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Unending Journeys: *Migration Trajectories of Korean Im/migrants in South Africa*

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Abstract

The history of Korean im/migrants on the African continent is relatively recent and on a smaller scale compared to Korean diasporas elsewhere. Migration from South Korea to South Africa does not fit the stereotypical migration pattern from a country in the Global South with a lower income to a higher income country in the North. Hence, it is difficult to explain by either conventional migration theory focusing on income discrepancies, or the neo-classical and functionalist push-and-pull model. Drawing on in-depth interviews, this study aims to map out the spatial trajectories of migration taken by Korean im/migrants to, from, and within South Africa. Central to this work are the multi-directional and onward geographic migratory trajectories. Complex issues and motivations that have informed these embodied movements and migration trajectories are explored. In tracing the migration trajectories of Korean im/migrants to, from and/or within South Africa, this study examines the economic and socio-cultural dynamics of migratory trajectories and migrants' changing subjectivities. This facilitates analysis of the way in which lifetime migration trajectories are enmeshed within the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of both origin and destination countries.

Keywords: migration trajectory, Korean im/migration, overseas Koreans, migration decision-making, transnational migration, Asians in South Africa

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Introduction

The year 2022 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea (hereafter Korea) and South Africa. Since 1992, the development of state-initiated diplomatic and economic cooperation has continued. Multi-level cooperation has been achieved in sectors including IT, trade, technology, investment, culture, defence, culture, energy and mineral resources, and employment. The African continent is valued for its rich raw material resources and future market potential and South Africa is regarded as a key African partner for Korea (Shelton 2019, 34–37). State-level cooperation has occurred with such organizations as KEPCO (Korea Electric Power Corporation; Hanguk jeollyeok gongsa), KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency; Daehan muyeok tuja jinheung gongsa), and KORES (Korea Resources Corporation; Hanguk gwangmul jawon gongsa), while banks and private firms like Samsung, LG, Daewoo, Hyundai, and POSCO have opened sub-Saharan branch offices in South Africa. The Korean government has provided developmental cooperation, such as the Saemaul Mindset Development Experience Exchange Partnership (DEEP) Program (2016–2020). In April 1998, a bilateral agreement between the two countries on a 30-day visa waiver was signed. Even before the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the first migratory journey of Koreans to South Africa started at the end of the 1980s, when a handful of Koreans moved to South Africa. However, it is the visa waiver program for short-term visitors that has been particularly helpful in making South Africa more accessible to Koreans

The history of Korean im/migrants to the African continent is relatively recent and on a smaller scale compared to that of the Korean diaspora on other continents particularly the Global North. According to statistics from the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of 2021, 9,471 Koreans lived in Africa, which represented only 1.56 percent of the total number of overseas Koreans (7,325,143). The majority (3,357 Koreans) reside in South Africa, which accounts for 35.45% of the total in the African Continent (MOFA 2021, 25). Transnational mobility between Korea and South Africa

over the last two and a half decades has increased through migration for education or work, investment, and tourism. Johannesburg is the most popular destination, followed by Cape Town and Durban. However, (especially since 2015) the number of Koreans in South Africa has been decreasing, with the number of Korean im/migrants in South Africa falling by 18.2 percent in 2021 compared to 2015. This decline can be observed throughout the continent of Africa (see Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of South Koreans in South Africa (1995–2021)

	1995	1997	1999	2005	2011	2015	2017	2019	2021
Total Africa						11,583 (100%)	10,853 (100%)	10,877 (100%)	9,471 (100%)
South Africa	498	658	1,061	3,452	4,186	4,125 (35.61%)	3,650 (33.63%)	3,843 (35.33%)	3,357 (35.45%)

Sources: MOFA (2021, 25); Korean Net (2021); Jeon (1996, 180).
Note: Unit is persons.

Typical occupations of the Korean im/migrants in South Africa are shopkeepers, business owners in the service sector, a few small-size manufacturers, and distributors and suppliers for Korean fishing ships and their employees. Shopkeepers mainly run photography shops, or work as retailers of wigs, shoes, toys, or car accessories and parts. Service sector enterprises include guest houses, restaurants, tourist guides, and travel agencies catering mainly to Korean clients. Furthermore, there are pre-college or college students, missionaries, employees of the Korean companies Samsung, LG, Daewoo, POSCO or other small- to medium-size Korean firms. Among these groups, some settled in South Africa after their study or initial delegation contract with their company ended. Even though the Korean im/migrants are not a homogenous group, they have mostly attained middle- to upper-class socio-economic status in the destination society.

Migration from Korea to South Africa does not necessarily fit into the stereotypical migration pattern of travel from a country in the Global South

with lower income to a higher income country in the North.[1] South Africa was—and arguably still is—less well-known than other countries and thus, represents an adventurous destination to most Koreans since there is no established migration route. In addition to the spatial distance between the two nations, they share limited historical relations. South Africa is a member of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) with an emerging economy, but is still considered part of the Global South. Therefore, this case of migration from the Global North to the South is difficult to explain with either conventional migration theory focusing on the influence of economic factors of income discrepancy between the countries of origin and destination, or the neo-classical and functionalist "push-and-pull model" (E. Lee 1966; Harris and Todaro 1970; Castles and Miller 2003). Alternative explanations of the spatial trajectories associated with this type of migration from the Global North to the South merit investigation.

The aim of this study is to map out the spatial trajectories of migration taken by Korean im/migrants to, from, and within South Africa. Central to this work is observing the transformation of the multi-directional and onward geographic migratory trajectories that are fluid and evolve over the course of migrants' lives. Complex issues and motivations that have informed their embodied movements and migration trajectories—including onward migration, circular migration journeys, settlement in the host country, remigration to the country of origin, and double return migration—are explored. In this study the term *migration trajectory* primarily refers to physical movement through global space, which consists of migrant embodied mobilities. In tracing migration trajectories of the Koran im/migrants to, from, and/or within South Africa, the economic and socio-cultural dynamics of migratory trajectories, and migrants' changing subjectivities are examined. This facilitates analysis of the way in which lifetime migration trajectories are meshed within the socio-economic and

1. According to World Bank data, the 2021 GDP of South Korea was USD1.8 trillion, more than four times that of South Africa, at about USD420 billion (World Bank, accessed October 17, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=KR).

cultural circumstances of both origin and destination countries.

In terms of temporality of the trajectories, there is a difference between the conventional concept of immigration and that of migration. The former implies movement to another country with a long-term perspective from a place of departure to one of settlement, frequently with the goal of being naturalized, whereas the latter focuses on shorter temporary stays. However, as seen in this study on Koreans in South Africa, there is convergence between *permanent* immigration and *temporary* migration as often the movement does not stop after the initial relocation. Hence, in order to document this blurred line between immigration and migration and transformation in temporality of those who move to another country through their multiple journeys, I have used the term *im/migration*.

As migration studies scholars such as Cresswell (2006), Schapendonk and Steel (2014), Mainwaring and Brigden (2016), Schapendonk et al. (2021), and Snel et al. (2021) point out, migration is an ongoing process, in which the continuity of mobility practices and migration trajectories become entangled with mobilities of multiple paths. A "sedentarist" approach of focusing on "fixed locations," in Snel et al.'s phrasing (2021, 3211), in migration research pays little attention to migrants' multi-directional mobilities to diverse places over the long- and short-term. A trajectory perspective of migration in the current study serves to map out ongoing and multi-pronged journeys taken by Korean im/migrants across the Global North and South throughout their lifetimes.

The main body of literature on northbound migration deals with economically motivated migration from less industrialized countries to post-industrial countries. Mobility in the opposite direction, for example contemporary migration from the Global North to the South, especially to Africa, has been under-represented in the growing body of migration literature. Exceptions are a handful of articles on "lifestyle migration"—often after retirement—to make a pension go further in a country with a lower cost of living and having the additional benefit of a mild climate. Favored destinations include Africa, South or Southeast Asia, and Latin America (Benson 2014; Salazar 2014; Benson and O'Reilly 2018; Rainer 2019; Korpela 2020). In addition, there are a few cases of labor migration from

Europe to former colonies in Africa, like Portuguese migrants in Angola (Åkesson 2018; Waldorff 2017; Augusto and King 2020).

Furthermore, the topic of Korean im/migrants in Africa has not been investigated in the body of diaspora literature on Korea to date. Compared to the Korean communities, their Chinese counterparts are more diverse and visible and have a higher profile with a longer history of im/migration.[2] For example, they include earlier settlers' offspring from the late 19th century, migrants from Taiwan who came mainly as investors during the apartheid era, and newcomers from Mainland China after the end of apartheid in the late 1990s (Park and Chen 2021). This earlier arrival may have given them more interactions and greater networks with the host society compared to their Korean counterparts.[3] The higher profile of Chinese communities—in conjuncture with increasing investment by China on the continent—is well-represented in the body of literature on Asian migrants in Africa. A range of works have been published about early or contemporary Chinese im/migrants in South Africa (Park 2008, 2018; Park and Chen 2021; Bright 2013; Liu 2018; Yap and Man 1996) and Chinese entrepreneurs in Namibia (Dobler 2009). After Chinese im/migrants, South Africans of Indian descent and Cape Malays have been the major groups of Asian descent in the country over time. Compared to these groups, Korean im/migration to South Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon and is represented neither in the literature of the Asian minority in Africa nor in

2. The number of ethnic Chinese in South Africa has been estimated in 2020 as a maximum of half a million (Statista, accessed October 18, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/279530/countries-with-the-largest-number-of-overseas-chinese/). South Africa and China established diplomatic relations in 1998.

3. These networks function through socio-cultural and political engagement and the establishment of socio-cultural or economic organizations. Scholars like Park and Chen (2021) and Van Wyk (2021) observe that the Chinese im/migrants retain links with their homeland. Liu's (2018) work investigates Chinese associations in South Africa, for example, the Sino-South Africa Chamber of Commerce, South African Association of Jilin, All-Africa Chinese Woman Association, South-Africa-China Cooperation Forum, South African Chinese Community and Police Cooperation Centre, Transvaal Chinese Association, Chinese Association of South Africa, Sino-South Africa Sport and Culture Liaison Association, South African-Chinese Cultural and Arts Exchange Association, and Chinese Professionals Organization of Southern Africa, among others.

the literature on the Korean diaspora.[4] Hence, this study aims to fill the evident gap in the body of literature on Korean diaspora and Asian im/migrants in Africa.

Methodology

The current study draws on in-depth life-history interviews conducted with thirty-four Korean im/migrants in major cities (Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Durban) in South Africa and in Korea.[5] Between 2015 and 2019, supplemented by two online and offline interviews in Seoul, South Korea in 2022, open-ended questions or conversations were conducted about respondents' lifetime migratory journeys, including departure, arrival, residency, moving on and/or return. During this period, I was able to go back for follow-up interviews with some participants. Initially, my personal network through the Korean community, including Korean religious and social groups, was utilized to find respondents, who then introduced me to further participants. Among the participants, personal accounts of fourteen are directly cited with their pseudonyms in the current work. All interviews lasted approximately two to three hours and were conducted in the Korean language and audiotaped with the participants' consent. After transcription, interviews were translated into English by the author. Except for in-depth interviews recorded during fieldwork, countless everyday casual conversations, participations, and observations in a private social setting were possible during my stay as a full-time or part-time resident in South Africa between 2001 and 2016. I was personally part of the Korean community in South Africa and member of a transnational family stretching between Germany and South Africa.

My positionality as a former resident of South Africa and holding

4. One theology dissertation focusing on Korean missionary activity in the region (Oh 2008) is available, but being in theology, it has little focus on migration issues.
5. The participants' ages ranged from the 30s to 70s at the time of the interviews. All names featured in this study are pseudonyms.

multiple interviews with the same group of participants has helped me to observe their spatial and temporal mobility trajectories with a longitudinal approach. In this case, I was not only an interviewer or researcher wanting to gather information, but also part of the community. This dual role enabled me to not only be attentive to their voices but also to share their lived experiences, crossing boundaries between the researcher and the researched. Hence, this study strives to engage with a production of "situated and embodied knowledges" (Haraway 1988, 583) by paying attention to my positionality as both a researcher and former member of the community. In this process, my subjectivity is engaged, performed, and navigated through the lens of "embodied objectivity" (Haraway 1988, 581) and in the production of "situated knowledge" entangled with my lived experiences and "mobile positioning" (Haraway 1988, 585) as a sojourner/migrant/resident/tourist in South Africa.

Migration Mobility to South Africa

The migration trajectories of Korean im/migrants consist of initial travel to and/or within South Africa, onward migration across the Global North and South, and/or remigration to Korea. This section explores the original move to South Africa. The first generation of Korean migrants departed Korea in the late 1980s. As my interviewees explained, their journey began with a stopover in Hong Kong or Botswana to apply for a South African visa, remaining there until the visa was issued for onward travel to South Africa. Diplomatic relations between Korea and South Africa were suspended between 1978 and 1992 due to its apartheid policy of racial segregation and discrimination and there was no South African embassy in Korea to process visa applications. Their outward journeys during the apartheid regime did not follow a linear route from a place of departure to that of arrival. This handful of early movers served as missionaries, potential investors seeking business start-ups or simply tourists.

A Land of Opportunity

Individuals with entrepreneurial drive considered Africa to be a *land of opportunity* and perceived South Africa to be one of the most developed countries on the continent. Often the migration initiator in a family (usually, but not exclusively, the husband), travelled alone for a holiday or to visit family members or friends, which led to considering long-term relocation. As their temporary move as tourists sparked the desire to migrate, a porous boundary is revealed at the "nexus between tourism and migration" (Möhring 2014, 116–117). In this case, tourism can be regarded as not only an act of leisure or consumption, but concurrently an act of investment in the migration decision-making process.

One of my interviewees, Han, first visited South Africa as a tourist without any clear migration plan, while others visited specifically to investigate relocation. "I came here first for a holiday in 1989 as somebody told me that it is a beautiful destination, so I wanted to have a holiday here to see how it looked. Surprisingly it was quite different to what I thought about Africa."[6] Before or after the decision to move was made, in most cases the migration initiators in the family travelled alone to calculate the costs and benefits of the migration and then their families joined them several months or years later. However, a few did not go on to make the move and remained in Korea.

Like Hong, some did not make a rational, calculated decision to relocate at the outset, rather serial processes were involved in the trajectories of pre-departure and post-relocation lives: "I just thought I might go there and see how it is and whether I would like it. If not, I might go back to Korea."[7] Unlike the neoclassical theory of migration, which assumes that "individuals are rational, risk-neutral and that they maximize their utility" (Karpestam and Andersson 2019, 4), a substantial number of these pioneer migrants did not make a clear-cut, risk-neutral decision to move to Africa. Their indecisiveness in the process of setting out on a risky, adventurous, and

6. Han, interview by author, Johannesburg, April 2, 2015.
7. Hong, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2015.

unknown trajectory stem from a degree of uncertainty regarding their future in a new country about which they had difficulties obtaining and accessing information. Hence, they had to maneuver their migration trajectory carefully with limited information, particularly in the pre-migration phase.

As discussed in the body of migration literature, migrants' social networks play a significant role in the decision-making process (Caarls et al. 2021; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Wissink and Mazzucato 2018; Schapendonk 2015). Massey et al. define migrant networks as social ties based on kinship and shared community membership that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas (Massey et al. 1993, 448). The networks could serve to minimize the economic, social, and psychological costs of migration (de Haas 2010, 1590). Contact with those who have already relocated to South Africa is crucial in obtaining relevant information for potential newcomers. Most of my interview participants utilized and mobilized co-ethnic networks of any kin and friends who had settled earlier in the host country or alternatively made a short fact-finding visit to form an impression of the life awaiting them in the destination country including living conditions and the economic situation. These preparations had to be done independently through their own social networks, as hardly any agents handle migration to South Africa, except for educational migration based mainly in Cape Town. A social network comprising co-ethnic individuals or groups could provide valuable resources prior to and after arrival to the country of destination; for example, practical support by way of advice and information related to migration and settlement, offering paid or unpaid accommodation before they found a place to live, and/or lending money or exchanging currency between the Korean *won* and South African rand.

Not all family members agreed to undertake this journey to Africa. For instance, looking back, Han had ambivalent thoughts on his decision to move:

> Everyone around me discouraged me from going to Africa, my family and friends, including my wife definitely and desperately [argued against the

> move] [...] Not a single person understood me. They doubted and asked me, "What for?" and "Why Africa?" I didn't have an answer either but was excited and just wanted to try whether it would work opening a new business in a new place with whatever money I had. Maybe I took a journey I shouldn't have taken.[8]

Other groups included those who were dispatched from the headquarters to South African branches of Korean firms for their company for a couple of years and settled down in the host country after their initial contract lapsed. Mun's family is one of those who saw the economic potential in the move. Mun's husband initially worked for a South Korean company and her family decided to stay on because the couple were convinced that "Africa is a place of opportunity."[9]

The opportunity the Korean im/migrants were looking for was primarily that of ethnic entrepreneurship or self-employment. What particularly attracted my interviewees about South Africa was the chance to set up a small business with limited capital because of the less expensive costs of both labor and living. Pek maintains that, "Canada, Australia, or New Zealand are places where those who have enough money can go. The rich prefer these countries to immigrate, but here [South Africa] offers a chance to those with little money. I mean, with little money one could have a decent life here."[10] The potential to achieve upward social mobility with fewer material resources than required in Korea is one of the factors that enticed them to set out on a migration pathway to South Africa in the Global South.

Korean emigration increased shortly after the 1997 Asian economic crisis. One of the contributing factors behind this was the desire to seek out new economic opportunities. There were very few specialist labor migrants save for a handful of chicken-sexers, like the Ahn couple, who took up this job in South Africa in 1991. The majority were driven by ethnic entrepreneurship or the desire for self-employment, especially after the 1997

8. Han, interview by author, Johannesburg, April 2, 2015.
9. Mun, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 9, 2017.
10. Pek, interview by author, Cape Town, September 9, 2017.

economic crisis, to escape financial and emotional hardships caused by recession in the country of origin. Choe and her husband were on a personal quest for an exit after her husband was laid off during the economic crisis in Korea:

> I was the only breadwinner and on top of that I had to support my in-laws and my elderly mother, so I was looking for an escape from the tough life at that time. My husband too. It was a difficult time for him. And then came a sort of crisis in our marriage. So, we wanted to seize an opportunity to leave all these problems behind, just go and move on.[11]

Amidst the financial and emotional hardship she was facing, the migration trajectory to South Africa served as a route of social escape with the prospect of a new start despite the limited resources available to her. A decision about a migration trajectory follows an individual's search for "ontological security" (Giddens 1991) having to confront anxieties around risks in their financial, emotional, social situation and to maintain subjectivity. While Anthony Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security is concerned with a sense of *continuity* and stability, certain migrants may strive to attain a new sense of security through *rupture* of their existing livelihood and setting up a new life in a new destination.

Socio-cultural and Personal Contexts of Migration to South Africa

Not only economic factors, but also socio-cultural and personal contexts were considered in the migration decision-making process. My interviewees cited a diverse range of such factors: for example, raising and educating children in an English-speaking country; living in a natural environment with clean air, clean water, a mild climate, beautiful landscape, and developed infrastructure; an aspiration for a better quality of life, including more time with family and less stress; enjoying an affordable standard of living with spacious housing; or having domestic helpers like a cleaner and

11. Choe, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2017.

gardener. This relocation represented a chance for them to review and recalibrate their previous work/life balance.

Interestingly, most interviewees emphasized the beauty of the local environment as influencing the choice of destination. One interviewee, Kwak, who was a seaman on a Korean fishing vessel who had passed a couple of days shore-leave in Cape Town during a voyage 40 years previously (in the 1980s). This short visit to South Africa made quite a profound and positive impression on him, a pleasant memory of which prompted him to make an emotion-based choice of South Africa as a destination.[12] The early migrants—in particular, during the apartheid era (1948–1991)—stressed the positive aspects of life there and held a romanticized memory of those days as spent in "a safe, beautiful, clean country with law and order" termed as "paradise" despite apartheid.

In his pioneering work on African migrant workers and Korean culture, Geon-Soo Han (2003) points out that Africa has been described as "primitive," "savage," and alternatively "the source of life" or "a romantic and abstract space existing in the imagination" of Korean society (Han 2003, 159–160). The early migrants found this romanticized place of their imagination to be true. In the words of Mun, "At that time [in 1990] when my husband arrived here, he praised this country as paradise and when I joined him later, I also realized what he meant. It was like a paradise, really."[13] These views of "rough" Africa or romanticizing South Africa as "paradise" or "*Europe* in Africa" are revealed in most of my interviewees' narratives, particularly those of early migrants. This romanticization exists in the symbolic and imaginary trajectories of migration and represents the power of emotion in determining migration trajectories to South Africa. Migration scholars like McKay (2007), Georgalou (2021), Wang and Chen (2021), Boccagni and Baldassar (2015), Tazreiter (2015), and Meyer (2018) discuss the ways in which diverse emotions like affection, desire, aspiration, hope/hopelessness, and suffering are entangled with migration. This argument is illustrated by the development of positive emotional attachment

12. Kwak, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 6, 2017.
13. Mun, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 8, 2017.

by some Korean im/migrants to their destination, which in turn became a driver of their migration trajectory.

The aesthetic quality of place enabled the newly arrived migrant Hong to retrieve and relive his childhood in his memory. He recalls, "When I arrived here, I felt like I was back to the rural village where I had grown up. Laid-back, clean air, green nature… You name it."[14] For him, the slow pace of life and rustic but idyllic landscape in the destination country in Africa revived memories of his childhood, which had been lost in his hectic life in Seoul but retrieved in his new surroundings. This emotion of nostalgia constructed his attachments and developed his relationship to the place where he arrived. There was spatial and temporal congruence between the two places of destination and origin in his memory.

On the other hand, one of the latecomers, Ha, who relocated to South Africa in 2011, found that "too many blacks and colored people were living in Cape Town" in post-apartheid South Africa and this made him hesitate to move there.[15] The main appeal for him was the prospect of his children enjoying the benefit of education in an English-speaking country. Most of my interviewees with families agreed on this point. For example, according to Kim, a mother of two young children at the time of her decision to move to the country, "I had no idea about South Africa at all but I thought it might be good for my children as they could learn English here."[16] The affordable cost of education was another positive factor in the migration rationale:

> I was struggling to afford tuition fees for all sorts of private lessons like English for my two sons and was concerned about how to raise them well in a highly competitive society without providing these things. So, I thought it was a welcome idea [to move to South Africa] for my children.[17]

In the list of attractions of the city, Pek found its natural environment as a

14. Hong, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2017.
15. Ha, interview by author, Cape Town, September 17, 2017.
16. Kim, interview by author, Johannesburg, January 1, 2019.
17. Choe, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2017.

key attraction: "Particularly Cape Town is one of the best, [with] pure beauty, clean air blown directly from the South Pole and then no crime and so on. I was fascinated about all these charms at that time."[18] As a long-time Cape Town resident, he praises the beauties of the place, one of the most attractive destinations for holidaymakers and for local and European pensioners. The Korean im/migrants construct their own spatial and temporal meanings for South Africa with its breathtaking landscape and slower pace of life, which distinguishes it from the hectic tempo and overcrowded space of their homeland.

Korean migration to South Africa demonstrates both congruence with and divergence from the concept of "lifestyle migration" "where aesthetic qualities including quality of life are prioritized over economic factors like job advancements or income" (Knowles and Harper 2009, 11). Certainly, they are searching for an improved lifestyle, but they are also looking for economic opportunities to build their new life. More weight is placed on work and/or education than leisure. Oh is the only one of my interviewees who prioritized available and affordable leisure facilities as a motivating factor in his move. However, the temporality of Korean migrants' lives in South Africa demonstrates a shift in their daily lives which places more weight on leisure. Towards retirement age elderly Korean im/migrants engaged less with their work and as part-timers had more free time to spend on leisure, particularly playing golf.

To summarize this section, multiple factors (not only economic, but also socio-cultural and aesthetic) contributed to the Korean migration trajectory towards South Africa. Aspiration—as well as uncertainty and ambivalence—were characteristic of their initial decision-making process. Korean im/migrants' quest for "ontological security" through migration for a better quality of life entails weighing up both costs and benefits.

In terms of post-arrival livelihood, both congruence with and divergence from the fantasy of *paradise* and the reality of personal daily experiences in the destination society can be observed. Some early Korean migrants—especially those running photo studios—did very well financially.

18. Pek, interview by author, Cape Town, September 16, 2017.

However, they often had to contend with risks, uncertainty, and complexities in their daily lives: for example, endangered personal security arising from the high crime rate in post-apartheid South Africa where Asians were often targeted by criminals.[19] A further complicating factor is that of mistaken identity; because of the existence of anti-Chinese sentiment in Africa, Koreans are wary of being identified as Chinese by the locals. Another challenge proved to be changes in economic outlook, especially currency depreciation in the post-apartheid ANC (African National Congress) administration, which seriously impacted trading businesses. Imports of Chinese products to South Africa have had a particularly negative impact on Korean small-scale entrepreneurs like Han who had to close down their factories or businesses because of the unbeatable price competition with Chinese imports, especially in shoes and wigs. In addition, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to Koreans engaged in manufacturing, service, and retail sectors.

Migration Trajectories within and beyond South Africa

In this section, the Korean im/migrants' onward migratory journeys from their place of arrival are examined. The post-migration trajectories of Korean im/migrants are not discontinued but proceed both within South Africa and across the Global North and South. The multi-fold transnational migratory mobility flows disperse in all directions, to other countries in Africa, North America, and Europe and include remigration to Korea. Initially, most of the im/migrants travelled on within South Africa.

19. As Asians, members of the Chinese community share safety and security concerns with their Korean counterparts and are often targeted by criminals, falling victim to armed robbery, home break-ins, or car hijackings. Some Chinese even run their own security companies. For further details on issues of safety and security facing Chinese communities in South Africa, see Van Wyk (2021).

Internal Migration within South Africa

Most Korean im/migrants live in South Africa's major cities—Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, or Durban. A few took up employment in small local towns where hardly any Koreans had previously settled, such as Potchefstroom, St. Michael's on Sea, or Stellenbosch, but later moved to the major urban areas where a co-ethnic community resided. This was mainly prompted by a sense of isolation or the desire to set up ethnic businesses in an urban environment.

In 1990, Pek arrived in Stellenbosch, where Afrikaans is the dominant language and virtually no Koreans were living at the time. He later moved to Cape Town to open a travel agency and set up a guest house for Korean tourists.[20] The majority of Koreans dwell in English-speaking areas since—unless they are second-generation Koreans who learned Afrikaans at school[21]—they would be unfamiliar with the language if heading for an Afrikaans-speaking area.

When relocation to an area where co-ethnic residents could be found was not feasible, some regularly visited the nearest city where Koreans were living. Mun arrived in St. Michael's on Sea, a well-known holiday destination in the south coast KwaZulu-Natal, when her husband got a job at a resort owned by a Korean company.

> We were the only Korean family there. Every Sunday I drove to a church in Durban, 120 kms away, with my children and all together five or six [Korean] families gathered there so we could meet them and chat in Korean.[22]

Drivers of spatial trajectories of internal migration are associated with

20. Pek, interview by author, Cape Town, September 16, 2017.
21. South Africa is a multilingual country with 11 official languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English, among others. Afrikaans evolved from "the 17th-century Dutch of the Dutch settlers who colonised the Cape since 1652 until approximately the end of 18th century when the English took over" (Van der Eist 2006, 387).
22. Mun, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 8, 2017.

emotional and economic aspirations: the desire for proximity to a co-ethnic community to overcome a sense of isolation in more remote locations and the search for economic opportunities in a major city. Already dealing with the rupture of their existing life through migration, they then faced a sense of loneliness in their embedded experiences as im/migrants in a new destination where only a few co-ethnics could be encountered. Hence, they strived to navigate their spatial trajectories of migration in the post-arrival phase.

Within a major city like Johannesburg, Korean im/migrants' trajectory of movement replicates that of white neighborhoods. The phenomenon of so-called *white flight* has been taking place from Johannesburg central since black neighborhoods began to establish there in the post-apartheid era. In the same period, Korean im/migrants also moved away from Johannesburg central to find more secure areas in northern suburbs like Rosebank, Sandton, Morningside, and Fourways. For example, Hong lived in Hilbrow in Johannesburg CBD (central business district) when he arrived in 1990 and then moved to Rosebank and later moved further north to Paulshof in 2002. He retains pleasant memories of Hilbrow in his early days in South Africa and his relationships to this place are associated with his memory of the beginning his migration trajectory with all the associated excitement and aspiration. As he realized that Hilbrow, an inner-city residential location was now "too dangerous to visit," he visualized it as a lost place where he could trace and retrieve a chapter of his migration journey.[23] As Cresswell (2004, 85) points out, place and memory are interconnected in a way that may combine to exercise and strengthen the im/migrant's grip of memory in a meaningful practice.

The Korean im/migrant mobility within the destination country entails serial movements from Johannesburg inner city to northern suburbs further afield in the search for greater security. However, their retail shops are often located in black neighborhoods, which obliges them to commute between two distinct zones. This spatial division of race that persists in post-apartheid South Africa has a direct influence on the trajectory of internal

23. Hong, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2017.

migration. Racial segregation is no longer legally enforced, but segregation practices have survived in many aspects of everyday life. For instance, residential areas, entertainment venues like cafés, pubs, and dance clubs remain racially divided. The racial dimension in the spatial division of the place can be witnessed in residential areas, where Korean im/migrants prefer to reside in white dominant neighborhoods. This preference is based on a perceived sense of security and associated socio-racial status in the still racially divided South African society, which is consequently a decision-making factor in their mobility trajectory within cities.[24] Stereotypes of blackness perceived as "signs of criminality, fear, and anxiety that reproduce the black body as an object of fear" (Huang 2018, 256) are imagined and internalized among Korean im/migrants, while the stereotypical Asian body is associated with possession of cash, and thus is explicitly the target of crime. This can be interpreted as racial construction of crime, which is recounted in Korean im/migrant experiences and perceptions and has an impact on their migration trajectories.

Migration Trajectories beyond South Africa

Further transnational migratory mobility can be seen from South Africa to other countries in Africa, North America, and Europe. Onward migration to North America or Europe is undertaken mainly by young Koreans seeking higher education or employment opportunities outside South Africa. Substantial numbers of Korean youth in South Africa move abroad to Korea, the United States, Canada, or China for higher education. At least seven interviewees sent their children abroad for education when they were able to afford the high costs of education and living, especially in North America or Korea. In reality, very few have secured employment and settled down in North America to date and most have redirected their migratory

24. The racialization of migration is a salient field in the associated literature, to include Nelson (2016); Bischoff and Engel (2013); Ling (2012); Roth (2012); and Hübinette and Tigervall (2009), among others. The issue of race in Korean im/migration to South Africa is a significant topic, but in the current study it is only discussed in relation to migration trajectories.

trajectory to Korea and found a job there. In this case the country of origin is a site of confluence of the multi-fold intercontinental movements of this highly mobile younger generation taking them across Africa, North America, and Asia.

Factors prompting onward transnational mobility of Korean youth in South Africa are higher education, career, and marriage. Three adult children of my interviewees moved to the Netherlands, Germany, or Hong Kong, either to work or to unite with a newlywed husband. Their Afrikaans proficiency acquired from school enabled them to learn Dutch or German quickly. Besides Korea, Western Europe and North America are preferred destinations for a skilled migrant. These trajectories of Korean youth in South Africa to the Global North are not usually circular in form since most of them have not returned to South Africa.

Transnational mobility includes moving to another African country like Mozambique, Zambia, or DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) to look for economic opportunities or ethnic entrepreneurship. The Chin couple moved to Zambia to work for a mining company for a couple of years and later returned to South Africa.[25] Often these family members demonstrate "global householding" (Douglass 2013) since their wives and children stay in South Africa which is considered to offer better infrastructure and education. This split household arrangement is seen to benefit their children's education.

Remigration to Korea

One of the major migration trajectories of Korean im/migrants in South Africa is a remigration journey to Korea motivated by education, job prospects, marriage, family reunification, or retirement. Inability to claim retirement benefits or pension in the country of settlement is another reason for considering such a return. Often this causes transformations in family configurations resulting in a transnational family in which children and

25. Chin, interview by author, Johannesburg, January 3, 2019.

parents are living apart. This family split formulates and maintains "global householding" (Douglass 2013) across different nation-states, often across different continents in the case of Korean im/migrants in South Africa. Chi—whose daughters remigrated to Korea to study—spends almost half a year living in Korea apart from her husband to look after her daughters and the rest of the year in South Africa with her husband, who is the breadwinner of the family.[26] This pattern is similar to the Korean "wild geese family" (*gireogi gajok*), a family formation whereby mothers accompany and look after their children who are studying in English-speaking countries while the fathers remain alone in their home country and support their families financially while abroad (S. Lee 2021, 1). However, for im/migrant families, especially in South Africa, the opposite is true. This can be conceptualized as a *counter-wild geese family*, characterized by spatial separation of the mother and children for education in the home country (Korea) from the father in the country of settlement in South Africa where he works to fund their education. This transformation in family configurations into *global householding* in a counter-wild-geese-family arrangement dictates the onward trajectory of the im/migrants and may even lead them to return to the home country at a later stage. Long-term spatial separation for the purpose of education or work often ends when the parents reach retirement age.

Family reunification together with health care provision is one of the major reasons for the retired to remigrate to Korea. The elderly im/migrants' propensity to return is greater when their adult children have already returned and settled in Korea. On the other hand, those ageing migrants who have seen the second generation settle down, join the parents' ethnic entrepreneurship or retail stores, or have a secure and relatively well-paid job are more likely to remain close by their adult children in South Africa rather than return to Korea.

Just as the Korean im/migrants romanticized Africa prior to migration, some of the elderly Koreans romanticize the country of origin as the homeland to return to be buried. To the migration generation, the homeland

26. Chi, interview by author, KakaoTalk, February 28, 2022.

is conceptualized as the final resting place. A home country burial means the chance to rest with one's ancestors thereby demonstrating loyalty to family history (Attias-Donfut 2016, 92). The trend of remigration to the country of origin has recently become stronger with increasing crime rates and the COVID-19 pandemic. The migratory trajectories of this situation consist of ongoing migration, remigration, or staying on. For some families there is no clear-cut boundary between return and staying in the host country since they keep multiple homes as with the *counter-wild geese family*.

Another distinctive aspect of migration trajectory is double returns. Some of those who remigrated to Korea returned to South Africa, a process which represents *counter-circular migration*: return to the homeland and then return to the host land after finding the homeland to be not the place they had expected. Kwak remigrated to Korea because of the health difficulties of his wife but after a two-year stay in Korea he returned to South Africa.

> I went to back Korea to restart life there and asked my family and relatives for some help. But at my age there was hardly anything I could do [for a living in Korea]. I tried this and that like working at a construction site… even though they were not regular jobs….At the end of the month there was nothing left in my hand after paying for rent and food. It was tough without any prospects for the future. I was also looking for a piece of land for farming, but everything became expensive, and I couldn't afford it. If you don't have money, you can do nothing there, you just become a beggar. My son insisted I come back here [South Africa], and I thought I could grow [Korean] veggies and sell them, so here I am again.[27]

His return with his ailing wife and lacking a success story might have led him to feel he had fallen short of fulfilling his pre-migration aspiration for upward socio-economic mobility. Consequently, the process of return and readjustment in the country of origin was not positive either, so he made the decision to go back to South Africa. This trajectory of return home and then

27. Kwak, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 6, 2017.

return abroad has been termed "double return migration" (White 2011, 2014) or "yo-yo" migration (Margolis 1995, 32–33). This takes the form of a circular trajectory and shows that return does not always end with the act of migration but may become a redirection of the migration pathway, which can further evolve as an ongoing process.

In the recent precarious situation in South Africa with the pandemic-associated economic recession, mobility restrictions, health risks, political unrest, and a rising crime rate, more and more Korean im/migrants have been reflecting and some have redirected their path to remigrate to Korea. The 2021 riots protesting former president Jacob Zuma's corruption charge left Korean firms like LG, Samsung, and other retail shops looted and burned (Kim 2021). Soaring crime rates in post-apartheid South Africa have consistently been one of the greatest concerns for Korean migrants as Asians are a frequently targeted group in serious crimes such as armed robbery, hijacking, break-in, kidnapping, and fraud. The Korean im/migrants face spatial and temporal limits in daily life caused by high crime rates. There are certain high crime rate areas where they do not wish to visit or even pass through by car, and some prefer not to go out after dark. Being targeted by criminals leaves victims traumatized and/or physically injured in the case of violent assault and/or shooting. A couple of my interviewees, like Nam, still bear the scars from shootings sustained in an armed robbery.

Current high crime rates in post-apartheid South Africa result in the migrant experiencing anxiety from low social trust and lack of confidence in personal security. This might reactivate a spatial migration trajectory to exit from an unstable host society with inadequate crime prevention to remigrate to the homeland temporarily or for good. Choe's son enrolled in the Korean military service as a means of returning to Korea as he was traumatized from a break-in by a group of armed robbers. Since then, he has never returned to South Africa due to the negative emotion associated with his previous home even though the rest of his family still lives there.

However, not everyone is able to make their wish to return to Korea a reality. Choe's narrative indicates her feelings of entrapment in Africa:

> A close friend of mine just packed and left this country shortly after

> having gone through a nasty armed robbery and terrible beating. But even if I wanted to do the same thing, sadly I wasn't in the position to go back. I couldn't even think about living back in Korea. How? Without enough money, I am stuck here. So, by any means I must try to adapt myself to settle down here. I have no other choice.[28]

Lack of financial resources or opportunities to restart life in Korea rendered her chances for return migration slim and left her frustrated by her immobility. This circumstance of "involuntary immobility" (Carling 2002) is a hinderance from a pathway of return or onward migration to secure a better quality of life elsewhere. Involuntarily terminating her migration journey and committing herself to staying in the destination country is a way of settling a liminal position and of negotiating the involuntary immobility she faces. Hence, her immobility has two sides, a sense of entrapment and concurrently commitment to adopt and embrace her current life in the country of settlement.

On the other hand, there are the elderly Koreans who have spent many years in South Africa, like Pek and Nam, who in their late 70s made a choice to remain:

> When I visit Korea, I don't really feel I am back *home*, but somewhere in a weird place. Feeling like I am just visiting for a short period of time without much to do and feeling bored, but here I have a lot to do and to enjoy like relaxing with fellow Koreans here, playing golf, going for a drink, or drinking at home. All are good and precious for me.[29]

As he feels at home in South Africa and has no desire to return to the country of origin in his later years, his disinterest in remigration can be conceptualized as *voluntary immobility* from a sense of having completed his migration journey in the country of settlement and/or feeling unable to readjust in the home country.

Nam, who has almost reached his 80s and lives alone in South Africa,

28. Choe, interview by author, Johannesburg, September 5, 2017.
29. Pek, interview by author, Cape Town, September 16, 2017.

has mixed feelings towards a change of direction in his migratory journey to return to Korea: on the one hand, his ambivalent relationships with the country of origin, and his attachments and relationships to the country of settlement, but on the other hand, concerns about potential future health difficulties arising from aging and inadequate care arrangements. The aging im/migrant has to navigate his/her migration trajectory to find a place to live in their later years. The availability and cost of health care services and future health issues are their major worries and often prompt elderly im/migrants to return. Therefore, trajectories of aging im/migrants' mobility and immobility are entangled with their health status and access to care provision.

In some cases, they maintain or rent their houses or still run their shops and make regular visits to South Africa after they return to Korea. Their regular back-and forth trips between the country of origin and the formerly settled country extend their economic and social relationships with the latter and reflect the multilocality of their migratory journey. In this way, return to the country of origin does not necessarily mean the immediate end of a linear migration journey back to the place of departure.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the livelihoods of Korean im/migrants engaged in the sectors of manufacturing, service, and retail sectors in South Africa. So far, at least four families out of my interviewees have closed their businesses due to significant financial loss and have recently undertaken the return to Korea. In 2022, Yu ended her 33-year immigrant residency with the acquisition of South African citizenship, and returned to Korea with her husband:

> Because of Corona, it didn't make sense to run a guest house any longer. No single guest came from Korea for more than a year and the whole house has been empty. So, we had to decide to sell our house and go back [to Korea]. In any case, since my two daughters live here [Korea] we thought at some stage we would go back to live closer to them. Flying back was not easy either, because of the Omicron [variant] flights from and to South Africa kept being cancelled, including our own flights, so we had to wait…[30]

30. Yu, interview by author, KakaoTalk, February 26, 2022.

> An even worse thing for me was not being allowed to board the flight which the Korean Embassy in Pretoria had arranged [Koreans in South Africa returning to Korea], because I am no longer a Korean passport holder. Well…I had to manage getting hold of a return flight ticket by myself. It was via Europe, a long, long way to return… It was like an exodus. Now here I am [in Korea] and I am trying to reclaim my Korean citizenship.[31]

Contributing factors to her return decision were financial hardship caused by the pandemic and "intergenerational bonds" (Attias-Donfut 2016, 91), namely her desire to live close to her children. Return journeys appear to be challenging with the associated experiences of uncertainty and delay because the pandemic measures caused mobility restrictions and in this case there was the additional complexity of transferring the proceeds of the sale of her house to Korea. Since the pandemic restrictions have imposed immobility and financial hardship, their ongoing impact remains to be seen as the new normality imposed on daily life is reshaping the return migration trajectories of Korean im/migrants in South Africa. Yet on the whole, and as illustrated above, the Korean im/migrants' intention to return to the country of origin is driven by "more instrumental and practical motives" and/or family reunification rather than "an inherent sense of ethnic affinity to and longing for" the homeland (Tsuda and Song 2019, 24).

Conclusion

The last two sections above illustrate how migration trajectories of the Korean im/migrants in South Africa have evolved and been navigated over time and space through their multi-directional journeys to, from, and/or within South Africa. These trajectories do not entail "the unidirectional configuration from country of departure" (Crawley and Jones 2021, 3229) to that of destination. The spatiality and temporality of their migration

31. Yu, interview by author, Seoul, May 23, 2022.

trajectories are not entirely determined beforehand. Whether, where, and when to leave and settle with family are not—or cannot—be meticulously planned prior to arrival in a new destination, because of uncertainty, unforeseeable changes, and challenges encountered in South Africa. Nevertheless, they are willing to give it a try, weigh up the costs and benefits, and negotiate the challenges of their new lifestyle. After arrival or settlement, they continue to navigate migratory paths to deal with ongoing changes and obstacles facing them and their families. Their lived and embodied experiences in these journeys reflect the procedural and transitional nature of migration whose trajectories continue to be directed, redirected, and maneuvered. Their mobile trajectories across multiple places or nation-states even in the post-migration period continue when necessary or feasible. This motion contests a sedentary and linear view of the migration journey from place of departure to that of settlement as outlined in a typical migration framework of departure-movement-arrival-integration (Schapendonk et al. 2021, 3244, 3249; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016). Hence, migration trajectories of the Korean im/migrants in South Africa can be conceptualized as non-linear processes characterized by practices of constant reasoning and transformation.

Their embodied movement, lived experiences, and identities/subjectivities are entangled in shaping and reshaping their multidirectional migration trajectories to Africa, North America, and/or Asia. Spatial and temporal trajectories of migration are not only economically driven, but also involve familial, emotional, and socio-cultural factors of both countries of origin and settlement. The decision-making process of Korean im/migrants features factors such as economic opportunity, education, marriage, family reunification, provision of health, everyday security, and migration policy, demonstrating that migration is a social process as well as multi-polar physical movement that undergoes constant transformation. Socio-economic, political, and familial changes and challenges and their "mobile" and shifting identities over the course of their lifetime contribute to shape the fluid and unsettled nature of migration trajectories. These encompass "onward movements and re-orientations as well as periods of rest and intermediate forms of settlement" (Schapendonk et al. 2021, 3246). To cope

with the gap between pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities, their *resilience* and ongoing recalibration of their lives as im/migrants are embedded in their lived experiences and influence the reconfiguration of their migratory trajectories. This process involves constant re/negotiations highlighting their active agency in making and remaking their plans and decisions to navigate through the aspirations they want to fulfil, and circumstantial challenges and possibilities they encounter in the course of their migratory lives.

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Appendix: List of Interviewees

Name	Year of birth	Sex	Year of migration	Job	Year of return	Date interviewed
Ahn	1968	female	1991	former chicken -sexer, housewife		September 11, 2017
Chi	1969	female	2005	housewife		Online interview, February 28, 2022
Chin	?	female	1999	former employee at a mining company		January 03, 2019
Choe	1955	female	2000	former guest house owner, housewife		September 05, 2017
Ha	1958	male	2011	pensioner		September 17, 2017
Han	1954	male	1989	former entrepreneur, trader, guest house owner	2022	April 02, 2015
Hong	1944	male	1991	trader		September 05, 2017
Kim	1963	female	1998	housewife	2021	January 01, 2019
Kwak	1949	male	1999	former guest house owner, pensioner	2022	September 06, 2017
Mun	1963	female	1992	guest house owner		September 08 & 09, 2017
Nam	1942	male	1989	former photo shop owner, pensioner		September 04, 2017
Oh	1959	male	2001	pensioner		September 15, 2017
Pek	1947	male	1990	guest house owner		September 09 & 16, 2017
Yu	1957	female	1989	former guest house owner, travel agent, pensioner	2022	September 03, 2017, online interview, February 26, 2022; May 23, 2022

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