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Constructing Community at the Border: Perspectives from Korean-Origin Residents in El Paso, Texas

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CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY AT THE BORDER: PERSPECTIVES FROM KOREAN-
ORIGIN RESIDENTS IN EL PASO, TEXAS

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CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY AT THE BORDER: PERSPECTIVES FROM KOREAN-
ORIGIN RESIDENTS IN EL PASO, TEXAS

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Studies of communities at the U.S.-Mexico border have usually contrasted their views on living at the border with wider U.S. perspectives which understand the border mainly in terms of security concerns. This thesis aims to extend such studies through focusing on the Korean-origin community in El Paso, Texas, in order to examine how border perspectives are shaped through global comparisons. The study is organized around two central questions: (1) How do Korean residents experience and construct community in El Paso? (2) How do notions of the Korean border shape or remain separate from notions of the U.S.-Mexico border? Through interviews with Korean-origin residents in El Paso, it seeks to provide voice to an immigrant community that has been relatively less studied in terms of its multiple border experiences. Given contemporary global flows of national news, Korean-origin communities have remained connected to information on events related to the Korean border, and as El Paso residents also have access to everyday experiences of the U.S.-Mexico border. This study found that while the Korean community in El Paso has constructed a collective identity through churches and stores, it remains cognizant of South Korea's rising economic stature and hence has become more confident in terms of its Korean-American identity. Alongside, while the Korean border is framed as a site of geopolitical conflicts, the El Paso-Juarez border emerges as a site of travel and exchange which connects the two borders. Overall, this thesis considers how political perspectives on the border are informed by international comparisons, especially in the case of communities that can draw on connections to more than one border experience.

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1: INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The construction of immigrant identity through both experiences at their current locations and continuing connections to their places of origin has been a central focus of sociological analysis. This has especially been the case because global flows of digital media have made it easier to keep in contact with national news sources, even without actual or continuous travel to countries of origin. However, whether and how current locations mediate views towards national issues in places of origin is an aspect of immigrant identity that remains to be further examined. The question that arises therefore is: Do immigrant experiences produce a new kind of identity (informed by both previous and present belongings), or do immigrants maintain dual identities (using different lenses to evaluate their previous and present locations)?

This thesis focuses on Korean-origin residents of El Paso, Texas, as a case study for understanding how access to multiple national contexts shapes immigrant identities. More specifically, it draws on interviews with Korean community members to compare their views on the North-South Korea border and the U.S. Mexico border. El Paso becomes an especially useful context in which to conduct this research because the city because its location on the border makes it a valuable vantage point from which to consider multiple ways to understand a national border, and also because it has a substantial Korean population whose histories and identities have rarely been studied.

The central questions for this research are as follows:

(1) How do Korean residents experience and construct community in El Paso?

- (i) Through what spaces and practices do Korean-origin residents form a collective identity?
- (ii) How do they view themselves as fitting or not fitting into El Paso?

(iii) How does the role of South Korea in the global economy shape perspectives

(2) How do notions of the Korean border shape or remain separate from notions of the U.S.-Mexico border?

(i) How do Korean-origin residents view the Korean border conflict?

(ii) How do their views resemble discourses in South Korean news media?

(iii) How do their views on the Korean border compare with their views on the U.S.-Mexico border?

My experiences of meeting and talking to people of Korean origin in El Paso suggest that many of them identify with their Korean roots, observe Korean traditions, and update themselves on current Korean national events. Given this, it is useful to understand the shaping of their Korean identities and perspectives on Korean politics in terms of the kind of media they utilize to gain information on contemporary Korean politics, and the ways in which they may possibly build comparisons between the border conflicts that characterize their current location and historical origins. Korean news media use various lenses to report on Korean border-related events, ranging from calls for military action, support for economic linkages, and promotions of peace through dialogue and humanitarian aid. The ways in which these discourses also emerge within the views of Korean residents in El Paso thus can reveal how news media shape border perspectives. Since the North Korea-South Korea border continues to be an active zone of political struggle, it is important to understand how overseas communities situate themselves within this struggle. Alongside, contemporary debates in the US over the extent to which borders represent a threat or asset to national economies and identities have focused on whether the border should be protected by a physical wall versus the importance of maintaining cross-border social and economic linkages – debates that become especially vivid in the case of the El Paso-

Juarez relationship. A more global perspective on borders could thus emerge from Korean residents in El Paso since they have access to both experiences of the Korean border and the U.S.-Mexico border. More broadly, as attitudes towards immigrants have become an important aspect of national politics across the world, the ways in which multiple experiences of borders possibly shape political opinions becomes a significant area of inquiry into the formation of global immigrant subjectivities through local experiences.

This thesis research follows a qualitative framework in terms of both its overall methodological orientation and its procedures for data collection and analysis. Respondents were initially recruited through visits to Korean churches, and 12 interviews were conducted with a wide range of Korean-origin residents, including people of varying ages, educations, occupations, and length of stay in El Paso. As a qualitative project, this thesis sought to provide an in-depth analysis and hence worked with a small number of interviews. The relatively small size and tendency towards invisibility of the Korean community in El Paso also prevented the conduct of a large number of interviews. A semi-structured questionnaire was utilized which enabled a focus on research questions related to the Korean community in El Paso and their perspectives on borders, while also enabling interviewees to take the conversation in a direction of their choosing.

The remainder of this introduction reviews existing studies on Korean immigrant communities to consider how this thesis draws on and extends these studies. The next chapter analyzes media representations of the border in English language Korean newspapers, again building the foundation for comparison with views expressed by El Paso's Korean residents. The chapter on methods provides details on interview respondents and how they were recruited, while also more broadly placing the Korean community in the geographies and histories of El

Paso. The two findings chapters are the core of this thesis and address the two central questions respectively, while the conclusion reconnects the findings to whether Korean residents inhabit a dualistic identity which separately approaches Korean and American borders, or whether their perspectives on the Korean border have been changed by their location in El Paso.

Studies of the Korean Community in the U.S.

Studies on Korean immigrant communities have found that nationalist perspectives on the border emerge within them revealing that despite new contexts and generational shifts, their connection to national discourses on the border remains relatively strong (Song and Muschert 2013: 16). Thus, whereas moving abroad could build a distance from national identity, yet many who belong to the Korean diaspora maintain links with a Korean national identity (Kim and Stodolska 2013: 187). Kim and Stodolska study Korean-American students who had traveled to South Korea found that despite living abroad or being born outside of Korea, students affirmed their Korean identity, either as Koreans or Korean Americans, as a consequence of travel.

Moving abroad presents challenges to Korean immigrants, partly due to difficulties in linguistic assimilation. Thus, in a study by Kwon (2010) in New York, it was found that there are four newspapers in Korean in the city. Almost half of respondents of Kwon's study replied that Korean newspapers were their main source of daily information. The second most popular choice was English newspapers, followed by Korean television channels. Kwon also found that while a majority of his respondents tended to care about issues related to their homeland, they professed a lack of interest in Korean as well as American politics. Although U.S. Koreans are viewed as more likely to support conservative ideals, only one-third of his sample followed American politics and less than half had voted in U.S. elections. In Kwon's quantitative study, out of 105 respondents, a little over a third (38%) responded that they prefer the Democratic Party, while

less than a third (31%) supported the Republican Party. When Kwon asked about reunification of the North with South Korea, 94% responded that they agreed with reunification.

The notion of ‘assimilation’ has been widely used to understand immigrant incorporation into host societies (Alba and Nee 1997). Thus, it has been argued that assimilation into national politics can be associated with the closeness members of a racial minority may have to the dominant group. Within this framework, inclusion of Asian Americans into U.S. politics and fraternity emerges from social mobility which transforms race relations such that new identities can gain access to some of the privilege and respect hitherto held by a dominant group. Alba and Nee (1997) however question the linear trajectory assigned to assimilation. Providing a critical analysis of Kwan and Shibutani’s (1964) study, they argue that different segments within immigrant communities may become incorporated in dominant groups through different processes. Thus, low income immigrant communities (such as those involved in small businesses) may remain more distant from the social mainstream than professional classes. As well-educated minorities seek out increasing inclusion, employers will implement policies promoting diversity, thereby enabling their assimilation in contrast to continuing distance from lesser educated groups. Segments of minority groups which continue to rise to higher rates of assimilation might then become more likely to delve into protests and opposition. These social shifts will spark the interest of the elite who will insist on changes and reform ‘to alter the relationship between majority and minority in a manner that promotes assimilation’ (Alba and Nee, 1997: 841).

Religious identity is another important part of being Korean in the U.S. In a study conducted with Protestant and Buddhist groups, Kwon (2010) studied how Korean immigrants raised their children. When it came to passing down tradition, 88% of Protestant respondents

agreed that they wanted their children to identify with both Korean and American identity, while 62% of Buddhists sought this outcome and instead were comfortable with the formation of an American identity (Kwon 2010: 284). Similarly, when it came to teaching children religious doctrine, ‘less than half of Buddhists (42%) teach their children religious doctrines while the majority of Protestants (85%) do so’ (Kwon 2010: 285). Thus, Buddhists seem to be more liberal in allowing children to choose their own religion and exposure to new cultural influences. Alongside, while there is strong evidence that Koreans pass along tradition and religion, they do not tend to teach political views to their children, instead allowing educational institutions to do this for them. As there is little participation in politics, it does not seem to be of major concern to Koreans if and how their children vote.

Generational differences in political approaches to the Korean border within South Korea are one of the issues raised in studies by Kim (2002) and Yoon (2012). Yoon (2012) argues that the population in Korea can be divided into two groups: those that have experienced the Korean War and a more contemporary generation that does not experience the border through the war. The population that still remembers the Korean War is part of the older generation which considers any attempts at reunification as leading to the possibility of further war. This generation has a younger cohort that comprises their children that tend to have memories of family members that are now separated and living in North after the War. Their views on peace reflect their fears that the cost of reunification through the reconstruction and modernization of North Korea will be high, therefore they view a peace treaty as a more viable option. The experiences of these groups usually translate into conservative ideology and support for the United States, but not in political activation. The younger generation is more liberal in ideology, not having any memory of family members that live in North Korea, however, they may seek

further representation. Whether these generational attitudes transfer to Korean communities in the U.S. thus becomes a useful issue to examine.

This thesis seeks to extend such studies to the Korean-American community in El Paso through specific attention to how viewpoints on the Korean border are shaped by news media consumption and location on the U.S.-Mexico border. Borders are sites of special significance in international politics and hence can become important markers of identity for international communities. Using the El Paso border region as the location of the study, we can view how a diasporic community negotiates the building of identities and political beliefs through religious and linguistic identities, generational shifts, and while being at a distance from its homeland.

2: BACKGROUND: NEWS MEDIA AND THE KOREAN BORDER

This chapter focuses on how the border has been discussed in South Korean news media to establish the background against which views provided by El Paso's Korean residents can be analyzed. It begins by providing an overview of theoretical approaches to the study of media: specifically, the discourse theory of democracy from Habermas, Appadurai's concepts of ideoscapes and mediascapes, and McLuhan's study of medium of communication. The chapter then examines two mainstream South Korean newspapers – *Hankyoreh* and *Chosun Ilbo* – to examine popular topics associated with the Korean border and more broadly seeks to understand whether media promote a frame of peace or conflict.

Theories of Media and Communication

This section focuses on three main theorists of how media discourse emerge and become part of broader audiences. The work of Habermas is central to understanding the dissemination of media through power relations. Appadurai meanwhile enables an appreciation of the role of media in the context of global cultural flows. Finally, McLuhan can be utilized to more closely look at how the nature of media shapes the kinds of messages that are possible and hence the popularity of specific forms of media consumption.

Habermas: Deliberative Communication and Legitimation

Habermas (1996) identified the problem of elites and power in his book *Civil Society, Public Opinion, and Communicative Power*. In it, Habermas describes the power of political and corporate elites to use media to their advantage. As the media seeks to lead public discussion, it is a tool for those who are seeking an opportunity to bring their agendas to the forefront. A powerful elite can thus push their agenda through seeking to manipulate the media.

While politicians can promote their policies through political rallies and town halls, it has become equally, or possibly more, important for them to appear on television programs to gain more publicity for themselves and their agendas. Television networks now increasingly arrange themselves to push particular political viewpoints, so that it is often enough for a politician to appear on a particular program or network to draw a suitable audience towards them. In the context of the U.S., the media is often distinguished between so-called ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ camps which promote particular politicians. A similar process unfolds in South Korea as will be discussed later.

Corporations spend large sums of money on marketing to steer media in favor of their profit needs. In the U.S., corporations have successfully lobbied to lower taxes on themselves by framing the current tax laws as affecting everyone, including low wage workers. Habermas identified this steering of the media by businesses as leading to control over processes of daily life, stripping democracy from the public, and taking with it morals and communicative abilities (456).

Habermas (2016) argued that deliberative democracy is the process by which moral and rational subjects reflect arguments through public reasoning and reach a consensus. However, by removing direct links between public discussion and action by authorities, the ability of people to participate in democratic decision-making has been curtailed. According to Habermas (1992:452), ‘public discourses’ aim to

uncover topics of relevance to all of society, interpret values, contribute to the resolution of problems, generate good reasons, and debunk bad ones. Of course, these opinions must be given shape in the form of decisions by democratically constituted decision-making bodies. The responsibility for practically consequential decisions must be based in an

institution. Discourses do not govern. They generate a communicative power that cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it. This influence is limited to the procurement and withdrawal of legitimation

While complete agreement may not happen, conversations between various sides allow for the formation of ideas that influences the way in which elite decision-making is accepted or rejected, therefore allowing for the legitimization or rejection of power. Media often leads this public discussion and thought, becoming a link between institutions and public discourses, as people seek facts and opinions from media sources so they can participate in public discussions. But media also often plays into the agendas of the powerful elite, finding the best possible way to sway public opinion to conform to elite needs. Media that serve state and corporate needs become useful in this way to shaping public political opinions.

Appadurai: Ideoscapes and Mediascapes

Appadurai (1992) has also reflected on the role of media, focusing more broadly on the kinds of flows that characterize globalization. His interest is in immigrant communities that may escape their current national formations due to being connected with wider flows of information, commodities, and experiences, and the Korean community in the U.S. is a good example of this. The two dimensions of Appadurai's global cultural flows that especially apply to this thesis are ideoscapes and mediascapes. Both of these refer to dissemination of images that build a narrative or story of (capitalist or national) development. According to Appadurai (1992: 764), ideoscapes 'are often political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it.' Thus, competing ideologies strive for power through demonstrable images that will drive popular opinion in their favor. Ideoscapes work very closely with mediascapes which refer to

electronically produced and disseminated information and images on a global scale. Examples could be social media and online search engines that have become widely used tools for the dissemination of images and narratives providing viewers access to complex, global viewpoints. Currently, among the most prominent of these social media and search engines are Facebook, Instagram (now owned by Facebook), Twitter, and Google.

Such global mediascapes are capable of immediate sharing of information and construct a specific notion of ‘reality,’ typically mixing news and politics with commodity images, pandering to certain audiences and creating false narratives and needs. They additionally create a market for information, giving viewers a frequent dose of infomercials and infotainment to sell a narrative or a product (Appadurai 1992:764). News media tend to be influenced by both mediascapes and ideoscapes, and they will show images of the news stories that are relevant for a specific outlet and its audience. Such practices often aid in constantly blurring the line between news and propaganda, reality and fantasy. Mediascapes provide the perfect venue for ideoscapes to propagate their message. In fact, ‘study after study has shown that the mass media are the public’s key source of information about risk issues’ (Kim 2002: 4). In this way, issues that were previously of no public concern are suddenly part of the national discourse.

McLuhan: Medium is the Message

McLuhan’s (1964) argument was that the way in which the message is presented is equally as important as the message, as represented by his famous aphorism, ‘the medium is the message.’ If a story begins in print, it will be received as a particular kind of message, but once the medium changes, for example to television, it will gain a new interpretation and configuration given to it by transformations in speed and time. Writers can write scripts, jokes, or

actions to be interpreted on stage or on camera, but once an actor receives the script, they transform the message into something else, making it their own.

McLuhan further defined media as ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ in terms of participation. The abundance of information, or lack thereof, and the intensity of public participation with the message is what gives it its temperature. ‘Cold media’ has high participation due to less information that the user must fill in. ‘Hot media’ has a higher degree of already existing information and requires less audience participation. For example, concerts and radio are both auditory mediums, yet both require different types of attention. A listener may be listening to the radio while cooking, driving, or exercising, but a concert requires the attention of the participant, as that is what they went to see. Not only does the concert require more participation, it also engrosses the audience visually, creating a show in which the audience must fill in certain gaps through attention to information. A similar form of ‘cold’ or ‘hot’ experience is likely to occur in terms of whether news is obtained from news media, social media, or personal conversations. Social media requires a level of exchange between users and the post that make it ‘hot’. By commenting on posts, sharing it with friends, and giving a ‘like’, hot social media requires that sort of exchange. A wide variety of social media available to online users – Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Google, and YouTube – are all used as sources of information and hence have to be considered in analyses of engagement with news sources.

Taken together, Habermas, Appadurai, and McLuhan theorize the role of power in the shaping of public discussion through media, consider the nature of media in the context of global flows, and show how the medium of communication shapes how the message will be taken up by audiences. Their theoretical approaches become useful to understanding how information about Korean politics and borders is possibly accessed and understood by overseas communities.

News Media Representations of the Korean Border

News media representations of the border usually deal with three topics. The first, and most common, is military action and preventative measures in case of war. These studies focus on U.S. military presence in South Korea, defections of North Korean soldiers to the South, and North Korean provocations and global responses. The second topic is political steps towards peace or conflict, and policies followed under various South presidential administrations. Some smaller details include the taking in and caring for North Korean defectors through housing, and job opportunities. The third topic is possible economic development related to the opening of the border which would benefit South Korean companies. These topics related to the border have also changed over time moving from a more militaristic attitude to greater attentiveness to peace in the present.

Korean media during the authoritative regimes (1961-1981), and under the broader auspices of the National Security Law in force since 1948, was controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Education (Yoon 2012). Newspapers were thus perceived as untrustworthy and biased. However, as they were the only source of information, they were still widely read. By protecting the government and helping further economic gain for powerful elites, newspapers such as the *Chosun Ilbo* became very conservative in nature. Later, due to authoritarian governments controlling the news media, dissident journalists who wanted to create an alternative newspaper, free of the influence of the government and business money, came together to create the left-leaning newspaper *Hankyoreh* (Yoon 2012: 5). This chapter will examine the differences between these two opposing newspapers regarding coverage of border issues. Both newspapers have online portals with foreign language versions of their articles and pieces. The languages included in the websites are English, Chinese, and Japanese. Online sites

for the newspapers were searched through the keywords ‘North Korea,’ ‘border,’ and ‘DMZ,’ and the first ten results were examined to gain an initial idea of how the border was being discussed.

Chosun Ilbo has a very strong stance against North Korea, as it is typically very conservative towards international issues. Although the newspaper is an advocate for peace with North Korea, it tends to seek U.S. approval and is ready to find any justification of violence. In an article by Yoon (2019), the newspaper points to increasing tensions between the U.S. and North Korea, saying that a ‘North Korean official has warned the U.S. of “unwanted consequences’ ” (2019). In a piece by Cho (2019), North Korea is reported as justifying the buildup of nuclear weapons as a deterrent and safety for the nation. Cho’s article in fact combines the military frame with an economic frame, saying that the mission to acquire nuclear weapons comes with the price of ‘the regime’ holding ‘out the begging bowl for food aid to the international community.’ This article denigrates North Korea in the very first line of the article. Thus, level of economic development is a popular way of framing North Korea: for instance, similar to Cho generally referring to the country as a ‘small’ and ‘impoverished nation.’ and Lee (2019) depicting the country as ‘scraping the barrel to earn hard currency.’

In a similar vein, Lee and Yoon (2019) write that, ‘North Korea is reduced to selling hair like the Victorian poor.’

When modifying the search to focus specifically on the ‘DMZ,’ the first article to appear is one promoting tourism at the border titled ‘*S.Korea to Open 3 Hiking Trails to DMZ*’ (News 2019). It should be noted, however, that this article was not written by the *Chosun Ilbo*, but by another source, Arirang News, which is the largest Korean news broadcaster worldwide. Other articles speak of the railroads that will connect the two Koreas (Jun 2018). Jun’s article talks of

the hopes of opening a road from Seoul, South Korea to Wonsan, North Korea. Additionally, both nations see it as an opportunity to carry out three important projects: the excavation of Korean War bodies, the opportunity to remove old landmines that are still active, and to excavate historical sites where palaces once stood. All of these are currently inside of the military demarcation line (MDL). The article also mentions the actions of North Korea in detonating bombs on the border to help the de-escalation of border tensions. Images are also attached to discussions of the border: Jun (2018) provides maps of the border, and Cho (2019) provides images of North Korean military leaders in their respective articles.

When speaking of North Korea as a military threat or as an impoverished economy, the conservative *Chosun Ilbo* pulls no punches, using inflammatory language to communicate border tensions to the readers. Yet the tone is softened when speaking of peace with North Korea through tangible steps on the border, including removal of weapons, stations, and personnel.

The tone changes once we move to liberal media. The *Hankyoreh* is composed of writers that were rejected from conservative newspapers, and therefore has a very clear difference from the hard approach of war and dehumanization rhetoric of the *Chosun Ilbo*. The *Hankyoreh* focuses more on politics as the frame, looking towards the U.S. for sources and story development. The *Hankyoreh* supports a softer approach of peace and negotiation with North Korea. The newspaper tries to not blame North Korea for the slow progress in peace negotiations, and makes a point to include South Korean politics and their attempts to bring peace to the peninsula. The most common factor in all these pieces is the mention of either South Korea's President Moon Jae In or U.S. President Trump.

In an article about humanitarian aid (Hwang 2019), the newspaper addresses the White House response to the South Korean government providing aid to North Korea. The article does

mention American politicians that are important to the region. Mike Pompeo and Donald Trump are named as the leaders of the discourse for peace in the peninsula. Sarah Sanders, the former press secretary for the White House, is quoted as saying ‘if South Korea moves forward on that front, we are not going to intervene.’ The frame of the newspaper praises the White House, pushing for dialogue between the two countries and advocating for further intervention from South Korea into the North, through the apparent approval of the United States. The newspaper also paints North Korea as the victim of international sanctions that unnecessarily debilitated the country. The article does mention, however, the need for sanctions when talking about reducing tensions in the area, especially those dealing with denuclearization. As Hwang (2019) mentions, ‘Diplomatic sources say that the US administration is waiting to see whether food aid to the North will ease the strained atmosphere and preserve the momentum for dialogue, even if it doesn’t completely dissolve the tension between the two sides.’

Articles in the Hankyoreh even suggest that Kim Jong Un is not responsible for the stalling of negotiations and is only looking after the safety of his country. In ‘*Moon says N. Korea isn’t trying to sabotage dialogue*,’ Park Min Hee (2019) explains how President Moon is not worried about recent ballistic missile testing: ‘ “I think that the launch of a ballistic missile, even a short-range one, could have violated UN Security Council resolutions,” Moon said. But alongside those concerns, he also emphasized that “North Korea is also showing us that it’s trying not to sabotage dialogue” ’. The article goes on to defend Kim in his mission to protect North Korea from sanctions: ‘... the North would have no reason to go to all the trouble of acquiring nuclear weapons in the face of sanctions if it could achieve security without them.’

Hankyoreh humanizes the political situation with North Korea by presenting them as victims of international bullying. At the end of the article, Park demonstrates the rhetoric used by

Moon through the ‘we/I’ pronouns to create a national identity and solidarity with the North. ‘ “...it was really great not to need interpreters since we’re from the same nation and speak the same language”.’ The media plays along with this narrative – despite the separation of both countries after the Korean War, the feeling of being one nation remains. The media frame is thus liberal in nature, hoping for the day in which both Koreas will be one. Given that the nation is still perceived as one, it is the responsibility of the South to be able to take care of the North. In the interview above, Moon utilizes his power and influence as president of South Korea to steer media discourse. President Moon uses personal pronouns to elicit the idea that the separation of the two countries is only temporary, and that each citizen of the South must help look after the brothers and sisters in the North.

Searching for ‘DMZ’ in *Hankyoreh* itself provides results that are similar to the *Chosun Ilbo*. Articles about opening tourist attractions called ‘peace trails’ dominate the first few search hits (Hankyoreh, 2019). Nature is also a frame used by the media, as the newspaper discusses the first sighting of an Asian black bear on the border (Hankyoreh, 2019). Images provided by *Hankyoreh* also focus on representations of peace. One 2019 article demonstrate a human chain to ‘commemorate the Panmunjom Declaration.’

Military themes in *Hankyoreh* were prominent in only two articles. One article covered the swearing-in of new military leaders who declared that they will be ‘clearing mines and recovering remains in the DMZ’ (Yoo, 2019). A brief mention of Kim Jong Un’s role in North Korea was made in an article that spoke of halting ‘ “unscheduled military activity” ahead of the second North Korea-US summit’ (Gil, 2019). The newspaper explicitly claims that there is no evidence of North Korea testing any missiles, and that Kim has not given up on negotiations with President Donald Trump despite the failure of the second summit.

There is one article in *Hankyoreh* that becomes especially noteworthy since it explicitly addresses business interests. Famed investor Jim Rogers visited Pusan National University (PNU) to give a speech at the Busan Bank headquarters on '*Global Economic Prospects and Investment Strategy*' (Kim 2019). Rogers spoke of the business opportunities that will come up after the reunification of Korea, claiming that the North is an area ripe for investment: 'A lot of opportunities are going to arise in North Korea. Investors in the US and Japan are going to start heading to North Korea now.' Rogers is thus predicting a radical shift in infrastructure and economic opportunity in the North and on the DMZ, once the two nations are reunified and the border disappears. Rogers has already claimed that he will invest his assets in North Korea once peace occurs, and has even stated that Asia will be key to 21st century growth. During his speech at PNU, the university officials gave him an honorary Ph.D. to celebrate his special lecture at the university. The article pays special attention to the images of Rogers receiving his certificate and giving his speech in full graduation robes.

Investors such as Rogers can thus exercise power through mediascapes, disseminating his business ideas through images that certify his believability. A focus on McLuhan's medium of communication shows how credibility is created through both Rogers' speech and images of his apparent education through his graduation robes despite lack of actual university education from PNU. Kim (2019) writes a full paragraph on Rogers' business history and why he is a man to follow in business, even reporting the 'earning [of] a miraculous 4,200% rate of return.' Rogers declares that he has told his daughters to study Korean and not Mandarin, thus ingratiating himself with his audience and allowing him to one day be able to exact business interests in the country without opposition.

Kim's (2019) article is explicit as to the intentions of Rogers in North Korea and in the DMZ, although Rogers is a bit more cautious. The article mentions that, 'The DMZ will soon go away, and North Korean resources will be aligned with the Korean Peninsula's 80 million people, 'and provides the argument that, 'To seize business opportunities, you need to stake out a place with potential.' Liberal media here is allowing for a foreign business tycoon to exert power over them, steering public opinion through his believability and money that peace will be beneficial to the economy, and of course himself.

Overall, the news articles analyzed from the *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh* had four frames, some of which appeared together in the same article. Military, politics, tourism, and industry were all focal points used to steer public perspectives into certain ideoscapes. The frames depended on the newspaper and their political leanings. *Chosun Ilbo*, the conservative newspaper, attacked North Korea and had a very militaristic frame, only talking about tourism and nature when not talking about military. Whereas *Hankyoreh*, the liberal newspaper, focused on politics, nature, and industry, whilst praising politicians and businessmen. The ideoscapes that the newspapers promote are easily visible to the reader. Even a quick read demonstrates how the media is being steered in favor of politicians and corporate interests. In keeping with Habermas, the news steers public perceptions of what is right and wrong. Not only did the newspapers steer public perspectives while they themselves were steered by influence, but the newspapers all helped to reify a sense of nationalism through very specific vocabulary, using *I* and *we* to form bonds between strangers and create a national consciousness. The use of images in the newspapers also calls to attention McLuhan's 'medium is the message:' in some cases, the article was not in words but solely in images with small descriptions underneath, as was the case for the trails and wildlife articles.

These news article provide an overview of how the border is presently being discussed within South Korea news media. They thus provide a useful background for understanding whether the views of overseas Koreans are drawn from this news media or depend on other sources to form their perceptions of Korean politics. The next chapter discusses the methods used to find interviews respondents and gather their views, before the findings chapters of this thesis move to a discussion of the views of El Paso's Korean residents on border issues in South Korea and the U.S.

3. METHODS: RECRUITING INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

This research follows a qualitative methodological approach through utilizing oral and written interviews for its data, and seeking to interpret this data for the range and complexity of viewpoints it provides. This chapter will outline the processes of gaining access to Korean residents in El Paso, how interview respondents were found, and also provide some reflexivity on my interests in studying the Korean community and its views on border issues.

Gaining Access to El Paso's Korean Community

The first consideration in field research is the process of gaining access to the group being studied. I contacted the El Paso Korean community through churches, temples, business sites, and students at UTEP. Business owners and military personnel serving in the Fort Bliss military camp often identify with Christian or Buddhist faith and many were willing to meet to discuss social and political viewpoints. Access to the Korean student group from UTEP was obtained through student organizations as well as those working in stores near campus.

The community gatekeepers at the churches included ministers, Sunday school teachers, and elders. I obtained their consent for individual interviews, and gained contacts within the wider community. I also volunteered my time and efforts at various churches to get to know their personnel. Most student organizations are open to new members who are interested in joining, which opened the possibilities of meeting with Korean students in a university setting. As for the Korean population that works in nearby businesses, I knew of students that worked at a café owned by a Korean-origin individual and initial contact as a customer increased the likelihood of eventually securing an interview. I chose respondents to reflect differences in age, gender, education, occupation, linguistic skills, and political viewpoints. Snowball sampling was initially considered; however, this could have led to recruitment of respondents having similar views

with those that recommended them. Additionally, participants that were available and willing were recruited, to avoid those that showed a lack of engagement in politics or unwillingness to discuss their views.

Conducting Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted to give space for the respondents to freely bring up issues of interest to them while still providing connections to my main research themes (see interview questionnaire in Appendix). A range of questions were asked on their notions of Korean identity, their perspectives on the Korean border, the various sources from which they obtain their news about Korea, and their experiences of living on the US-Mexico border. Overall, 12 face-to-face interviews were conducted and each interview was approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length to ensure that an adequate amount of data was collected for thematic analysis. Except for two interviews, all interviews were audio recorded. In the case of the two exceptions, handwritten notes were taken during one interview, and the other respondent preferred to be engaged in an informal conversation and later provided specific answers via email. One condition of being recruited as a respondent was that one should have some actual familiarity with Korea through previous stay there or at least one visit. This led to some respondents being rejected, but was viewed as an important aspect of studying a more authentic Korean American identity.

Locations for the interview were flexible as respondents asked for neutral ground or a place where they felt safe, as well as a place where it was convenient for them to meet. Locations included church or temple grounds, UTEP facilities, and local stores, restaurants, and cafes. As interviews were being conducted, I wrote down field notes to record my observations on the respondent's words and behaviors, so that non-verbal aspects of the interview are also recorded.

During the interviews, I presented myself as a student who was interested in learning about Korea, but did not have strong views on Korean or American border issues. This research had IRB approval for the interviews and each interview commenced only when the respondent had understanding of their informed consent. Respondents were assured that complete confidentiality will be maintained in terms of their identity and that they had the right to refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Respondents did not receive any compensation for participation in the interviews. Interviews were selectively transcribed for further analysis. Keywords, themes, and patterns were obtained through an inductive, open coding process and codes were tracked on interview transcripts. Each respondent was given a pseudonym to keep their identity safe. All files created through data collection and analysis were kept in a secure personal computer, and in a secure online file storage site.

Table 1: Description of Respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Years in El Paso	Interview site
Ahn	20s	Male	University		1 month	Church
Cosmo	64	Male	College	Industrial maintenance tech	46 years	Church
Jenny	63	Female	9 th grade	Housewife	25 years	Church
Lance	66	Male	Masters	Retired	14 years	Church
Minji	18	Female	College freshman	Student	18 years	Church
Mimi	54	Female	College	Restaurant owner	27 years	Restaurant
Nibbles	33	Female	Some College	Housewife	2 years	Church
Peter	36	Male	Doctor	Physician	1 year 7 months	Church
Sanghoon	27	Male	Bachelors	Student / Sales	NA	University
Sarah	34	Female	Bachelors	Nurse	1 year 5 months	Church
Shin	23	Female	University		2 years 5 months	University
Simon		Male	9 th Grade	Retired	20	Store

Limitations

There were many challenges associated with conducting interviews, especially related to recruiting participants. Reaching out to the Korean community was not easily accomplished, even as I sought multiple avenues to do so. The first obstacle was convincing individuals to participate in this research. Despite knowing several gatekeepers, participants did not approach the researcher to take part in interview, and most individuals had to be approached personally after gaining their trust through frequent visits to churches or stores. The Koreans I met did not like to talk in detail about their political leanings to outsiders. Therefore, it took almost two years to fully gain the trust of the small Korean-American church community. In fact, a number of possible respondents did not take part in the research, as they still did not feel comfortable talking about this sensitive issue or did not wish to be participate. Language also became a limitation since it is possible that respondents did not answer the interview in the same way they would have in Korean. Several respondents did not feel comfortable speaking in English, and the use of a translator was necessary at times. An outlier interview is that of Simon, a South Korean with good command of English, who preferred to answer in Spanish, mixed in with English and Korean.

The second major difficulty was trying to conduct interviews during the pandemic. El Paso enforced stay-at-home orders in March 2020 that shut down the city, and continuing rise in cases has meant that normal life had not resumed at the time of finalizing this thesis. Restrictions in El Paso included the closing of public places, the shutting down of businesses and the prevention of large gatherings (City Clerk Dept, 2020). As evident from Table 2, all interviews were conducted between February and November. Many occurred before the lockdown. The

interview conducted in October took place at a restaurant with proper observance of mask wearing and physical distancing. The final interview in November took place over email.

Meeting Respondents

The first respondent to be interviewed was Ahn. A Korean American church member, Ahn had recently moved to El Paso. Looking for friends to meet, and a place to practice his Christian faith, he began attending a Presbyterian church in Northeast El Paso. When approached to be a part of the study, he eagerly accepted. A man with university education, his opinion and well-versed thoughts are the product of a mind that has thought of these questions before. The interview took place in a café near the university campus, as Ahn was still experiencing many parts of El Paso for the first time and wanted to meet at a new place for him.

Cosmo and Lance were retired military members and attend the same Korean church. Both were part of American troops stationed in Korea, and have the most experience on the DMZ out of all respondents. Cosmo was stationed on the Korean border twice during the 1970s, being directly involved in patrolling the demilitarized zone. He visited South Korea once more in 1989, witnessing the rapid development that was brought about by the ‘Miracle on the Han River.’ Lance was stationed in South Korea for two four-year assignments, in 1974 and 1984. A musician, Lance had to play in ceremonies in Panmunjom, the blue rooms on the border used as a meeting place between officials of both countries. Both Cosmo and Lance were met in a church meeting room as it was a place where they felt comfortable and could easily speak their minds.

Sarah and Peter are a Korean American married couple who decided to participate in the study. They were referred to this study by Ahn. They sent their kids to visit a family friend, and hosted the interview in their home, seemingly excited to have a guest over. They offered and served tea during the interview, which especially endeared them to me. Both individuals are

highly educated, work full time, and their opinions differed on the DMZ. Sarah believes in a more secure Mexican border, a stark contrast with Peter who sees the border as already being secure.

Jenny and Nibbles were recruited somewhat unconventionally for this research, as they approached me when they heard about the study being conducted in their church. Both asked me about the study on the same day, even as they did not know each other. After a few questions regarding their intentions and knowledge, I decided to interview them on the same day. Jenny was met in a meeting room after church hours, as she did not feel very comfortable with others eavesdropping, but also did not want to meet somewhere else other than the church. Nibbles was a little more flexible, and she was interviewed in the fellowship hall right after lunch with the other church members. Jenny is a housewife married to a former military member. Although she claims her education is not perfect, her experiences in South Korea, the DMZ, and in the El Paso-Juarez border were well articulated. Nibbles did not wish for her interview to be recorded, so notes were essential to recording the information she was giving. After some initial discussion of how an interview would be conducted with note taking, she eagerly responded to the questions.

Another group in the study are Korean born business owners. Two respondents fit this bill: one current restaurant owner in East El Paso, and another retired store owner who had shut down his small local store a year prior to this study. Mimi is a mother of two and runs a successful business. While she was working at her restaurant, I reached out for her to join the research. There had been a prior rapport built with Mimi, as I had previously patronized that restaurant on many occasions. Recognizing me while I ordered food, she approached to greet me. After some small talk, she agreed to be a part of the research and her interview happened a few

days later in her restaurant. Simon too was approached after having met him at his former antique store, and then again at church. Feeling more comfortable in a language other than English, Simon took part of the study while speaking in Spanish, switching between English and Korean if he did not know the correct word in Spanish. Luckily, his wife sat next to us and addressed the rare need of her having to translate for him. This interview was conducted in the church fellowship hall.

The last three respondents are university students, from three different universities. Minji is a Korean American college freshman born in El Paso and attending a university in New Mexico. Minji was met while she was visiting the Korean church in El Paso. Agreeing to respond to the interview, she asked for the questionnaire to be sent to her email, as she had to go to her school. Sanghoon was a university student when we met at Korea University during my study abroad. He was learning Spanish in preparation for his study abroad in Mexico the semester after. Using the opportunity of being on the same continent again, Sanghoon visited Juarez and El Paso for a week with me as his guide. Now working as a salesman in Seoul, Sanghoon asked to be interviewed by email, lending a perspective on the U.S.-Mexico border from the eyes of a Korean living in South Korea but one who was familiar with the El Paso-Juarez border. The last respondent in the university student group is Shin, a Korean nursing student at UTEP. A friendship formed on campus; Shin was eager to participate in the study due to her knowledge of the Korean media. Shin gave her account on the Korean diaspora and border issues in the campus library.

Overall, the respondents provided a very insightful mix of perspectives on the border being Korean residents who have worked or lived in American contexts while still retaining vivid memories as well as contemporary connections to Korean culture. The next two chapters

utilize the voices of this diverse group of respondents to analyze perspectives on and from the Korean community in El Paso.

Table 2: Interview Details

Pseudonym	Interview date	Place of interview	Duration (in minutes)
Ahn	2/17/2020	Café	54:36
Cosmo	3/1/2020	Church children's room	1:03:10
Jenny	3/11/2020	Church room	48:41
Lance	2/29/2020	Church room	1:45:26
Minji	3/15/2020	Email	NA
Mimi	10/22/2020	Mimi's restaurant	58:15
Nibbles	3/11/2020	Church fellowship room	NA
Peter	2/22/2020	Peter's living room	48:11
Sanghoon	11/16/2020	Email	NA
Sarah	2/22/2020	Sarah's living room	39:02
Shin	2/19/2020	University library	41:39
Simon	3/15/2020	Church fellowship room	45:18

My Interest in this Research

I initially became interested in South Korea due to my interest in Asian cultures and languages and my desire to travel abroad. In Fall 2016, I applied to Korea University in Seoul and was accepted as a foreign exchange student for the summer. During my stay in Seoul, I witnessed a corruption scandal that ended in the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. The responses of the public, the relative quickness of government response, and the ending of the impeachment process with a new presidential election sparked my interest in Korean politics. Recent inter-Korean developments and peace talks makes the DMZ a timely research topic. Having found no substantial study of overseas Korean perspectives on the DMZ, I decided to contribute to the literature through research with Korean Americans living in El Paso.

I am connected to the local Korean community through my attendance at a Korean church and my visits to Korean businesses. Most of the current Korean community found in the

city hails from the Fort Bliss military base, and the Northeast area of El Paso is home to most of the Korean American population due to its proximity to the base. There are many restaurants and businesses there run by Koreans, as well as a large amount of churches to congregate. Within this context, I have found a community that I seek to learn more about.

The individuals that I have met are all very open to talk about their community and Korean culture and politics. In the Korean church, families attend in large numbers, and all usually know other members of the community. I have had long informal conversations with a few about their views on politics and social issues. For instance, I spoke with an elder from church about the impeachment of the former president due to her involvement in a large corruption scandal. The elder insisted that the president had done nothing wrong: ‘She has asked for forgiveness already, she did nothing wrong.’ They did not like the political process being altered, or that the president elected as a consequence was a liberal. Such conservative views are held by a cross-section of my Korean acquaintances and friends and often lead to heated debates (though they end amicably). Regarding reunification, members of the church seem to agree that there should be peace with North Korea, but reunification and how it would be achieved is a controversial topic. Elders still remember family members on the other side, while youth only consider the shared culture. These everyday conversations made me eager to learn more about Korean identity and political perspectives in El Paso.

4. FINDINGS: CONSTRUCTING KOREAN COMMUNITY IN EL PASO

This chapter analyzes interviews for their perspectives on the Korean community in El Paso and more broadly across the U.S. It begins by understanding how specific sites – churches, stores, and the military base – become aspects of Korean community formation in El Paso. It then considers how the multilingual context of the border shapes Korean identity at the border. One significant feature of Korean identity was the generational difference in occupation, and the interviews also reveal how generational differences emerge in terms of attitudes towards U.S. politics. The final section of this chapter considers South Korea's rising economic power and how that shapes overseas Korean identity.

Constructing Community: Ethnic Churches, Businesses, and Military Base

Churches are a key location for the gathering of Korean origin residents. A number of churches with Korean congregations are located along Dyer Street in Northeast El Paso. Dyer Street also has a number of Korean businesses and is also relatively near the Fort Bliss military base. Peter has lived in El Paso for two years. Born in South Korea but brought to the United States at a young age, Peter has also lived in various American cities. In each stop, he has been an active member of the local Korean community. According to Peter,

I think it [El Paso] is very church centered, like many other places. Church is not – Korean churches in the United States, it seems like – it is not just a religious place, it's a new community, and yeah, that's everything. Multi functioning, community, community tool.

Religion in El Paso is a cornerstone of the Korean community. It is their gathering place, where they meet others with the same heritage, and where they are able to practice their Korean identity. During church meetings, the congregation will cook food for post service community

meetings. Sharing a table encourages congregants to interact with each other, thus forming close bonds. As Peter highlights,

One thing to keep is going to a Korean church, a place that I can meet Koreans and have my personal and spiritual life with Koreans. I think that's the main way I keep my Korean identity, and food. Korean food. I eat a lot of it.

The role of religious identity in shaping belonging to the Korean community is thus emphasized by Peter, with religious identity also becoming the base for wider community sharing.

The small size of El Paso, however, limits the number of Korean stores and hence access to Korean food and other Korean products. There are not a lot of large stores and entertainment as available in major cities. Sarah views larger cities with longing.

There is not many Korean, how do I say that, markets and restaurants or, like in Los Angeles, there is Korean movie theater. There is Korean market that is 10 times bigger than Arirang Market. There is huge Korean community, there's Korean press. There's Korean, you know, it's more readily accessible, you know what I mean? Nobody's saying anything here about me being Korean, or me eating rice or teaching in front of other people, but I do sometime whenever I eat kimchi I tend to look at, you know, other people's response, like I don't offend them. But in Los Angeles, I don't do that. I don't have to do that in bigger cities. I can just completely be Korean and be fine. I don't have to worry about what they think of me eating my own food or just being myself as a Korean. Yeah, here I do a little bit.

Sarah's sense of discomfort thus emerges not from any actual experiences of being questioned about eating Korean food, but from the lack of a larger group which follows the same food practices. She expressed a need to match her surroundings instead of constantly standing out as different.

A large part of Koreans in El Paso are connected to the military base. Fort Bliss occupies a major part of El Paso, with a military encampment that houses 39,000 military personnel in 1,700 square miles. Fort Bliss is a transit base, where many military members are stationed only to move after three or more years. The military is the lead source of Korean nationals and Korean Americans in El Paso, as many who are stationed in El Paso during their military career move back to the city after completing their service. However, the military tradition of being on the move every few years also limits the ability of Koreans to build a cohesive, long-term community in El Paso. This opinion is articulated by Sarah, a military nurse married to a service member:

Majority of the Koreans here they're from military background. So, they move a lot. So, in a way, it's kind of impossible to have the close knit, because we know that we're moving in two, three years. So, I think it makes it harder in El Paso to make it close knit. Because I'm moving, I don't really care, I guess.

While churches help preserve cultural identity and the absence of Korean stores hinders it, the military base seems to play a dual role. A number of El Paso's Korean residents are linked to Fort Bliss, and either go on to stay in the city, or become delinked due to the short durations of their stay in El Paso.

Language and Asian Identity

The language barrier with the dominant Mexican culture adds a level of complexity to the relationship formed by a predominantly Korean speaking community with El Paso. Learning Spanish is important to navigate the Hispanic dominated borderland. Peter is learning Spanish for that reason. Even though he is in the military, and might soon be stationed somewhere else, he still practices Spanish to be better involved with the city.

I think initially a lot of people just don't know how to interact with Spanish speaking people, cause a lot of Koreans struggle with English to begin with. And then you throw another layer to it and different culture. You barely getting used to American culture and English, it's a whole new level.

For Koreans, as for other immigrant groups on the border, the multilingualism of American identity on the border necessitates a move away from assuming that English is sufficient to being American. In fact, there were multiple multilingual individuals taking part of this study, including Simon, whose interview was almost entirely in Spanish. The interview was facilitated through his wife, who provided help in English, and to translate the few instances of Korean.

Cosmo, an American retired service member attending a Korean church, does not struggle to bridge the dominant group on the borderland, the Hispanic community, with the Korean diaspora.

It is great having English as a tool also to be able to talk to people. Because what I do is, even though I speak enough Korean, and I do it in the workplace, to show people the different translations of words from Spanish to Korean to English, and I promote it. And what I get from a lot of people in the community. They say, "Why

are you speaking Korean to me?”, because I said, you need to be able to know different languages and stuff, to be able to better communicate with the world.

Not one to shy away from difficulty, Cosmo promotes interaction and understanding, fighting against stereotyping by using English as the bridge between Spanish and Korean.

English is not the only language. You have other languages that contributed to this world also. So there's nothing wrong with learning basic phrases and words from other countries and stuff. Because as long as Koreans still speak Korean, and people will always put forth an effort to learn a word, I think. Because I've had to do it myself being in this area in El Paso, having to learn a lot of Spanish. And because I'm involved with the Korean community, learning a lot of Korean.

Cosmo thus also articulates the need to consider all languages spoken by borderland residents as contributing to the culture of the borderland, neither shying away from displaying his skill with Spanish and English nor failing to acknowledge his links with Korean.

The meanings attached to Asian identity were also raised by Cosmo. The tendency to consider all East Asian as Chinese is one significant issue that he raises.

Most of the people since I've been living here in El Paso call Asians “chinitas” (Chinese). And I tried to tell them that they're not all chinitas. They are Koreans, Japanese, and Taiwanese and other cultures. So that's why I think the identity that the Koreans need to put forward, and we will need to learn from Koreans, that they are different. You're not just one type of person.

Despite this stereotyping that lumps all East Asians as Chinese, Cosmo also suggests that El Pasoans hold positive notions of Asian people.

They really respect the Asian community that's here, because they look at a lot of Asian people as very, very hard workers. That's what they see. Mostly. They don't see them getting into trouble with law. They don't see them having problems with other neighbors, things like that. And for the most part they run a lot of successful businesses. They think they're a hardworking people.

For Cosmo, this notion of Asian as hardworking is a matter of pride, so that he does not consider this to be yet another essentializing stereotype imposed on Asian immigrants.

A number of studies have focused on Korean-Black tensions in Los Angeles, the largest Korean community in the U.S. (e.g. Park, 2019). However, in El Paso, Korean-origin residents did not mention facing any problems in terms of interacting with the Hispanic community. Mimi even goes as far as mentioning most of her friends are not Korean. "I more like to be with a lot of American people than Korean. Beside I go to the Korean restaurant or like, that's it. But I don't have any Korean friends".

Koreans in El Paso thus have to navigate between maintaining the Korean language as well as fitting into the English-Spanish multilingualism of border residents. In some cases, then, they emphasize their Korean identity, while in other contexts they seem content to fit into a broader Asian identity. This issue of choosing between assimilation and differentiation is also raised in the context of generational differences.

Generational Divides in the Korean Community

Mimi is a first-generation Korean. A restaurant owner who has lived in El Paso for over two decades, she has two adult children who grew up in the U.S. and have a completely different mentality from her generation. Mimi explains the difference as

They [first generation] are so strong headed. They think they're right. And what people see, that's wrong. But not in the young generation, they're changing it because they see differently.

Mimi refers here to changing attitudes to Korean cultural practices among the younger generations which enables them to integrate with American culture. Older generations are not able to integrate in the same way because of their refusal to modify Korean customs.

Many of the current second-generation Koreans struggle with Korean, as they were not taught by their parents in order to help their children avoid discrimination. Sarah addresses the generational divide in terms of language:

Older folks in our church, I think they [had] more, hard time because they have the mindset when they come here in the United States they were told, blend in, speak English. That's why a lot of their kids don't speak Korean. But nowadays, I don't find it hard at all to maintain my Korean identity.

Sarah is alluding to the fact that many second-generation Koreans struggle with the Korean language, as they were not taught by their parents in order to help their children avoid discrimination. As she mentions, she does not feel the need to hide her Korean identity in the same way.

Ahn discussed the 1.5 generation Korean-Americans who were brought to the U.S. as children. These individuals were known to own small stores and restaurants at the height of Korean immigration into the United States in the 1980s. However, there has been a shift to manufacturing and franchise businesses since 2000, marking a departure from the traditional small store. Today, 11 percent of Korean-Americans who are part of the 1.5 generation are small

business owners. This number falls to only 6.2 percent among second generation members. A study by Thompson (2018) illustrates the generational divide in job prospects.

“[The] second generation doesn’t have to work so hard,” said Eun Sang Yoo, a first-generation small business owner and parent of two. Both her children graduated from universities in Los Angeles and now work for American companies. “The difference is, they will work on Main Street, and we work on side streets,” she said.

The interview with Ahn reveals a similar notion of change in occupations across time, with the first generation of Korean immigrants in the U.S. often being owners of small businesses and not being able to follow a professional career due to lack of skills or social discrimination. However, their children have been afforded the opportunity to pursue specialist studies and associated professional careers, such as medicine, law and business. Education has thus become important to Korean parents, as they want for their children to have better opportunities than themselves.

Among my interviewees, Simon and Mimi are elderly Koreans that run a small business. Their children have obtained higher education and climbed the social ladder through their occupations. Such changes could expand notions of Korean identities and question the stereotype of Koreans as small business owners, but it may also signal possible shifts towards an American identity through which Korean identity becomes diluted.

Generational Divide in Political Opinions

Generational differences also emerge in terms of political opinions. Ahn is a young Korean man who has been in the military for a few years and is a recent addition to El Paso. He spoke with me in a café near the university. Ahn does not claim much local knowledge of the border between El Paso and Juarez. In contrast, he has extensive knowledge of the South Korean

diaspora in the U.S., political controversies in the Korean peninsula, and the politics of the U.S.-Mexico border. Ahn begins by discussing the politics of Korean origin people in the U.S.: ‘What I’ve noticed is that Korean communities abroad generally don’t, try not to involve themselves a lot in [Korean] politics.’ According to Ahn, political apathy is a defining factor of many who belong to Korean-American communities. Many elders did not participate in politics when they moved to the U.S., and youth are not as engaged with politics as other eligible voters.

I’m on the younger side, like my parents haven’t showed me, and a lot of the elders don’t like to interact with us to begin with, in that regard anyway. I don’t think they want to exactly indoctrinate.

Korean parents then seem to want their children to think for themselves, especially in terms of American politics, and prefer to provide their children with the educational skills they need to succeed. For Ahn, the issue is one of parents seeking to assimilate their children into American society, and knowledge of Korean politics is not viewed as important for this.

I don’t think they exactly try to spend time explaining to us why Park Jung Hee, he is so important, and stuff like that, when they probably just want us to integrate. So I don’t think they really care. So, we don’t, so younger Koreans, they, we, don’t really get exposed to the older Korean American opinion on politics.

Ahn recalls the time when his parents were witnessing the military dictatorship of President Park Jung Hee (1963-1979), who controlled South Korea ruthlessly, yet also oversaw the economic expansion of South Korea that elevated it from a third world country into a developing nation. His daughter, Park Geun Hye is still idolized by conservative elders who see her as a strong savior of South Korea against the evil North, endowed with the same wisdom and capacity as her

father. Her removal from office dealt a huge blow to Korea's conservative party. While Park Geun Hye is currently serving time in jail for corruption crimes, protests seeking her freedom still occur every week in downtown Seoul, organized by a political minority that is elderly and conservative.

Ahn then discussed the need for Asian representation in American politics which currently does not feature any prominent [East] Asian-American politicians.

I think there has been an increase in political discourse in Asian circles, especially with the recent introduction of Andrew Yang as a presidential candidate. I think he was somebody we needed – the Asian, Korean community in general needed someone like him to be a presidential candidate to bring Asians into political discourse.

Andrew Yang thus seems to have become an example for a community that was not used to seeing themselves in the formal political sphere. According to Yang's official campaign website (Yang, 2020), he entered the Presidential primaries for the Democratic Party as an outsider to politics. An entrepreneur, Yang wanted to become the first Asian American president, an encouraging goal that promised representation for all Asian Americans in U.S. politics. Mimi, the business owner who had explained the hard-headedness of the older Korean population, looked up to Yang as a real political prospect: 'Just like my daughter. She wants to be president. She's full Korean.'

Awareness of Asian American experiences in the U.S. has increased due to their growing economic clout, and Ahn highlights the growing visibility of Korean Americans.

As more and more Koreans are entering the professional world and more money is being made by Koreans, more attention is being given to the Korean

experience, and what have you. Koreans are really coming into the limelight recently, it's a big wave. It's a big wave.

Ahn thus provides an insight into the growing political confidence and aspirations of the younger generation of Korean Americans.

Many Koreans in El Paso however are not eligible voters, or do not want to vote. As Cosmo explains, their participation in politics then emerges not from actual voting, but through influencing political opinions in their wider social circles.

I think they really don't vote as much because maybe they're not US citizens and stuff, able to vote. But they voice their opinions, and the political viewpoint and stuff. So they're not voting, but in a way they're voting, by influencing the majority of friends, if they're not a U.S. citizen or anybody that isn't, they're actually doing a more of a influencing type attitude toward people.

Cosmo also mentions the difference between older and younger Korean Americans.

They'll [younger members] voice their opinion about it. And I think they're more free and open to do it here than what I saw in Korea, as a whole. Because normally they all speak out against the government too much, today's society does more speaking out. The younger generation they have now will speak out against society more than in the past. And I think this is typical of any culture, but the Korean culture is really reserved and speaking out in public is totally different than speaking in private.

Cosmo can thus see a change in terms of public outspokenness about political issues among youth, which is a behavior he does not connect to Korean culture. The political activism of Korean American youth has them searching for representation in politics. However, there are no

local politicians in El Paso that are of Asian origin. Lack of representation in politics is the lead cause of political apathy among eligible Asian American voters. It also discourages Asians from going into politics, thus further contributing to lack of Asian representation in politics.

South Korea in the Global Economy: Rise of A New Korean Economic and Cultural Identity

The economic rise of South Korea after the Korean War (1950s onwards) is popularly designated as ‘The Miracle on the Han River.’ It is linked to a policy of export-oriented industrialization conducted under the strict political atmosphere of military regimes. South Korean companies – such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai – now compete with Japanese companies in high-tech sectors, associated especially with automobiles, electronics and consumer appliances. The global prominence of South Korea’s economy has been accompanied by the rise of culture industries, including film and music. Through the import and export of culture and arts, the ‘Hallyu Wave’ has reflected an openness to South Korea across the world. In terms of popular music, K-pop (Korean pop music) groups have provided new models for youth and artistic expression. Certain K-pop (Korean pop music) acts have broken the mold of Asian representation (Greenblatt, 2019). Boy band BTS has been compared to legendary quartet the Beatles. They have performed on American live television, sold out stadiums in world tours, and have received global media attention and adulation from fans. Attention given to them has raised the profile of Koreans, and by extension the Korean American community.

In South Korea, youth are encouraged to attend an institution of higher learning and get a degree in a professional field. South Korea has a large percentage of young adults (66 per cent) having a tertiary or higher education and is one of the countries with the highest government expenditures on education (Jeon, 2014). South Korea spent 6 percent of its national GDP on

education in 2000, and 8 percent in 2011 – a higher percentage than that of the OECD member nation average of 5 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Shin, a young Korean born immigrant studying nursing at UTEP, highlights the value accorded to education in South Korea: ‘Our education level as a Korean is very high – like a lot of people, I think over 60%, has an undergraduate degree, and also people are very participating in politics.’ South Korean investment and spending in schools has the nation ranking high among OECD nations (Jeon, 2014), being 3rd for GDP out of 37 OECD member nations, and 5th for public spending. This focus on education also characterizes Korean Americans, and the Pew Research Center estimates that 28 percent of foreign-born Koreans have a high school education or less, 32 percent have a bachelors degree, and 20 percent have a post graduate degree. Compared to this, among U.S.-born Koreans, 15 percent have a high school degree or less, 37 percent a bachelors, and 23 percent a post graduate degree (Pew Research Center, 2017). The focus on education this continues across generations among Korean Americans, to some extent resembling their counterparts in South Korea.

The role of technological development in politics also needs to be highlighted. While K-pop is what dominates the headlines, weapons are a large portion of the South Korean economy (Chang, 2019). Heavy investment from the government into the private sector makes it a leader in the warship and missile technology industry. Industry giants such as Samsung and LG developed programming and design for naval ships and missiles. Selling this technology has helped to deter the threat of North Korea, while also strengthening ties with international players that have an interest in the Korean border conflict. Today, South Korea buys firearms and other weapons from the United States. Along with large nations that are unified under NATO, such as England and Turkey, the US military has a large interest in North-South Korean relations, which

becomes visible on the DMZ border. NATO has a permanent troop presence on the border. Along with U.S. soldiers, the border requires constant maintenance and development, and the South Korean government continues to spend a large part of its resources on defending the border.

To return to Ahn, who has spoken of Asian American representation in U.S. politics in the previous section, South Korea's rising global power is cause for celebration. Ahn's visual image of this power was the rising presence of non-Koreans, which he had noted during a visit to South Korea.

I was shocked, honestly, when I saw so many foreigners in Korea. People from India, people from Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Chinese, Japanese. So many people have come into Korea since, over the course of the last ten years. I was shocked. I was happy. I was happy because Korea was developing not just as economic power but also cultural power. As Korea is becoming more and more multi-international. And I really like that.

Multicultural immigration thus becomes a mark of South Korea's economic and cultural power for Ahn. South Korea's prominence in the global economy could possibly be one way in which to understand new forms of assertion in the Korean community within the U.S.

Korean community identity is thus shaped both by the experiences of living in El Paso as well as an identification with the economic growth of South Korea. As younger generations become upwardly mobile through professional careers, Korean Americans view themselves as needing more visible representation in American politics. The next chapter continues this focus on politics by focusing specifically on how borders become a site from which to reflect on Korean American identity.

5. FINDINGS: COMPARING SOUTH KOREA-NORTH KOREA BORDER TO U.S.- MEXICO BORDER

This chapter focuses on the Korean border to understand the political perspectives of the interview respondents, and through this their continuing connection to Korean political discourses. Many respondents discuss the Korean border in geopolitical terms, bringing in the role of the U.S. and China. The U.S.-Mexico border in contrast is discussed through the framework of people living on two sides of the border, bringing in their experiences of residing in El Paso.

South Korea-North Korea Border

In 1945, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) were separated along the 38th parallel. The armistice establishing the separation was signed on July 27, 1953 following the Korean War (Pruitt 2019). Designated as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the actual border is patrolled by North and South Korean troops on foot with watch towers closely following each step soldiers take. Tight security is practiced with the heavy use of security cameras placed at key points. In places where the border is not easily patrolled, the physical border division may be up to 5 kilometers (3 miles) wide and riddled with mines and other traps to stop enemy troops (Ray 2017). Wildlife refuge areas are often threatened by the possibility of animals stepping on mines, or attacks that can injure or kill the protected animals (Ray 2017) The DMZ border is thus a highly controlled area. It is a place that was created by the government and yet has its own laws. Despite being in Korean territory, it is under UN control and has a high presence of military. Seventy percent of South Korean forces are stationed at or near the border. Seventy-five thousand people live in the Yeoncheon border region, thirty thousand of which are soldiers (Heuck and Yoo 2016: 197). Individuals are

always required to have identification with them, and strict curfews are enforced. Visitors are also required to leave before sundown, and only tourists of select countries can enter the border region. Practice sessions are held for individuals living in the area in case war breaks out, and while at first they may seem to be routine exercises, the mentality, maneuvers, and the turning North Korean soldiers into monsters fit for target practice make it feel like a real state of war (Heuck and Yoo 2016: 197).

I visited the DMZ border at Daeseong-dong, a district of the city of Paju, 30 kilometers north of Seoul and 1.2 kilometers away from North Korea, in the summer of 2019. The township of Daeseong, a farming village, was established by the South Korean government to have close interactions with North Korea. As Daeseong sits in the civilian controlled zone, (the area around the border where the UN has exclusive military control), it is tightly protected, although civilians have many benefits. First, they are paid a handsome amount to live there and given large plots of fertile farming land. Second, men are exempt from military service, which is mandatory in the rest of the country. Occupying the land next to the border is considered a service to the nation. Third, their security is guaranteed; it is reported that crime is almost non-existent. Rumors say that people live without doors, since they have nothing to fear. With North Korea to the north, military checkpoints to the south, and joint UN, US, and South Korean military forces patrolling the whole area, there is nowhere for criminals to run. Fourth, individuals living in Daeseong do not have to pay taxes.

Daeseong enjoys media coverage that is in stark contrast to the situation under which it lives. Media reports paint a rosy picture of the village often connecting the village with efforts to bring peace to the Korean peninsula. The attempt to designate Daeseong as a UNESCO heritage site has led to joint North-South Korean excavation for historical artifacts. Individuals from

outside do not have access to Daeseong. In order to be granted access, an individual must either be stationed in Daeseong, be a civilian, be a descendant of someone living in Daeseong, or know someone from the city who can grant them written access and have applied for military escort two weeks in advance. Daeseong is considered one of the most isolated towns in the world, yet it is also one of the most highly advanced villages. It enjoys the full attention of South Korean government for the protection of civilians. As of 2019, Daeseong is fully connected with 5G technology. Any efforts of development on the border along the Paju area is highly promoted and praised.

Despite the possible experience of the border as threatening for border residents, tourism has paved the way for the DMZ to be spoken of differently (Tours 2011). Paid tours with guides leave from Seoul as early as 7 a.m. Tours include visits to the tunnels and allow you to be in front of the demarcation line that separates the two countries. All of this is under the strict supervision of both North and South Korean soldiers. Tourism has allowed the conversation around the DMZ to be more peaceful and hopeful, framing the border as a secure area for Korean and international citizens to visit. Tourism could thus change public perspectives around the border from an unsafe conflict-ridden region to a secure international division.

Hunter (2013) has investigated the visual representation of Korean borders through online images. His case studies were the DMZ and the island of Dokdo which borders Japan. Using the lens of DMZ as war heritage, and isolation and alienation of Dokdo, Hunter found that the South Korean government uses censorship to attach nationalism and tourism to these sites. Through social media of visitors, the government can highlight patriotic connections to the Korean border for consumption by the local and international community. Similar to the DMZ, the island of Dokdo is a border with Japan that serves a symbol of nationalism (Hunter 2013:

151). As Dokdo is a contested island between the two nations, a large indoctrination process starts from the preschool stage. Images are in place on subway station halls to claim it as Korean sovereign territory, legitimizing the ideology built around the islands. Through the use of tourism and imagined communities, Dokdo is commonly referred to as “독두 우리 땅 (Dokdo Is Ours)”.

The South Korean government thus uses both pictures of the islands and slogans to easily convey the nationalist narrative around Dokdo.

Kim’s (2011) study of the DMZ Special Exhibition at the Korean War Memorial in Seoul follows a similar lens. Exhibitions are curated to alter memories and produce nationalism. The DMZ is an active border between two hostile states, and yet is a symbol for peace. Kim calls this a ‘cartographic paradox,’ using it to mark ‘certain performative conditions that illuminate the immanent absurdities of the Korean partition’ (Kim 2011: 381). Through strategic staging, the museum alters perception of historic events for an audience that did not experience the Korean War firsthand. Visitors are conditioned ideologically using deliberative communication to sympathize with the South Korean side while maintaining a sense of unification with the North with hope as a major motivator for the future.

In South Korea, the space of the border thus has multiple meanings – as a site of both conflict and peace, residence and tourism, and common heritage yet separation between the two Koreas. These multiple meanings of the space also interact with media representations of the border conflict (discussed in Chapter 2) which attest to the need for separation between an impoverished North Korea and a more developed South Korea, while also arguing that reunification will contribute to greater economic development in South Korea. Whether similar discourses of border spaces and conflicts emerge in the interviews will be discussed next.

Perspectives from Interview Respondents: Sources of Korean News

There was one significant characteristic that connected interview respondents: most of them did not use mass media – including mainstream newspapers or TV news channels – as their primary source of information about Korean politics and border issues. Rather, they preferred the internet, in particular social media and search engines, as their primary news source. This may be linked to their specific location outside Korea. However, the reason interview respondents provided for this is their lack of trust in conventional media. Nibbles stated that she distrusts all media: ‘Reporters are trash. Talk s--- about the president and their politics. 기자 (gicha, meaning reporter) + 쓰레기 (seuregi, meaning trash) = 기레기 (giregi, trash reporter), people call them this.’ A news article in the *Korea Herald* (Herald, 2014) seems to align with this view expressed by Nibbles: ‘Pressured by increasing competition and worsening finances, many news organizations have resorted to yellow journalism, which is slowly changing the public’s opinion of reporters.’ Sanghoon, originally from Seoul but who was visiting Mexico on a study abroad program, also took a similar view:

Like mass media of many country, Korean news media is not accurate. They are telling only their opinion. Mostly we can see the biased point regarding the problem of the North Korea.

Thus, ideologies pushed by the South Korean mass media has delegitimized them leading people to turn to online sources, instead of relying on traditional news media. Yet, as subjects look for the news online, the sources become more questionable and confirmation bias becomes an issue as algorithms pair internet users with what they want to see online. Images, text, and video all become part of the same message, adding to the need to understand the complexities embedded in the information.

Some respondents also viewed Korean and American TV news channels for information, such as FOX, MSNBC, and TVO. Lance and Cosmo watched a variety of news channels in order to compare them and get a well-rounded perspective. As Cosmo explained:

I look at all sources because to me I like to have a real formed opinion of what's going on because I know somebody is trying to go on their political agenda this way, and the other people are trying to go on their political agenda this way. And to me, I want to hear from both sides and see how both people actually say things.

I want to hear everybody's opinion before I render mine.

Jenny also mentioned going through Korean TV sites while browsing online for the news, and clicking on them to compare stories. Ahn specifically mentioned JTBC, a South Korean cable TV network:

JTBC is our families go to channel these days. Although we do like to peruse other news. But we had a very high opinion of JTBC as a news source since the Sewol tragedy [ferry disaster, April 16 2014]. That really brought JTBC into the limelight, that's when we realized, oh this is a really good news source.

Another television viewer, Mimi, stated that she did not like news sources for their negativity, instead focusing on receiving news through comedy shows and late-night talk shows.

I really don't like to, nowadays, you know, I don't like to [be] really serious. So, most of the time I watch comedy. Something making me laugh. I don't like to be serious thinking about something. Why is it, ... it's not gonna change anything. It just makes me more stress[ed]. So, I'm watching something fun.

Respondents thus were not loyal to one TV news sources, preferring to compare across channels, and in the case of Mimi seeking alternative news formats, such as comedy shows.

The kind of media consulted was also linked to the age of the interview respondents. Younger respondents would verify news through perusing a variety of online sources, using search engines and social media they trusted. Naver, Twitter, and Reddit were among the mentioned search engines and social media – which they considered to be forums allowing freedom of expression and neutrality, as well as fact checking. One respondent mentioned following a college professor on Twitter – this professor consulted Twitter and Reddit to verify claims while using Naver to find the most recent news. Older respondents used YouTube and television news channels to verify their news. However, only certain TV and YouTube channels are used that would often fit the political positions they already held.

Perspectives on the Korean Border

Interview respondents often discussed that Korean border politics was not just a bilateral issue between North and South Korea, but part of wider geopolitical competitions between the U.S., China and Russia. In terms of alliances, a question that emerged was whether North Korea is firmly linked to China, or is also open to a relationship with South Korea. Although South Korea provides support to the North through food aid, it is China and Russia that provide the majority of aid (Reality Check Team, 2019). Ahn, a young man in his mid-twenties, however suggested that North Korea is not satisfied with this relationship of dependence on China, possibly providing a political opening for South Korea.

There is a family friend who is a university professor. He is very old. And he was alive during the Korean War. He said that what needs to happen is a greater degree

of economic exchange between North and South Korea. North Korea does not like to be overly dependent on China. This is probably going to be very important to note, that North Koreans aren't very fond of Chinese. Theirs is a partnership of necessity. China is the only country that has power to counteract US influence in North Korea, that is why North Korea is a bit hesitant. If North Korea was finally smart enough, it would open restricted economic zones. Like what China did with Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai. It would bring in much capital into North Korea. And North Korea would at least be able to eat,

The argument here seems to be that North Korea and China are not close allies as much as strategic partners who are using each other to further their respective national interests. Ahn goes on to say that he believes that China keeps North Korea poor to ensure that the U.S. does not have a larger foothold on the economy of the region, and North Korea uses China as a safety net against the possibility of war with the U.S.

North Korea's leader emerges prominently in Ahn's discussion and he considers that Kim Jong Un would actually be open to leaving North Korea if his security could be guaranteed.

Here's where my conjecture comes in: although Kim Jong Un and the Kim family have done many wrongs, I think the West has to guarantee at least his safety and some amount of leeway. I think somewhere in the neighborhood [of] house arrest. Simply because Kim Jong Un is probably genuinely threatened, is probably doing this for his life. Because if he says, "Oh, I'm going to defect to South Korea, because of open borders and everything," ... then the military is probably gonna rebel on him and he's gonna probably get his head cut off without putting up a fight.

So, the ideal way forward ... [is] de-extremization; ... I'm not gonna use the term reunification, because that in itself is a loaded term in my opinion.

The notion of Kim Jong Un wanting to escape his country, but being unable to do so because of his political position and power, is an interesting proposition. Yet his policies have actually undercut peaceful negotiations in the past. Ahn accepts that reunification of the peninsula is almost impossible, hence his mention of 'de-extremization.' However, working towards de-escalation in the past has proven to be unfruitful as North Korea has historically used regional tensions to its advantage. It is worth noting that Ahn mentions an old college professor as one of his sources, possibly showing both his interest in more careful representations of the border as well as his desire to highlight the value of his perspective/

Conspiracy theories related to reunification also abound. Unverified stories of spies working and living in high positions of the South Korean government are found online. Although not common among the interview respondents for this study, it is useful to consider the views provided by Simon. He remarks that current president, Moon Jae In, along with all of his cabinet, have been sent by the North to hand South Korea to Kim Jung Un and claims that the country has been sold out by the South Korean youth.

They sold themselves to the communists [so that] we would unify. When we were in college, a lot of people still remembered. That was over 50 years ago. Economically everything, they (the younger generation) grew up today (knowing only prosperity and peace). Now they run everything, including our land. They run everything. They are all spies.

The fear that a left or liberal ruling party can become part of a communist attempt to take over the South is a minority view, but shows possible political polarization around reunification.

Cosmo explicitly mentions the wider geopolitical competitions that would impede reunification.

So, China and Russia would not be thrilled if North and South Korea became Korea, and we [the U.S.] were still involved with them. If we still maintain bases there. That would be a sticking point.

Lance also considers the position that may be taken by China and Russia regarding reunification.

Because China is still aggressive. They're building up that group of islands where they're bringing in and filling it up, and claiming turf to it and territorial borders. I think they want 200 [nautical] miles of Exclusive Economic Zone sea border versus 12. You know, different crazy stuff like that. So, China's not so good.

Russia is less than what it used to be. And it's less than China. So, China would be the one who would benefit the least from normalized, or a one nation Korea.

And they've got a big border. That's very fluid.

China is thus viewed as more invested in maintaining the Korean border than Russia.

Having lived in Korea for many years, as a military service man and a civilian, Lance knows the ins and outs of the border, and has long studied relations between the two Korean nations. He argues that North Korea takes an expedient position to border opening.

Oh, it opened up when it was to their [North Korea's] advantage. And they use that as a tool to either get oil or get rice or get whatever they needed. And then they made their promises. And then as soon as it was not to their advantage, they closed it. So North Korea, the fluidity of the border was politically motivated.

Border openings and closings are thus viewed as a political tool wielded by North Korea in accordance with its economic needs.

The proximity of China to North Korea also shapes its relations with South Korea. When the South Korean military announced the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), a missile seeking rocket launcher, to counter the threat of North Korean missiles in case of a nuclear bombing attack, China took immediate measures to oppose it (ISDP, 2017). Claiming that the range of the THAAD defense system reached its national territory, and fearing that it would serve as a measure by the U.S. to corral them against South Korea and Japan, China cut all economic ties with South Korea, closing Korean stores and purging Korean goods from its markets. Although these were ultimately temporary measures, China effectively the message that it did not want THAAD infringing on its national interests. Russia did not react as strongly as China, but did propose that the THAAD issue should be dealt with in a political and diplomatic fashion. Russia has historically supported the North Korean regime, and also has economic development projects that span the two countries. It is important for Russia to not have more American presence in the region, but they are not as vocal in their opinion as the Chinese.

One significant consequence of geopolitical tensions over the border is revealed through the actions of those who flee across it. For refugees from the North, the most common routes to escape into South Korea is to travel through China and find their way further south, into Thailand (Voice of America, 2011). Smugglers who will assist in border crossings are not easy to find (Yoon, Park, & Im, 2013), and Chinese police patrol the areas of embassies to deport immigrants before they seek asylum as refugees or conduct sweeps in neighborhoods at dawn (International Crisis Group, 2006). Those that escape also face the risks of being imprisoned and human trafficking. If North Korean refugees cannot find a broker who will help them arrive at a South Korean consulate, their options become very limited and increasingly perilous.

Lance argues that border crossings have lost relevance in South Korea.

“People escape every once in a while, and they get to the South and there, they used to be national heroes. Now they’re just another person who escaped from the North. But the border is the border. Ain’t nothing happening without both sides agreeing for just a tiny little window – that’s all they [defectors] have is a tiny little window. It’s a locked down border.

North Korea recently announced the expansion of troops in the DMZ as tensions escalated after false reports in April 2020 of Kim Jong Un’s death, and the speculation that his sister, Kim Yo Jong, would take over the mantle of responsibility (Bicker, 2020). This has further closed off a border that was already dangerous to escape through, leaving the sea and the Chinese and Russian borders as the only escape routes. China is the most commonly used crossing and the one of which authorities are most aware.

Despite its name, the DMZ is one of the most heavily armed in the world, flanked by the two Koreas and a significant UN presence. The U.S. currently commits 28,500 troops to South Korea, and is the current UN DMZ commission leader (Lee, Kim, & Feast, 2019). It is almost impossible to make it through the border, and very few crossings across the DMZ are ever successful. The attempts that are reported are most notably North Korean military defectors crossing to South Korea. How does this experience of the border then compare with the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso?

The U.S.-Mexico Border

The Rio Grande has marked the U.S. border with Mexico since 1884 (Hidalgo, 1848). A wall stands on the U.S. side along the river. However, El Paso-Juarez is a binational community, and people are free to cross the border with proper documentation, so that thousands of people cross the border daily at the three international bridges. The border thus is a hub of commerce, as

companies export and import goods to either side. In my experience, it is easy to cross the border into Mexico – to buy groceries, have dinner, and visit friends. But the border is also a highly contested entity in terms of U.S. national politics; the rhetoric of the Trump administration has increased political pressures on the borderland.

The U.S. border with Mexico is often represented in national media as fraught with insecurity and widespread violence, and national political discourse often focuses on how to prevent illegal immigration. Castañeda and Chiappetta (2020: 11) show how this framing of the border can incite actual violence, as was witnessed in El Paso.

On 3 August 2019, an armed man shot and killed 22 people and physically injured dozens of others in a Walmart in one of the commercial hearts of the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez metropolitan region. In a letter that he published before driving the long distance between Dallas to El Paso, he explicitly stated his hatred of Hispanics and what he, echoing others, saw as “the invasion of America” by immigrants from Latin America.

Such representations of the border as a space of ‘invasion’ can be contrasted with the actual fact that El Paso is considered one of the safest cities in the nation. In Castañeda and Chiappetta’s (2020) survey of El Paso residents, a majority mentioned feeling secure in El Paso, despite living next to Juarez, one of the most violent cities in Mexico. As this study goes on to mention, areas with high immigrant population display a lower crime rate, are less likely to be characterized by the use illicit drugs, and witness a revival of otherwise withering small towns [10]. Castañeda and Chiappetta hypothesize that this is because immigrants aspire to achieve social mobility and lower the insecurity and poor conditions they lived under in their community of origin. Thus, El Paso natives live without fear of violence because of the society they wish to build.

However, outside of El Paso and the border region, fears associated with illegal immigration are often rampant. A study by Lozano (2019) finds that across the U.S. men and religious conservatives were more likely to view immigration less favorably. Political affiliation also affected views on illegal immigration, with conservative Republicans having the most negative views, and more likely to answer negatively to questions such as: Are undocumented immigrants a problem in society? Should there be open borders? Is it okay to detain families and children if they come to the U.S. illegally? This perception of an unsafe border exemplifies the spread of information to further an ideology of nativism. The views of border residents thus differ markedly from those distant from the border.

Perspectives on the El Paso-Juarez Border

Interview respondents considered the El Paso border to be very different from the Korean border. Minji, a university student from out of state, reflected on this difference.

We all know that the DPRK are torturing its people, and although Mexico (and other Latin American countries) are not relatively safe, there are still people there who are just living their lives. Because we know that disparity, often times what happens, a lot of news sources in the U.S. praise the defectors escaping [North Korea], while demonizing the Latinos trying to come in.

In her comments, Minji also reflects on the possibility of crossing the El Paso border versus the inability to do so in the context of North Korea. While there are means to legally cross the U.S.-Mexico border which witnesses millions of documented border crossings each year, the DMZ is entirely closed. Thus, even as the U.S.-Mexico border is highly politicized, with new regulations being imposed by the current administration, it differs substantially from the North Korea-South Korea border in terms of the flow of immigrants.

During the Trump administration, the border wall was a constant point of contention, and media discourses followed suit in discussing immigrants in terms of crime and illegality. The physical wall being constructed at the border was framed as ‘Trump’s wall’ and U.S. media focused on the details of its construction. While the South Korean media was not as attentive to the actual construction of the wall, it did discuss the politics associated with the construction of the border wall. Sanghoon described what South Koreans know about the wall through their media: ‘I don’t know how it is covered in U.S. news, but in Korean new media, it is covered like Trump’s ambition and result of the race problem.’ Korean media represented the border as a discussion of Trump’s policies, and legitimation for the border wall centered around how the president talked about the border and the people who cross it. The U.S.-Mexico border was thus discussed as politicized policies and ambitions. Lance, a former military service member in Korea, attempts to take a balanced approach to the wall, both supporting its need in some places and questioning it in others.

I think they need to go ahead and secure more where, where it’s needed. Okay. There are certain places where, I think out towards Santa Teresa, it was pretty fluid where people were getting across. So where it’s identified that, they need to secure it more. And if there’s a place where we don’t need a physical barrier or whatever, because it’s just too remote, or people don’t do it for whatever reason, it’s okay. It’s secure where you have to.

Lance thus partly accepted the official discourse related to border security, while also understanding that it was overblown in some contexts.

One issue that all interviewees brought up were the long lines and wait times to cross the border. Jenny has a few experiences of crossing the border but wants to recount the experiences she has heard about.

“Some lady’s husband – when I [was] working in the Chinese restaurant, there’s one Korean lady, as in customer – her husband’s working in a Korean company in Mexico. She says it takes about two hours to come home, he get off work at five o’clock, or five-thirty or something, but by the time he got home it was close to nine o’clock, because border [waiting time] was that long.”

Lines to cross into Mexico have been increasingly long for the last number of years.

Vehicle crossing times have been reported to reach four or five hours at their peak.

A proposed change Jenny would like to see at the border is for the government to construct

“another border [crossing], then easy to [go] in and out [for] the person who [is] working; from here to there, from there to here, and back home. Have you seen five o’clock at the border? Oh gosh!”

Jenny thus reveals the cross-border connections that contribute to the El Paso economy, and wants these connections to be further facilitated.

A final theme was the positive connotations associated with crossing the border. Ahn provided an especially vivid characterization:

For both people [North Koreans and Mexicans], the wall, basically the border, the wall, it is just a barrier to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. People want to be people. And in order for them to do that, the wall is the biggest obstacle for them. And that doesn’t change whether you are Korean or Mexican. You want to cross

the border because that is the life that you can be having. ... Similarity-wise, crossing the border is hope on both ends. Doesn't matter, Mexicans, Korean, cross the border for hope.

For Ahn, the ability to cross the border is the ability to gain access to hope for a better life.

Sanghoon, visiting the El Paso-Juarez region from Seoul, considered the relative ease with which he crossed the border here:

It was unbelievable to me. For me, it didn't make sense to cross [a] 'border' between countries. Korean people can't experience it. I think the Korean border is a symbol of the Cold War, not peace.

Sanghoon thus viewed the El Paso-Juarez border as very different from the Korean border: the border at El Paso enabled connection between two countries; the Korean border symbolized separation.

Overall, interview respondents spoke of the Korean border in political terms, bringing in the roles played by the U.S., China and Russia. The U.S.-Mexico border in contrast was not a site for geopolitical conflict between contending nations, but a site of national debate between diverging social views. This group of respondents were a mixed bag of conservative and liberal views on the border; however, some generalities could be inferred that U.S.-Koreans could very well also be just as varied in their opinions. As they read social media and the news, their views might not reflect the realities of the border, contrasting with the views of the Koreans that live in El Paso. Then, as South Korean's live on the El Paso-Juarez border, they would not view the border with such conservative views. Their experience allows them to create opinions different than those found on the news and on social media. Moreover, in contrast with El Paso-Juarez, the Korean border is mainly experienced through distant frames provided through the lens of the

military or tourism, whereas the El Paso border is a place where they live on an everyday basis. Despite these differences, Ahn provided a useful way in which to bring together perspectives on the two borders through his statement that both borders symbolized 'hope' for those who sought to cross them.

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on two main research questions: How do Korean residents experience and construct community in El Paso? How do notions of the Korean border shape or remain separate from notions of the U.S.-Mexico border? South Koreans living in El Paso must create their own community in the borderland. Since their numbers are small, this becomes a difficult task. Through church, stores, and food, they find others in their diaspora with similar backgrounds. For those who are military members, they often do not create strong bonds to one another due to having to move from place to place. The church however becomes a hospitable space for display of community identity every week and churchgoers spend time together during and after church. The small amount of Korean focused businesses makes it hard for them to fully practice their culture, since Korean spaces and food are not as readily accessible or visible in El Paso as in other larger cities. The role of speaking Korean in an English-Spanish context also sets them apart. However, the Korean community has no problems with locals, so that tensions identified in larger cities, such as Los Angeles, do not seem to be as prominent in El Paso.

Differences also exist within the Korean community in terms of occupation. Earlier generations were more likely to run small businesses, while current generations have moved into professional occupations and thus have become upwardly mobile. It is likely entrepreneurial and professional groups may have different degrees of attachment to the Korean community in El Paso and the wider El Paso community. This may especially be the case since professional classes are more likely to be mobile moving in and out of the city in search of job opportunities. Each occupational group then becomes incorporated to the dominant group through different processes.

In terms of political attitudes, interview respondents posited that there was a gulf between South Korean youth and their elders in political thought, with youth being more open about their political views than their parents' generation. Attitudes towards the DMZ constitute a divide among generations in South Korea. Elders wanted to take a 'strong man' approach, scaring North Korea into talks. President Park Geun Hye promised this approach, following in her father's footsteps. Current President Moon Jae In has sought to use talks as the main approach to the Kim Jong Un regime, sending humanitarian aid and seeking to ease tensions. This approach is supported by South Korean youth. Within the older generation in El Paso, the policies of the previous president gain more support, so that they are still invested in Korean politics. Meanwhile, the younger generations seek to find representation in American politics, even as South Korea's economic rise enables a change in meanings attached to Korean identity.

Interview respondents demonstrate a lack of confidence in traditional news media. Most of them have turned to online sources, often finding information through search engines and social media, rather than going to a single source for information. To them, a variety of sources means more reliability and less bias. This shift in medium has also led to a shift in the form of the message. Information now arrives in the two or three sentence items that search engines find, and news articles in search hits are a few paragraphs long. As individuals avoid mainstream sources, they remove the legitimization of those institutions and functions. Across generations, it was found that respondents used social media to find their news, though most respondents used various online sources to confirm their findings. Mediascapes are then easily disseminated online through various websites and social media, carrying with it the ideoscapes that are consumed by the internet users.

In terms of borders, interview respondents agreed that the El Paso border is relatively safe, yet there is still room for improvement in terms of ease of border crossings. The DMZ however provides no possibility of travel across it. For some respondents, the DMZ was thought of as needing to have greater freedom; whereas the U.S.-Mexico border should be enforced more. These differences in perception can be attributed to the media-led ideoscapes that the respondents consumed. When focused on the DMZ, South Korean news sources often combine militaristic frames with notions of peace between the two Koreas. Meanwhile, the U.S.-Mexico border has recently become a site of contention where security concerns are at the forefront of deliberative communication. In the case of El Paso, it is possible that the military shapes the perspectives of the respondents on the border. Access to military resources could thus enable support for stricter security measures. Yet, Sarah and Peter, both of whom have experience of the military, have different views of how the border should be secured; Sarah seeking more secure borders while Peter considering the border to be secure as it is. There needs to be further research therefore into how such different perspectives are formed beyond the consumption of news sources.

Overall, interview respondents seem to suggest that the ability to cross borders is a source of hope for a better life, at least in the case of the El Paso-Juarez border. The DMZ does not allow this hope at present, but political negotiations suggest that this remains an ongoing attempt on the Korean peninsula. We can use the findings of this research to speculate on how the creation of community links to attitudes towards the border among the Korean community in the El Paso. This study recruited church-going individuals to a larger extent, and future research could consider how the wider Korean population constructs community and relates this to political perspectives on border openness and security.

This research has utilized a unique case study – Korean-origin residents in El Paso – to consider how knowledge of different kinds of borders shape political understandings, even as immigrant communities have to make place within the realities of the borders that they currently inhabit. In the process, it has sought to extend the notion of immigrant assimilation by considering how political perspectives also become part of building multinational and multicultural identities.

Future Research

Future research can extend these themes by comparing between Korean diasporas in large and small cities. El Paso has a very small Korean origin population, and they may feel uncomfortable practicing their culture being a minority in a mostly Mexican-origin city. The construction of Korean community in El Paso must also be further examined through the lens of the military and other available job opportunities, to complement the focus on churches as sites of community identity.

There is also a significant need to further understand how new generations of Korean Americans form communities that enable them to maintain their links to Korean culture and politics while also seeking to assert their American identity. As Korean economic and cultural power begins to differentiate itself from other Asian identities such as Japanese or Hong Kong Chinese, Korean identities may become more visible in the U.S. Future research can thus specifically consider the shaping of Korean-origin youth identity in the U.S. Overall, further research on how other Asian nationalities in the borderland create their diaspora and community is required to build a more comprehensive view of Asian Americans at the U.S.-Mexico border.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. Interview number and pseudonym
2. Age
3. Place of Birth
4. Education level
5. Occupation
6. Number of years in El Paso

KOREAN COMMUNITY IN EL PASO

7. In what ways is Korean identity important to you?
8. How do you maintain your Korean identity?
9. Do you think there are ways to maintain Korean identity in El Paso? Or is it difficult?
10. Is El Paso hospitable to Korean-origin people? In what ways? In what ways is it not hospitable?
11. What kind of Korean community is there in El Paso? Is it close knit?
12. Would you consider this community to be actively involved in or informed about politics? American politics? Korean politics?
13. What would you say is the economic or cultural position of Korean-origin people in the U.S.?

PERSPECTIVES ON NORTH KOREA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONSHIP

14. How often do you visit family and friends in Korea? When was the last time you traveled to Korea? How would you describe your experience of being in Korea?
15. Have you ever visited the Korean border? When did you visit it and what was the experience of that visit?
16. What recent events do you remember connected to the Korean border? Would you characterize these as ‘good’ or bad’ events?
17. Where did you learn of these border events? Was it news media, social media, or from family or friends?
18. What do you think is the way forward for North Korea-South Korea relationship?
19. How would opening the Korean border be beneficial? In what ways would any opening be problematic?

20. Do you think the Korean border is moving towards peace?
21. Who do you think should take responsibility for the Korean border relationship: the South or the North?
22. Where do you usually obtain news about Korean politics (e.g. print, online, TV, word of mouth)? What is your opinion of these news sources?
23. Do you read any Korean newspapers in print or online? How often do you read them?
24. Do you think Korean news media report the news accurately? How do political leanings shape their reporting of news?
25. Do you Korean politics and the Korean border is sufficiently covered by the US media? Is it adequately covered?
26. In what ways does Korean border politics become a matter of interest for the international community? In what ways would the US benefit or lose from opening or closing of the border? Are there other countries that also have interests in the border?

PERSPECTIVES ON U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

27. Have you ever crossed to the US-Mexico border? What was your experience of the crossing?
28. What do you think of recent events related to the US-Mexico border?
29. How do you obtain news about the US-Mexico border?
30. How does coverage of the US-Mexico border differ between the US news media and the Korean news media?
31. Do you think that the US-Mexico border needs to be secured further? Or is it too securitized already?
32. In your opinion is Mexico doing enough to secure the border as well?
33. The border with Mexico is closing more every day because of political reasons. Whereas on the Korean peninsula the border seems to be opening everyday a little bit more. Do you agree? Why?

VITA

Josue E. Lopez was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. He studied at the University of Texas at El Paso, and Korea University in Seoul, South Korea. A recipient of Gilman Award and the Korea University Grant, he worked as a SURPASS researcher in El Paso in the Summer of 2017. Following this he received his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at UTEP in August of 2017. In Fall 2018, he began studying for his Master of Arts in Sociology. While studying at UTEP, he worked as a teaching assistant while researching for his master's thesis. His long-term goal is to earn his PhD and to continue his work with the Asian American community in El Paso. He hopes to one day work with ASEAN and other international organization as well as continue researching topics he is passionate about.