Koreans in America
History, Identity, and Community

Revised First Edition

Edited by Grace J. Yoo

Included in this preview:
• Table of Contents
• Foreword
• Introduction

For additional information on adopting this book for your class, please contact us at 800.200.3908 x501 or via e-mail at info@cognella.com
Contents

Foreword
   By K. W. Lee 1

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction
   By Grace J. Yoo 9

Section I : Understanding History 13

Chapter 1: Early Beginnings: Korean American History
   By Hyeyoung Kwon 15

Sidebar: Memories of my Grandfather: Reverend Whang Sa Sun
   By Gail Whang 24

Sidebar: Nectarines
   By Margaret Rhee 28

Chapter 2: The Sound of Two Bullets Cry for the Spirit of Freedom:
The Assassination of Durham White Stevens
   By Richard S. Kim 31
Chapter 3: The Origins of Contemporary Korean Immigration
  BY SANG CHI

Sidebar: Life Before K-Town
  BY K. W. LEE

Chapter 4: The Not So Forgotten War: Narratives of Korean Immigrant Women
  BY GRACE J. YOO

Chapter 5: The Third Wave: Post–1965 Korean Immigrants
  BY HYEYOUNG KWON

Chapter 6: From Ethnic Resources to Transnational Ties: Korean Americans and the U.S. High-Technology Industry
  BY EDWARD J. W. PARK

Section II: Diverse Demographics and Identities

Chapter 7: A Snapshot of the Korean American Community, 2010
  BY JASON CHUNG

Chapter 8: Undergraduate Korean Americans and “Korean Koreans” in the Millennial American University
  BY NANCY ABELMANN

Chapter 9: Zainichi Koreans (Koreans in/from Japan): Replanting Our Roots
  BY KEI FISCHER AND KYUNG HEE HA

Chapter 10: Passings and Transgressions: The Korean Adoptee Experience
  BY KIRA DONNELL

Sidebar: Poetry Written by Korean Adoptees
  BY KIRA DONNELL
### Section III: Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 11: “It’s for the Family”: Negotiating Love and Marriage Within Korean American Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Margaret Rhee and Grace J. Yoo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sidebar: Fighting for Love: Lt. Dan Choi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Joseph Domingo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 12: Korean American Children as Language and Cultural Brokers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Natalie Y. Ammon, Su Yeong Kim, Diana Orozco-Lapray, Oluwatobiloba Odunsi, and Seoung Eun Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Allen J. Kim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sidebar Cartoon: Dad Love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Chuck Joo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sidebar: Where We Stand in Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Doug Kim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 14: Remembering Sacrifices: Attitude and Beliefs Among Second-generation Korean Americans Regarding Family Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Grace J. Yoo and Barbara W. Kim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sidebar: Make Us Happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Chuck Joo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sidebar Cartoon: Or I Will Disown You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Chuck Joo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section IV: Arts and Culture

Chapter 15: Food, Culture, and Identity: The Korean American Food Truck Revolution
By Eunai Shrake and C. Alan Shrake

Chapter 16: Korean American Cultural Expressions: Evolution of *P’ungmul*
By Eun Jung Park

Chapter 17: The Growing Popularity of Korean Soap Operas Among Asian Americans
By Jason Chung, Darryl Choy, and Grace J. Yoo

Sidebar: A Guide to K-Pop
By Jenny Suh

Sidebar: Getting Our Korean Fix on TV
By Darryl Choy

Chapter 18: Korean/American Art: Nam June Paik, Yong Soon Min, and Michael Joo
By Rory Padeken

Sidebar Cartoon: Korean American Art
By Chuck Joo

Section V: Community and Activism

Chapter 19: Korean American Churches
By Sharon Kim

Sidebar Cartoon: Welcome to K-Town
By Chuck Joo

Sidebar: Whither Immigrant Churches/Hello Next Generation
By K. W. Lee
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>“When a Fireball Drops in Your Hole”: Biography Formed in the Crucible of War</td>
<td>Ramsay Liem</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sidebar: Still Present Pasts</strong></td>
<td>Ramsay Liem</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>A Conversation with Chol Soo Lee and K. W. Lee</td>
<td>Richard S. Kim</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Twenty-five Years Later: Lessons Learned from the Free Chol Soo Lee Movement</td>
<td>Grace J. Yoo, Mitchel Wu, Emily Han Zimmerman, and Leigh Saito</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>America’s First Multiethnic Riots</td>
<td>Edward T. Chang</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sidebar: Lessons Learned from the 1992 Los Angeles Riots</strong></td>
<td>Edward T. Chang</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Legacy of Sa-ee-gu: Goodbye Hahn, Good Morning, Community Conscience</td>
<td>K. W. Lee</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Contemporary Korean American Issues</td>
<td>Jane Yoo, Eunsook Lee, and Morna Ha</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Korean Americans and Access to Health Care: A Physician’s Perspective</td>
<td>Ricky Y. Choi</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

By K. W. Lee

Once upon a Jim Crow time, I came east aboard a slow boat to America as part of the first trickle of young students from post-liberation Korea.

The year was 1950, just months before my divided homeland was plunged into a bloody civil war.

Five years later, a tired black woman refused to yield her seat in the whites-only section of a Jim Crow bus in the South.

The rest is history.

Momma Rosa Park’s act of defiance and her arrest set off the mighty civil rights movement, eventually leading to the 1964 law outlawing public segregation.

Within my lifetime, I would witness an impossible dream come true: a black man born to a white woman and an African foreign student ascending to the presidency of this republic whose founders owned slaves.

This second American Revolution also spawned the 1965 immigration reform act, opening the ancient anti-Asian floodgate to the new waves of immigrants and refugees from Asia in turmoil.

Seeing is believing. Within my lifetime, this original FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) would be asked to write a foreword for the seminal Korean American textbook for the incoming third (grandchildren)-generation students this fall at San Francisco State University.

What’s more unreal, this foreword surely will be read by one of my six grandchildren as a fledgling freshman at this iconic citadel, a historic springboard to the Asian American reawakening movement in the flaming 1960s.

In Prof. Grace J. Yoo’s summing-up opus “Koreans in America: History, Identity and Community,” we are singularly blessed to witness the first coming together of the multigenerational past, present, and future in our century-old Korean passage to the New World.
And the future beckons, brimming with daunting challenges in the shrinking digital Pacific Rim Hood era.

Our first-wave nomadic population, in exile from their conquered homeland, wiped off the world map, numbered a mere 9,000 at its peak.

Today’s Korean America is another world, an ever shifting demographic mosaic made up of several mini-tribes separated by generation, class, culture, languages, and even race. The latest census count runs 1.3 million and counting, while more than half of the Hawaii Koreans are racially mixed.

Time flies indeed—with digital speed.

Only recently, the urgency of a timely textbook for the exploding new generations came home to this aging FOB. Out of the blue, I received a call from its author Grace Yoo, a vanguard of the second-generation pioneers in multiethnic Asian American studies.

In amazement, the tenured professor in charge of the expanding Korean American study course pointed to the influx of third-generation enrollees:

“They are the sons and daughters of the 1.5 and second generation Korean Americans. They are coming into my classes.”

“They are more connected to things Korean such as food, language and pop culture, but all too often they don’t know their own family history, much less Korean history. Why did their families leave Korea? What happened to their family during the Korean War?”

“There is such a gap in so many personal histories of Korean Americans. So unaware of the early pioneers who have toiled in the field, dealt with exclusions and hateful prejudice, but all the while struggled to keep Korea's liberation in their hearts and minds.”

“I feel such an urgency to come up with a textbook with the cutting edge issues and the rapidly changing demographics. Many are so removed from the hardships their grandparents had faced upon their arrival but many are far more creative and open than their 1.5 and second generations. Thus this textbook is in response to the new challenges of the changing times.”

Amen to that, and Godspeed.

Just yesterday, I read a news story about my favorite historian, David McCullough, lamenting the utter ignorance of today’s young folks about their country’s history. He has lectured at more than 100 colleges and universities a period of 25 years. He has grown worried over the years.

“It’s shocking,” he says of the vast history gap.

It’s zilch when it comes to our own young people’s knowledge about our own heritage here and there across the ocean. I ought to know. In semiretirement, I’ve lectured at many college campuses and shared my experience as a journalist/activist with hundreds of young folks at annual student conferences and retreats for over the last 30 years.

It was our own Martin Luther King Jr., independence fighter Dosan (Island Mountain) Ahn Chang Ho, who launched our own civil rights movement in the hostile Wild West.

In 1902 the 22-year-old education reformer and his new wife, Helen, both converted to Christianity, modernity and equality, and came to San Francisco to learn about American education. Upon arrival, however, Ahn Chang Ho ran into two Korean ginseng peddlers squabbling in broad daylight in the heart of Chinatown.
That encounter prompted him to drop his 12-year education plan, and he plunged into organizing the nowhere hamlets of migrant farm workers up and down the fertile Central Valley of California.

From then until his 1938 prison death in occupied Korea, Ahn Chang Ho practiced what he preached: conquer the ancient habit of lying, be honest and sincere, speak the truth, work together for common goals, and be born again as citizens worthy of an independent nation.

Lest we forget, the San Francisco Bay has been home base to Dosan’s far-ranging grassroots Korean National Association (KNA) overseas, the Korean equivalent to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); the Heung Sa Dan (Korean Youth Academy); the rising community churches led by Dosan disciples Revs. Lee Daewoo and Whang Sa-Yong and the Sa-sun brothers, and the righteous patriot Chang In-Whan’s Durham Stevens assassination trial, to cite a few memorable landmarks and figures.

A half century later, true to the enduring Dosan legacy, San Francisco’s homegrown college turned into the launching platform for the Third World Strike, as well as the first successful pan-Asian American coalition movement to free death-row inmate Chol Soo Lee, who was wrongly convicted for a 1973 Chinatown gangland murder.

Fast forward to November, 1968.

“On strike! Shut it down.” The first Asian student protest since the Gold Rush years broke out on campus. For five months, the long-time passive young Asians, along with their black, Latino and Native American students, demanded an autonomous ethnic studies program, as well as an end to the Vietnam War. The next year, across the bay the UC Berkeley campus erupted in a similar strike.

Through sit-ins, marches, teach-ins, and occasional clashes with police, they demanded courses relevant to their own times, lives, and heritage.

As a result, in Fall 1969, the country’s finest Asian American Studies Department was established. Now the largest of four departments in the College of Ethnic Studies, it offers 50 classes, with more than 30 faculty members for two thousand enrollees each semester.

The successful strike’s wake-up call spread like wildfire, establishing ethnic studies curriculums nationwide for both the American-born children of the earlier immigrants from Asia as well as the new waves of immigrants and refugees from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Meanwhile, I was thousands of miles away covering nonviolent sit-ins, marches, and church rallies in the Jim Crow South as a lone Asian reporter for a pro-integration mainstream daily newspaper.

A decade later in 1979, I was invited to speak to the first Korean American studies class at SF State, shortly after my investigative series on the 1974 Chinatown gangland murder conviction of Korean immigrant Chol Soo Lee had run in the Sacramento Union, the oldest daily newspaper in the West.

This experimental course was inaugurated by a handful of American-born second-generation activists spearheaded by the late Tom Kim, a legendary Chinatown organizer.

Out of this class session was born the first local Chol Soo Lee defense committee. Had it not been for this brave band of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese American kids rallying behind a common cause, there would never have been what historians consider the first successful pan-Asian American coalition movement in American history.

Over the past three decades, as the editor of both Koreatown Weekly (1979–1983) and Korea Times Weekly (1990–1993), I’ve crisscrossed this continent several times touring mushrooming Korean settlements and visiting with hundreds of hardy non–English-speaking inner-city merchants.
This became a journey of self-discovery, as I came to bear witness to the remarkable phenomenon that we are an irrepressible breed of people who thrive on adversity without rancor.

Yet on the threshold of the global digital era, I am smitten with a growing sense of melancholy over the great generational divide between my first generation, now in their 70s and 80s, and our American-born children and their children, as well as another type of generational divide among earlier and more recent immigrants. They are all like ships in a stormy night passing each other without exchanging a signal.

What’s so troubling is the disinterest, disengagement, and disconnect of the American-educated, first-generation elites when it comes to the gathering storm over the lives and limbs of the fellow immigrants struggling and stumbling in the volatile urban centers.

The spirit of noblesse oblige appears an alien concept to those who are successful in their chosen fields and in positions to do the most good for bridge building in times of interethnic unrest and conflict.

To fill this void, only the painfully familiar faces of a splendid few professionals share the double and triple burden of thankless community service and coalition efforts. History simply has bypassed our so-called movers and shakers.

The time has come for our English-speaking children of the new immigrants to take up the leadership, as demonstrated during the 1992 fiery siege of Los Angeles’ Koreatown, as the first and last line of defense, come the next fire. I am tempted to call them the magnificent one percent.

Little wonder. Ours is a divisive, fragmented, and disparate colony without dialogue, consensus, or direction. Today’s Koreatowns, though outwardly thriving, remain ever vulnerable to flashpoints in the escalating interethnic tensions that can rise in the seething inner cities among disenfranchised Latinos, African Americans, and disparate Asian newcomers.

Almost 20 years ago, parts of South Central Los Angeles and adjoining Koreatown burned, choked, and wailed through three days and nights of firebombing, looting, and mayhem, in which our mom-and-pop storekeepers watched their American dream go up in smoke overnight.

The bitter lesson of Sa-I-Gu (Korean for 4-2-9, April 29) is that movers and shakers of Koreatowns have little or no clues why L.A.’s Koreatown was singled out for destruction in the fiery siege of the nation’s first media-instigated bogus race war between a politically powerful—but economically frustrated—minority and a seemingly thriving tribe of voiceless and powerless newcomers.

A walk through the ashes of Sa-I-Gu is a walk through our own smoldering embers of Hahn [Everlasting Woe]. Exploring the Sa-I-Gu wreckage is exploring our own scarred Hahnscape. Our sojourn in America has more to do with our own sojourn in our collective psyche as prisoners and accomplices of Hahn in this land of freedom.

A dark cloud hangs over our bleak urbanscape with the rise of the made-in-USA neo-Mandarins and techno-Mandarins among our best and brightest.

In hot pursuit of material success at any cost in the shadow of their parent generation’s running manta (Hahn Pullee), these privileged children of the latter-day diaspora don’t even know what Sa-I-Gu means (nor do they care).
Will Korean America end up as a mere footnote to American history, as a self-reliant—but selfish—tribe? Or will our third generation rise to the challenge of building a cohesive and inclusive community in the complex multiethnic urban space?

The publication of this breakthrough textbook for our future generations calls for some soul-searching time.

Maybe, just maybe, some answers will be found in the greatest untold story of our marathon Lonesome Journey.

At my twilight year of 83, I can’t help but remind today’s digital generation that this San Francisco Bay was our bridgehead, our own Jamestown.

At the dawn of the last century, boatloads of surrogate slaves sailed east to North America, first to the Hawaiian sugar plantations, Mexico’s Yucatan slave land, the apartheid West Coast, and finally to the remote islands of Cuba.

This bay is the birthplace of the undying saga of the humblest on earth, standing against the whole world all alone, rising to the noblest cause of freedom and independence for their conquered kingdom.

In their solitary passage as birds of passage, these single migrant farmhands and their picture brides, on the road following crops, gave their blood and sweat money to their government in exile. They welcomed their homeland’s liberation from brutal Japanese rule, only to watch their divided peninsula become the Cold War’s first battleground.

Long gone with the wind, however, our first-wave pioneers have left behind the Korean never-give-up-in-defeat-or-death spirit.

And their heroic passage, I daresay, was driven by the undercover revolutionary matriarchy forged by no more than 900 wannabe picture brides.

No doubt, their subterranean odyssey remains the greatest untold story of our Korean American century.

To these domestic “prisoners” in their own homes, “marriage” to strangers in Mikook (“beautiful country”) meant a great leap to freedom. Soon converted to Christianity and modernity under the influence of American missionaries, they had undertaken a daring flight across the ocean to the harsh Hawaiian plantations, and then to the forbidding American mainland.

Ironically, it was the aspiring middle-class missionaries from the heartland of America who had opened their schools and hospitals to these lowly nobodies at the bottom rung of the barbaric neo-Confucian feudal system.

Under this unrelenting plantation serfdom, they formed an underground sisterhood, transforming the overwhelmingly bachelor migrant enclaves into a family-centered, church-based community fighting for independence.

The secret? These woman warriors, unschooled, voiceless, and outwardly submissive within the suffocating patriarchal and hierarchical colony, who determined to carry out their life-long deferred dreams by pushing their American-born children to colleges and universities to eventually develop a viable, professional middle class within one generation.

Believe it or not, the proof lies in the 1970 Hawaiian census results showing that Koreans had the highest per capita income and the lowest jobless rate among all racial/ethnic groups, including whites, on the islands.
These invisible trailblazers, empowered not only by their embedded survival DNA but by their searing experience under Japanese occupation, worked and lived as wife, field worker, laundress, domestic, camp book, real estate agent, independence fighters and 24/7 independence tiger moms.

Thus, ironically, this shadow generation of silence and sacrifice in the apartheid West demonstrated an original American exceptionalism long before the phrase became a household word.

As I finish composing this foreword, this is my once-in-a-lifetime chance to pay my humble tribute to these women warriors who have indeed followed in sustained deed in the footsteps of our everlasting icon, Dosan Ahn Chang Ho.

---

Endnote

1. L.A. riots was called the last fire in my previous post-4.29 articles. I had editorially warned of the next fire a year before the eruption.
In 1963, my father, Frank Sung Kung Yoo, left war ravaged Korea behind him, dreaming of better days in the U.S. He was the son of a farmer whose notions of America were influenced by American GIs he had met. With only a camera and fifty dollars when he arrived, my father ended up as a dishwasher at a Chinese restaurant, the only place that would hire him. He survived on a student visa for almost ten years, had three daughters, and went to work by day and school by night. His daughters watched him toil as a carpenter and later celebrated when he became a chiropractor at the age of forty-two. All the while, Frank encouraged his daughters to go on to higher education to become medical doctors and lawyers. We studied hard, got good grades, and went on to college.

I went to the University of California, Irvine, intending to become a pediatrician and later work for Mother Teresa. Little did I know that my studies would take me on a different life journey. When I was a sophomore, I took my first Asian American studies course with Professor John Liu. That course changed me: I came away with a better appreciation of the hardships that my father had endured. After graduation, I went on to get my master’s in Public Health at Loma Linda University thinking I would continue to medical school. While there, I took a part-time job at the University of California, Riverside to create programs and services to support the growing population of Asian American students. During that time, I took a course on Race, Class and Gender that transformed my understanding of the disparities I witnessed every day as I sought to advocate for services, for a curriculum, and for a voice for a growing Asian American population that now was a third of the campus. The university was still run by old-school administrators and faculty who resisted this wave of change and racial/ethnic diversity. Demands and protests for courses and faces that represented Asian Americans at the University erupted over the years. And here I was in class talking about race, class and gender, talking about disparities, gaps, and voids in not only the academy but also the texts we were reading. It was an epic moment. My
direction changed: I proceeded to earn my doctorate, inspired to bring “voice” to experiences like those of my parents, but also those of the Asian American students with whom I had been working.

Over the last fifteen years, I have had the privilege of teaching the course *Koreans in America*. In that time, I have come to realize that what we call Korean America is vast and diverse. My students have ranged in background from international students from Korea struggling to find a community to mixed race Korean Americans who sometimes think they must be the only half-Palestinian-half-Korean in the world; from adoptees trying to find birth families and a connection to Korean America to, more often than not, twenty-something year old Korean Americans who do not feel they are Korean enough. And, in recent years, with the explosive popularity of Korean popular culture (the Hallyu wave), I have had an increasing number of non-Koreans take my course seeking to understand why they are so attracted to Korean food, music, movies, soap operas, and even lovers.

In the course of a semester, we explore Korean American history, the sociological, political, and economic implications of being a minority, and what it is really like to be a Korean immigrant in the U.S. Korean, and Korean American alike find a better appreciation of their families’ histories, which have often been unspoken, and awaken in themselves a sense of national and ethnic pride. For the non-Korean in the course, a whole new world in terms of culture, history, and identity is explored, often opening their hearts and minds to a new appreciation of difference. This textbook is in part the direct result of engagement that I have had with my students.

In this class, I have used a wide variety of readings. Because no ideal textbook existed, I realized it was up to me to make one, and so I brought together contributors to create a current, up-to-date textbook documenting the diverse changes in Korean America. In fulfillment of this vision, *Koreans in America: History, Identity and Community* carefully documents and examines these shifts within the Korean American communities through cutting-edge essays in ethnic studies, Asian American studies, sociology, psychology, history, and medicine.

This edited volume is divided into the following sections:

- “Understanding History” has chapters on early Korean immigrant history and key historical events and issues impacting the immigration and adaptation of Korean Americans.

- “Diverse Demographic and Identities” includes a chapter on the latest 2010 U.S. Census and the changing demographics of the Korean American community, along with other chapters on the experiences of adoptees, international students, and Korean Japanese.

- “Family” covers issues facing the Korean American family, including and the impact of language and cultural brokering on childhoods, negotiating love and marriage among 1.5 and 2nd generation and Korean Americans, culture and fatherhood, and attitudes regarding care and support for the elderly.

- “Arts and Culture” addresses emerging Korean trends impacting Korean Americans and includes chapters on music, television, food, and the arts.
• “Community and Activism” explores community institutions and movements within the Korean American community, such as chapters on the Korean church, the Korean War, the Free Chol Soo Lee movement, the Los Angeles riots and current issues facing Korean Americans.

Over forty talented authors contributed to this edited anthology. The contributors include established scholars within Korean American studies, national and local advocates with the Korean American community, and creative artists and writers. Others are emerging and innovative scholars and writers within Korean American studies who are asking new questions and arriving at new answers.

My hope is that students, like yourself, will come away with a better understanding of their own identity in relation to the Korean American community, an appreciation of the diversity and strengths of the Korean American community, and a desire to learn from, grow, and build upon the history of Korean Americans who have come before.

**Study Questions**

1. Why are you taking this Korean American course?
2. What do you think shapes Korean American identity and community the most—family, culture, history, institutions, or arts and culture?