

The Growth and Challenges of the Korean Community in Vietnam¹

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“Since it is so black, the Saigon River at dawn should be called a black and white painting rather than a watercolor painting. Even the palm trees along the river look black, only the sun and the roofs in An Phu village where the wealthy people live are orange. What am I doing in this country which is twenty years more backward than Korea? Where am I going to be buried - in Korea, in Vietnam, or somewhere else? While I talk to myself, the color of the river suddenly changes to yellow and the palm trees recover their green hues.” (Lee 2004:54)

The above citation reveals that Koreans in Vietnam live in affluent suburbs but they remain in Vietnam as sojourners. It is uncertain whether Koreans in Vietnam will remain sojourners or become permanent residents or citizens some day. In many foreign countries, Koreans began their lives as sojourners and later chose to become citizens or permanent residents. But what will happen to Koreans in Vietnam?

The history of Koreans in Vietnam is not a long one. During the Vietnam War, many Koreans lived in Vietnam. However, at the end of that War, while many returned home, some left for the Middle East, Australia and the USA. A large number of Koreans in Vietnam chose Australia as their future home. They pioneered the history of Koreans in Australia. Thus, the history of Koreans in Vietnam is quite important in the recent history of Korean emigration.

After Korea established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1992, many Koreans rushed to Vietnam. The Korean community in Vietnam continues to grow very rapidly. The presence of Koreans in Vietnam is

quite conspicuous - more than the numbers of sojourners might suggest. Korean automobiles, cosmetics, electronics, restaurants, factories, beauty salons, dramas, and films are ubiquitous. The departments of Korean studies in Vietnamese universities have also witnessed remarkable development during this period. These departments attract the top Vietnamese students. Korea is one of the largest investor countries in Vietnam. Considering the fact that the two countries were hostile until the early 1990s, the development of the Korean community and its influence in Vietnam is a remarkable phenomenon. Although there are some short essays about Koreans in Vietnam, no systematic study has been attempted so far on that community.

In this paper, I will discuss the development of the Korean community and its future prospects. Whilst researching this paper, I visited Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in February 2004. I met business leaders and community leaders to collect data and also conducted interviews with them. In addition, for my sociological studies on Vietnamese social development, I have visited Vietnam regularly - at least twice a year since 1994. In this paper, I will use some of the data which I collected in my previous studies and especially that relating to the community relations of Korean companies in Vietnam in 1998 and 2000. However, it is very difficult to gather systematic information or sociological survey data on Koreans in Vietnam. Due to the lack of adequate research material on the subject, this paper represents a preliminary exploration of the Korean community in Vietnam.

The Historical Development of the Korean Community in Vietnam

It is well known that many Korean soldiers participated in the Vietnam War. Along with the soldiers, Korean businessmen and technicians also visited the country. But the real history of Koreans in Vietnam dates back to an even earlier period.

1) Early Koreans in Vietnam

One historical record reveals that some Korean survivors of a shipwreck landed in Vietnam in the 17th century. In October 1687, 24

Korean survivors landed at Hoi An—a port town in central Vietnam. These Koreans communicated with the local people in writing. Three of them died of a local disease in Vietnam² whilst the remaining Koreans lived in Vietnam until July 1688. When they returned to Korea, an official interviewed them. This official then wrote about Vietnamese life and customs based on his interviews. The record also describes the lives of the Koreans in Vietnam. These first Koreans said that they enjoyed a free life in their new home. In stark contrast with this happy story, the fate of the Vietnamese survivors of a shipwreck in Korea in 1612 was terrible. In that year, the Vietnamese survivors of a shipwreck landed on Cheju Island, whereupon the provincial mayor killed them for the valuables they were carrying.

After this story, it is impossible to find any records of Koreans in Vietnam until the period of the Japanese colonial rule. According to Kim Ki-Tae who studied Vietnamese in Saigon from December 1967 to August 1969, only a few Koreans lived in Vietnam before the Japanese army invaded Vietnam which was then under French colonial rule. The first Korean to live in Vietnam in the 20th century was Mr. Chun. Kim Ki-Tae had heard two different explanations of the reason for Mr. Chun's migration.³ Some told him that Mr. Chun escaped from Hong Kong to Vietnam because of his involvement in the Korean independence movement. Others claimed that Mr. Chun came to Vietnam to trade in ginseng. Even Kim Ki-Tae is not certain which story is true. But these stories reveal two possible explanations for Koreans' migration prior to the Japanese invasion of Vietnam.

With the Japanese invasion of Vietnam, more Koreans came to that country. During World War II, the Japanese government drafted men and women of the colonized nations. Many Koreans were drafted into the army, mines, and factories. Some women were drafted as sex slaves or so-called comfort women for the Japanese army. According to Kim Ki-Tae,⁴ some Koreans who were serving in the Japanese army came to Vietnam as Japanese soldiers and some female Koreans came to Vietnam as sex slaves. Most of these visitors returned to Korea with the defeat of Japan in the war. However, some of them did not return home and instead, chose to live in Vietnam - some in North Vietnam and others in the South. After the division of 1954, all of the Koreans in North Vietnam moved to the

South.

In 1954, South Vietnam and South Korea concluded diplomatic treaties. With the establishment of diplomatic ties, some Koreans returned to Vietnam. Since Korea was a poverty-stricken country, these frontier Koreans chose Vietnam as a destination for their businesses. According to Kim Ki-Tae's observation, the number of these Koreans was small. The newcomers were more educated and richer than those who had gone to Vietnam with the Japanese army⁵ but we lack exact statistics and accurate data on them. Kim Ki-Tae cites David Nam-Gung's estimation. David Nam-Gung was one of the early Koreans in Vietnam. He was a former Japanese army officer who had moved to San Francisco. David's estimation shows that there were about 2000 Koreans in Vietnam in the 1940s.⁶ This number decreased in the 1950s and Kim Ki-Tae estimates that there were less than fifty Koreans in Vietnam in 1962.

2) The Vietnam War and Koreans in Vietnam

The number of Koreans in Vietnam increased with Korea's engagement in the Vietnam War. Korea sent non-combat forces to South Vietnam in 1964 and a survey shows that there were 164 Koreans in South Vietnam in 1966.⁷ From 1965 to 1973, the South Korean government sent many South Korean soldiers to Vietnam. The peak year was 1968. The number of South Korean soldiers in Vietnam in 1968 was about 50,000. It was the second largest foreign force after the American forces. Over the nine years of Korean participation in the war, the number of South Korean soldiers in the country reached a total of about 300,000.⁸

In return for Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, the American government promised to support the economic activities of Korean companies and workers in Vietnam. The activities of Koreans in Vietnam contributed immensely to the development of the Korean economy. People called this special boom the 'Vietnam Boom'. The boom included the provision of workers and soldiers for the war effort, an increase in exports to Vietnam and the repatriation of the profits of Korean companies operating in Vietnam. Korean companies in Vietnam were major military goods suppliers. The export of Korean goods to Vietnam was crucial for the export-oriented Korean economy. Korea's exports to Vietnam comprised 8.5% of the total exports of Korea in the late 1960s.

Many Korean companies entered the Vietnamese market, including trading companies, construction companies and a range of general service companies. Of these, some were well-known Korean companies such as Hanyang Construction, Kongyong Construction, Hyundai Construction, and Hanjin Corporation. Military goods suppliers were also joined by a number of smaller Korean companies. Many Korean technicians and workers worked in Korean and foreign companies in Vietnam. Korean soldiers, technicians, and workers remitted their wages back to their homes in Korea. These remittances contributed significantly to the growth of the Korean economy in the 1960s and early 1970s. According to one estimate, the fruits of the Vietnam Boom comprised 32-47% of Korea's total exports in the second half of the 1960s.⁹ This means that Koreans in Vietnam made a huge contribution to the modernization of the Korean economy. It also means that the number of Koreans in Vietnam was not small. To many Koreans, Vietnam was a new land and provided a new avenue and opportunity for their success. When Kim Ki Tae landed in Vietnam in 1967 as a foreign student, he found Saigon to be very dynamic, prosperous and attractive. To many Koreans in the 1960s, when Korea was very poor, Vietnam was a new frontier where a bright future awaited them. They rushed to Vietnam. Even soldiers had to compete with their colleagues to be selected as dispatched soldiers.

It is a well-known fact that there were many international marriages between Vietnamese women and Korean men in Vietnam during the War. It is difficult to know the exact number of Koreans and Korean Vietnamese in Vietnam during the War. One source claims that there are 15,000 Korean Vietnamese who were born to Korean men and Vietnamese women during the War currently living in Vietnam.¹⁰

With the Paris Armistice Agreement of January 1973, Korean soldiers withdrew from Vietnam in that year. In 1975 the Korean embassy personnel, a number of businessmen and others still remained. Even after the end of the War in April 1975, more than 200 Koreans were known to be still in Vietnam, including some Korean government officials. The Koreans who were not able to escape organized a Korean Association under the communist rule.¹¹ The president of this association was Mr. Lee Sun-Heung, a businessman who owned the Soon-Heung Trading Company in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Mr. Lee left Vietnam with three other

Koreans in 1981 after having lived in the communist state for six years. By the time he left Vietnam, the country was already embarking on its early reform program.

3) Koreans after Doi Moi (the Renovation)

Vietnam launched its dramatic reform program in the late 1980s based on the Renovation Policy (Doi Moi) of 1986. Korean businessmen subsequently began travelling to Vietnam to open up the Vietnamese market. Since they could not enter Vietnam from Korea directly, Korean businessmen used Hong Kong or Singapore as staging posts. General trading companies pioneered the opening of the Vietnamese market in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the normalization of relations between Korea and Vietnam in 1992, Koreans started talking about a second Vietnam Boom. War veterans and businessmen who had lived in Vietnam during the War started returning to Vietnam from 1992. For example, the former president of the Korean Association in Saigon chose to return to Vietnam. He re-established his former company and having returned, he has since become one of the most influential leaders of the Korean community in Ho Chi Minh City.¹² Early experiences and personal connections have been invaluable resources for war veterans and businessmen in their resettlement in Vietnam. Some veterans and former technicians have happily found their children and Vietnamese wives and now live contented lives in Vietnam.

Some war veterans returned to Vietnam with some trepidation: they remembered various atrocities committed by the Korean troops during the War. They were very surprised to find that the Vietnamese did not raise these issues and that the war-time atrocities did not become a critical issue even among ordinary Vietnamese until 1999 when a Korean weekly magazine seriously raised the issue.¹³

As Table 1 shows, the total number of Koreans is not large, but the rate of increase is quite conspicuous. What I would like to emphasize here is that the statistics do not reflect the real number correctly. Many people estimate that in 2003 there were almost 1500 Koreans in the Hanoi area and 15,000 or 20,000 in the Ho Chi Minh City area.¹⁴

Table 1: The increase in Koreans in Vietnam, 1992-2003

	1992	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003
Hanoi and neighboring areas	498	518	773	536	861	1,060
Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring areas		709	1,015	5,008	5,365	5,861
Total	498	1,788	5,544	6,226	6,821	6,821

Data: ROK Embassy in Vietnam

From Table 1 we will notice that the Financial Crisis in Korea dealt a severe blow to the Korean community in Hanoi and its environs. The number of Koreans in Hanoi decreased from one thousand to four or five hundred because of the Financial Crisis in 1997. Large Korean companies sent their representatives to Hanoi before the Crisis and cut the number or closed their offices because of the Crisis. We can see the recovery since 2001 in Table 1.

In Ho Chi Minh City and its neighboring areas, self-employed and business owners of mid-size companies outnumbered the staff dispatched by big companies. Although the rate of increase dropped after the Financial Crisis in Korea, the Korean population of Ho Chi Minh City and its environs has grown. Bankrupt Korean business persons and new young people entered Vietnam in search of profitable opportunities.

The official statistics of Table 1 show that the Korean community in Vietnam is not large. But considering its short history, the Korean community has developed extremely rapidly. Moreover, if we are to believe the long time observers in Vietnam, then we could say that there were some 20,000 Koreans in Vietnam in 2003. This increase from several hundreds to 20,000 in ten years or so is indeed most impressive. It will undoubtedly not take long before the number of Koreans in Vietnam surpasses that in Indonesia.

Vietnam has a number of attractive conditions for Korean investment. For example, many Koreans in Vietnam think it is much easier to operate a business in Vietnam than in other Asian countries. In addition, it is possible for Koreans to start a new business with a smaller amount of investment capital. In business leaders' opinions, the Vietnamese

government is much better than the Korean government. A business leader who has operated a large factory in Ho Chi Minh City for the last six years comments:

In my job here, I often meet Vietnamese officials. I have never been obstructed in my work by government officials here. When I was in Korea, I often visited government offices. I find the Vietnamese government officials are much better than their Korean counterparts.¹⁵

The above is but one example of a reasonably common observation. When we consider that Korea is a capitalist country and Vietnam is socialist, it is quite surprising that many Koreans in Vietnam find the government-business relationship there much more friendly than that in Korea.¹⁶

What are Koreans doing in Vietnam?

As the Korean community grows, the occupations of Koreans has diversified. I have not been able to find more up-to-date data on the occupations of Koreans in Vietnam. Table 2 shows the range of occupations of Koreans in Vietnam in 1999 and 2001. Recently more self-employed Koreans and students have gone to Vietnam, but this Table reveals the general landscape of the occupational structure of Koreans in Vietnam.

Generally speaking students and individual Koreans dispatched or posted to Vietnam by their home office or company are concentrated in Hanoi and its environs. Dispatched residents (*JuJaeWon*) are generally employees of large Korean companies or Korean government departments. In Table 2, the dispatched residents from private companies are generally the employees of large Korean companies. These constitute the wealthiest class of Koreans in Vietnam. They live a life of luxury in well-equipped modern apartments and their life styles are lavish, not only by the Vietnamese standards but by Korean standards as well. These dispatched residents symbolize “Koreans” in Vietnam, especially in Hanoi. Because of their presence, the image of Koreans in Vietnam is very positive and an icon of modern, successful Koreans in the eyes of the local Vietnamese.

Along with the dispatched employees, government officials also belong to the group of “wealthy Koreans” in Vietnam. Considering the small size of the Korean community in Hanoi, their presence is not insignificant. As we can see in Table 2, the dispatched residents occupy almost half of the Korean population in Hanoi. Since not all Koreans in Vietnam register their names and address with the embassy, this Table understates the number of self-employed and students in the country. Thus, in reality, the proportion of dispatched residents will be lower than the figure shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Koreans in Vietnam by occupation, 1991, 2001

		1999		2001	
		Hanoi	HCMC	Hanoi	HCMC
dispatched resident	government or public corporation	41	19	46	42
	private company	226	172	396	133
self-employed	trade	5	200	27	333
	service	24	45	15	301
	manufacturing		700	3	452
employed	non-manual work	4	500		669
	manual work		1,400		1,410
agriculture, fishery, forestry			1		23
professional		1	3		47
student	college and above	26	40	19	106
	high school and below	104	260	202	490
house wife		105	874	144	604
others			794	9	755
Total		536	5,008	861	5,365

Hanoi includes Hanoi City and its neighboring regions (North and Central Vietnam). HCMC includes Ho Chi Minh City and its neighboring regions.

Data: ROK embassy in Vietnam.

In Ho Chi Min City and its environs, the occupations of Koreans are more diverse than in Hanoi. The absolute and relative number of dispatched residents in Ho Chi Minh City is much lower than those in

Hanoi. From Table 2 we can see that more and more Korean business people and students are travelling to Ho Chi Minh City. Table 2 most surprisingly reveals that employees such as managers and manual workers only lived in the Ho Chi Minh City area in 2001. Managers and manual workers comprise about 40% of the Korean population in the Ho Chi Minh City area. The number of Korean students of college level and above in Ho Chi Minh City is five times larger than that in Hanoi. The image of Hanoi as an education center is not supported by this Table. The gap in Korean student numbers between the two areas is shown to have widened between 1999 and 2001.

In contrast to the ratio of employed Koreans in the two areas, the ratio of dispatched residents is much higher in the Hanoi area than in the Ho Chi Minh City area. In 2001, the dispatched residents in Hanoi comprised almost half of the Korean population in that city, but in the Ho Chi Minh City area they occupied just 3.2% of the Korean population. Self-employed Koreans in the Ho Chi Minh City area is another conspicuous phenomenon. In 2001, they comprised about 20% of the Korean population of the area whilst in the Hanoi area, they comprised just 5.2% of the Korean population. From this comparison we can see that the class inequality within the Korean population of the Ho Chi Minh City area is much larger than in the Hanoi area. During my interviews many Koreans in Hanoi told me how proud they were of their colleagues. Indeed, Koreans in Hanoi are better educated and wealthier than those in Ho Chi Minh City. They often claim that Koreans in Ho Chi Minh City cause social problems and are dishonest and deceitful. It is not easy to refute these statements. However, even Korean small shop owners enjoy quite luxurious lives in Ho Chi Minh City. Thus, even in Ho Chi Minh City, Koreans are considered to be very wealthy people by the local Vietnamese. This fact attracts more Koreans to the Ho Chi Minh City area. That is why there are many more Koreans in the Ho Chi Minh City area than the official statistics show. As I have mentioned earlier, local residents estimate that there were anything between 10,000 and 20,000 Koreans in the Ho Chi Minh City area in 2003.

Efforts at Settlement

As we can see from Table 1, the Korean community rapidly increased after 1992: from about five hundred to more than five thousand and possibly as high as 20,000. In the beginning, most Koreans thought they would stay in Vietnam for a few years to make their fortune and return to Korea. As time went by, more Koreans come to Vietnam and made more systematic efforts to settle down in Vietnam. International marriages between Koreans and Vietnamese increased year by year. Some tabloids tend to focus on the extra-marital scandals involving Korean men in Vietnam but there are many successful couples. They organize associations and meet regularly to discuss their common interests. Another significant sign of settlement is the establishment of a regular official Korean School in Ho Chi Minh City. The facilities at the Korean School are far superior to schools in Korea. Many Korean restaurants and religious institutions are also relevant tokens of the efforts at settlement. I will now discuss some of these settlement efforts in more detail.

1) Korean Residential Communities

As the numbers of Koreans increase in Vietnam, they tend to congregate in specific residential neighbourhoods. In Ho Chi Minh City there is a “Korean town” or “Korean village”. The oldest of these “villages” is located in Pham Van Hai street. There are currently several Korean residential districts in Ho Chi Minh City including the K300 area and the South Saigon area. These two areas are newer and fancier than the original “Korean villages”. The South Saigon Residential area is particularly popular with the super-rich foreigners. According to pastor Won of the Korean church, there are five hundred Korean families in the South Saigon residential area. He says that Pham Van Hai village is declining and South Saigon is booming.¹⁷

In Hanoi, many Koreans live in the Daewoo apartments, the Samsung apartments, and the TrungHoa apartments. The Daewoo apartment complex was the first Korean residential area in Hanoi. It was developed by the Daewoo Construction Company and is one of the most expensive residential areas in Vietnam. The Samsung apartment complex was developed by the Samsung Construction Company. With the boom in

real estate, many new apartments for wealthy Vietnamese and foreigners have been developed, including the TrungHoa apartment complex. In terms of community activities, these areas are not well organized. According to my research, only Pham Van Hai village in Ho Chi Minh City can really be called a community.

Of the Korean residential areas, Pham Van Hai village is well organized and well connected to the local Vietnamese community. It is not a secluded community of wealthy foreigners. The residents live together with local Vietnamese and some are married to Vietnamese women. Most of the residents are self-employed. Altogether, 27 Korean families live in this “Korean village”. They operate Korean and Japanese restaurants, barbershops, PC-rooms, and grocery stores, etc. Many of them are aged Koreans and members of the Korean Seniors Association. They have set up a self-help association which provides help to needy members and sponsors many social activities. They also help their Vietnamese neighbors on various occasions.¹⁸

2) Organizing the Korean Community

Under the umbrella of the Korean Embassy and the General Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City, there are separate Korean Associations (*Haninboi*) in Hanoi and Ho Chi Min City. It is very difficult to obtain permission from the Vietnamese government to establish an independent organization. For many years, Koreans worked hard to gain official permission from the Vietnamese government but without success. All the newsletters of the Korean Associations are published with the assistance of the Korean embassy and consulate. Thus, the Korean Associations in Vietnam are quite different from those in America or Japan: they are not independent and autonomous and rely heavily on the embassy and consulate. For this reason, in 2003 there was a serious conflict between the Ho Chi Minh City Korean Association and the ROK General Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. This instability in the structure of the Korean Associations will persist for the time being at least. Within their limits these organizations organize a range of cultural events for Koreans in Vietnam and charity programs for local Vietnamese.

3) Diverse NGOs

There are many Korean charity groups in Vietnam, many of which are protestant Christian in origin. The Vietnamese laws, as is the case in many socialist countries, prohibit evangelical activities by foreigners in Vietnam. However, charitable activities and developmental support programs by NGOs of religious origin are permitted. It seems that the social responsibility of Korean religious institutions is more prominent and better practiced in Vietnam than in Korea. Among the Korean NGOs in Vietnam, the Humane Technology School is well recognized. In the beginning the founder intended to help Korean Vietnamese children (lai Dai Han) who had been born to Korean men and Vietnamese women during the Vietnam War. The School has been very successful and praised by the Vietnamese government. According to pastor Kim, the school's principal, the Korean Vietnamese are now grown-ups and do not attend the school any more. From now on he intends to focus on poor Vietnamese and train them in technology.

4) The Education of Korean Children

As we saw in Table 2, the number of Korean students in Vietnam is not insignificant when compared to the total number of Koreans in the country. The desire for a better education for their children by the expatriate parents in Vietnam is as strong as parents in Korea. In Hanoi, the Korean school is just a weekend school, but the Koreans in Hanoi are making a concerted effort to have a regular weekday school recognized by the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Korean community has a very modern school. The Korean community established the construction committee in 1997 and the school was officially opened in September 1998.¹⁹ Mr. Yun, the president of the board of directors, says that this school holds the record for the shortest time in the history of establishing Korean schools in foreign countries. In his opinion,²⁰ the process of establishing the school was also the most successful in the history of Korean schools abroad. It has a special meaning too, because it was accomplished during the Financial Crisis in Korea.

5) Religious Institutions for Koreans

Although Korea is not a Christian nation, many overseas Koreans are very enthusiastic about establishing churches in their host countries. There are two Protestant churches in Hanoi and three in Ho Chi Minh City and one Catholic church in Hanoi. There are no Buddhist temples in Hanoi but there are two Buddhist worship groups in Ho Chi Minh city. Korean Buddhists do not yet have their own temples in Vietnam. Protestant churches have their own church buildings. In Hanoi, one church has its own building where about 100 Christians attend Sunday services.²¹ In Ho Chi Minh City also one church has its own church building and about 500 Christians attend Sunday services there.²² Churches mainly serve Korean Christians in Vietnam, but they also work hard to reach local people through charitable activities.

6) International marriages

While Koreans are not liberal about international marriages in general, international marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women are viewed in an especially discriminatory light. The Korean media tends to treat this issue as a scandal and constantly attempts to dig up salacious gossip. Contrary to biased media coverage, there are many good examples of international marriages between Koreans and Vietnamese. One couple I met was economically very successful. The couple has a daughter whom they send to boarding school in America in an effort to give her a better education. International marriages are divided into two categories: senior and junior. The dividing line is about 45 years of age. The first group of international marriages hail from the War years. These belong to the seniors association. Many senior Koreans in Vietnam have Vietnamese wives and children. Apart from this first generation, there are two other groups. Each group has its own friendship association: the seniors call their organization the Love Association (*Saranghoi*) and the juniors call theirs the Han-Viet Association (*Han bet hoi*). I was able to meet the president of the seniors association, but was not successful in my attempt to interview the president of the juniors - they try to avoid contact with strangers from Korea. An increase in international marriages will be one of the milestones by which we will be able to judge whether or not the Korean community will continue to develop in Vietnam.

Uneasy Relationship with the Host Nation

Despite the development of the Korean community and the broad-based efforts of that community towards the host country, there are still tensions between Koreans and Vietnamese in Vietnam. I identify two main sources of tension, the first emanating from the bitter memory of the war and second derived from the new conflicts of class and nation.

1) Bitter Memory of the War

Although many Koreans were surprised to find that the Vietnamese welcomed Koreans, some Koreans drew attention to the hostile atmosphere in Central Vietnam where South Korean soldiers were involved in atrocities. The tension that this memory caused remained largely out of public view. Finally, in 1999, a South Korean student in Ho Chi Minh City investigated the issue and visited several places where South Korean soldiers had committed atrocities. She sent her findings to a magazine in Korea.²³ This report gave rise to severe conflicts and a hot debate in Korea. International news agencies including Newsweek and Reuters paid a great deal of attention to this event and the debates in Korea. Vietnam War veterans in Korea attacked the office of the Korean magazine which first broke the story about the wartime atrocities. Following the coverage by the Korean magazines and newspapers, the influential Vietnamese newspaper, *Tuoi Tre* (Young People), also wrote about the war crimes committed by the South Korean soldiers. The news shocked many young Vietnamese from the post-war generation. *Tuoi Tre* and many Vietnamese thanked the Korean newspapers for their active efforts to publicize the issue. South Korean scholars and reporters subsequently visited the sites of the atrocities and many Korean NGOs suggested that humanitarian help be given to the family members of the victims. Despite these efforts, Koreans in Vietnam did not feel as safe as they had before. Although there have not been any attacks on Koreans in Vietnam, relating to the issue of the atrocities, the image of Koreans in Vietnam had been degraded considerably - especially when this issue was combined with some bad labor management practices by Korean companies in Vietnam.²⁴

Dual Tension: Class and Nation

Korea is one of the top five investors in Vietnam. Before the collapse of Daewoo, that company was a symbol of Vietnam's successful reform policy. For many Vietnamese, especially in Hanoi, Daewoo represented Korea. At the beginning of the Korean investment boom, high tech and major companies set up factories in Hanoi and its environs. These major companies did not cause serious labor-related problems themselves, but once the labor-intensive companies began moving into the Ho Chi Minh City area en masse, labor problems began to surface, including long working hours, unpaid wages, and abuse. Taiwanese and Korean companies were harshly criticized by the major Vietnamese newspapers. On the one hand they criticized the Korean business leaders by saying that they "ignored" the pride of the Vietnamese. Although Vietnamese workers were not allowed to strike before the economic reforms, they began wildcat strikes in foreign-owned companies from the mid 1990s.²⁵ It appears that the newspapers did not make a distinction between Koreans in general and the Korean managers. In February 1997 when I met a leader of the Samsung Trading Company in Ho Chi Minh City, he and his wife told me that the labor issues of Korean companies in Ho Chi Minh City were a very serious issue for the Korean community.

To solve this issue in Ho Chi Minh City, the Korean government dispatched a consular representative to take charge of the labor management issues. The consul has convened many training sessions for Korean managers in Ho Chi Minh City and provided Korean managers with many legal materials about labor management. In addition, Korean companies have tried to improve their management style. They have also worked hard to improve the relation between Korean managers and Vietnamese workers by investing more in local communities. Many companies have shown an interest in corporate social responsibility. Because of these efforts and the improvement in labor management by Korean companies, the situation has improved considerably. But Korean companies in general have still been listed among those companies with bad management customs.²⁶

The successful management of this dual tension of class and nation will be very important to the further stable development of the Korean

community in Vietnam. More and more Koreans will come to Vietnam and many of them will be managers or owners of companies. If they cannot ease this tension, they will face a tougher and more hostile working environment.

Not Permanent Residents but Sojourners

Since the mid 1990s, the Korean community in Vietnam has grown rapidly. This community already has an excellent 'regular week day Korean School' in Ho Chi Minh City and many successful business leaders. The Korean religious communities are also developing very successfully. The number of stable international marriages between Koreans and Vietnamese is also increasing. All these factors contribute to the development of the Korean community in Vietnam.

But from an historical perspective, ruptures are visible in the Korean community. The first Korean community in Vietnam survived for nine months in the 17th century. The second Korean community was developed during the colonial period after a long hiatus. In the 1940s, both countries were colonized and the Korean community in Vietnam at the time was very small. As we know, the Vietnam War enabled the Korean community in Vietnam to grow, but even this development was short-lived. From 1973 onwards, the community was shaken and diminished. After April 30, 1975, the existence of the Korean community in Vietnam was meaningless because Koreans were seen as "captives" to be sent back to Korea.

After the rupture of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Vietnamese Renovation Policy in 1986 provided Koreans with another opportunity. As mentioned above, the Korean community grew very quickly. The Korean community is the second largest foreign community after the Chinese in Vietnam. However, during the Financial Crisis, the Korean community was again severely shaken. Many Koreans returned to Korea and Korean companies substantially cut the budgets of their branch companies in Vietnam. What is worse, not a few branches and representative offices were completely closed down. Because of these financial cutbacks and closures, direct air links between Seoul and Hanoi were also closed until late 2000.

It is not certain whether the Korean community will continue its stable development. So far, the Vietnamese government will not allow

foreigners to gain Vietnamese citizenship or permanent residence rights. By definition, all Koreans are foreigners in Vietnam. But as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, some Koreans are considering living their entire lives in Vietnam. Some senior Koreans have already been buried in Vietnam. Despite these developments, Koreans will remain in Vietnam as sojourners, not as citizens. This will make the Korean community more volatile. In addition, the two serious sources of tension outlined above may contribute towards making the future Korean community less stable, namely the bitter Vietnamese memory of the atrocities committed by Korean soldiers and the atrocious labor management practices of some Korean companies in Vietnam.

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Notes

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- ¹ For this paper, I did my fieldwork in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in February 2004. I thank the leaders of the Korean Community in Hanoi and Hochiminh City for their precious time. I especially appreciate to Mr. Lee Jung-Yeol of the Korean Association in Hanoi, Mr. Lee Soon-Heung of the Association of Senior Koreans in Ho Chi Minh City, Mr. Han Young-Min of the Magazin *ChaoVietnam*, and Reverend Won of the Korean Church in Ho Chi Minh City.
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 - ⁶ Kim Ki-Tae. 2003. "Civilian Koreans in Vietnam in the 1960s", *ChaoVietnam*, Vol.14. August 17, 2003.
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 - ⁸ Han Do-Hyun. 1999. 'Rewriting the Contemporary History of Korea: Korean Engagement in the Vietnam War', *Hanguk Ilbo* (Daily Hanguk), July 27, 1999.
 - ⁹ Ibid.
 - ¹⁰ "Koreans in the World", *Jeonggyeong nyus* (Political and Economic News), September 2003.
 - ¹¹ Lee Soon-Heung. 2002. *Lee Soon-Heung's Profile*. Mimeo. "Human---Person of the month", *HoChiMin si Hanin Sosik* (Magazine of the Korean Community in Ho Chi Minh) June 2003, pp.22-23.
 - ¹² *The Ho Chi Minh Korean Review* (*Ho Chi Min Hanin sosig*), June 2003. pp. 22-23.
 - ¹³ *HanGyeoreh 21* (The Korean Nation 21) Vol. 273, September 2, 1999.
 - ¹⁴ From an interview with Mr. Lee Jung-Yeol (former President of the Korean

Association in Hanoi) in February 2004, and with Mr. Han Young-Min (editor of the magazine, *Chaovietnam*) in February 2004.

¹⁵ “Interview with Lee Bong-Seog of Samyang Vietnam”, *Chao Vietnam* Vol.11, June 29, 2003, pp. 20-23.

¹⁶ “Let’s start after studying Vietnam” *Chao Vietnam*, March 1, 2003, p.11.

From interviews I conducted with Korean business leaders in the Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi areas in 1998 and 2000. “CEO interview: Seong Nak-Gil of LG MECA”, *Chao Vietnam*, Vol.33, May 30, 2004. “Interview with Yoo Myung-Sik of Posilama”, *Chao Vietnam*, Vol.8, May 17, 2003, pp.20-23.

¹⁷ Interview with pastor Won on February 20, 2004.

¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Oh, former president of the self-help association.

¹⁹ Korean School, Ho Chi Minh City. *Year Book 2003*.

²⁰ Interview, February 21, 2004.

²¹ Interview with pastor Tae, on February 15, 2004

²² Interview with pastor Won, on February 20, 2004.

²³ *Hangyoreh* 21. Vol. 273, September 2, 1999.

²⁴ Han Do-Hyun 2001 and 1999b.

²⁵ Han Do-Hyun 1999b. Chun Kyung-Soo 1999.

²⁶ See the website of the ROK Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City.

Abstract

Koreans in Vietnam live in affluent suburbs, but they stay in Vietnam as sojourners. It is not certain whether Koreans in Vietnam will remain sojourners or become permanent residents or citizens later. In many foreign countries, Koreans started their lives as sojourners, and later chose to become citizens or permanent residents. What will happen to Koreans in Vietnam in the future?

The history of Koreans in Vietnam is not so old. During the Vietnam War, many Koreans lived in Vietnam. However, after the end of the war, many returned home and some left for the Middle East, Australia, and the U.S.A. A large number of Koreans departing Vietnam chose Australia as their future home, starting the history of Koreans in that country. Thus, the history of Koreans in Vietnam is quite important in the recent history of Korean emigration.

After Korea established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1992, many Koreans rushed to Vietnam. The Korean community in Vietnam is growing very rapidly. The

Presence of Koreans in Vietnam is conspicuous, more than the numbers. It is easy to find Korean automobiles, cosmetics, electronics, restaurants, factories, beauty salons, dramas, and films. Departments of Korean studies in Vietnamese universities have also witnessed remarkable development during this period. These departments attract top students in Vietnam. Korea is one of the top-ranking investor countries in Vietnam. Considering that the two countries were -hostile until the early 1990s, the development of the Korean community and influence in Vietnam is a remarkable phenomenon. Although there are some short essays about Koreans in Vietnam, no systematic study has been attempted so far on the Korean community in Vietnam.

In this paper, I will discuss the development of the Korean community and its future prospect. To write this paper, I visited Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in February 2004. I met business leaders and community leaders to collect data and also held interviews with them. In addition, for my sociological studies on Vietnamese social development, I have been visiting Vietnam regularly, at least twice a year since 1994. In this paper, I will use some data I collected in my previous studies, especially on the community relations of Korean companies in Vietnam in 1998 and 2000. However, it is very difficult to gather systematic information or sociological survey data on Koreans in Vietnam. Due to the lack of adequate research material on the subject, this paper represents a preliminary exploration on the Korean community in Vietnam.

要約

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本稿ではベトナムでのコリアンディアスポラコミュニティの歴史的な発展過程とその特性についての分析を行った。現在、コリアンディアスポラコミュニティはベトナムでは二番目に大きいディアスポラコミュニティである。その構成員の中ではベトナム戦争の際、ベトナムで軍人または技術者、労働者などを勤めた人が少なくない。しかし、多くの人はベトナムの経済開放や両国の国交正常化がきっかけで進出した。このような短い歴史ではあるが、ベトナムのコリアンコミュニティの歴史は17世紀までさかのぼることができる。17世紀末、難船に乗っていた韓国人20名が9ヶ月間、ベトナムの中部地方で暮らしたという記録が残されている。その次のコリアンコミュニティは植民地時代に形成された。植民地時代に、商売のためベトナムに渡ってきたコリアン、日本帝国主義により軍隊に駆り出されたコリアン、日本軍の

性の奴隷として連れ出された韓国女性などが存在した。この中では帰国せずにベトナムで暮らした人もいる。彼らはベトナム戦争がきっかけでベトナムに渡ってきた韓国人とともに新しいコリアンコミュニティを形成した。しかし、このコミュニティもベトナムの共産化で崩壊した。最近はベトナムの開放政策、両国の国交正常化、両国との交易増大によりベトナム内でのコリアンコミュニティは急速に成長している。しかし、市民権、永住権制度が存在せず、また、出稼ぎが目的の人が多数であるため、コリアンコミュニティは安定した構造であるとは言いがたい。さらに、両国民との間で緊張を引き起こす社会的な争点、例えば、ベトナム戦争期の韓国軍の蛮行、現在、ベトナム投資韓国人の企業による労働弾圧などはコリアンコミュニティの安定化を一層、妨げている。