

Between Foreign and Family: Return Migration and Identity Construction among Korean Americans and Korean Chinese, by Helene K. Lee. New Brunswick Newark; Camden; New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2018. 192 pp., \$26.95, ISBN: 978-0-813-58615-1 (paperback)

Helene K. Lee's book *Between Foreign and Family* serves as an antidote to the long-lasting puzzling conception of Koreanness by contributing a dialogue between two groups of Korean diaspora communities—Korean Americans and Korean Chinese—who have returned to the same ancestral homeland but barely cross paths. Koreanness can be a cultural construct, an inherited trait, a liability, or an asset (p. 13). The author interviewed 33 Korean Chinese and 31 Korean Americans during 16 months of fieldwork, and the process of writing the book spanned over a decade from start to finish. Discussions regarding ethnic return migration to South Korea reflect a burgeoning interest in Koreanness over this time period. However, the fundamental question of how the contested meaning of Koreanness which took shape in the past, is evolving at present, and will be transformed in the future among different Korean diaspora communities is left largely unanswered. As a Korean American, Lee's unique positionality overlaps both the researcher and the research subject, allowing her to competently explore where the two examined communities interact, trace how they diverge as a result of hierarchical differences and contribute information regarding individual-level interactions between Korean Chinese and Korean Americans. The use of "return migrants" is consistent with respondents' interpretation of their migration to South Korea as a homecoming. Return migrants' unquestioned recognition by their ancestral homeland as "family" undergoes re-evaluation during their homecoming process.

Lee entices readers at the start of the text with an anecdote of meeting with a Korean Chinese informant and expounds on the gist of the book by introducing a synopsis of each chapter in the introduction. The book has 5 substantive chapters to deconstruct the "logics of transnationalism" (p. 13) in the case of return migrants in South Korea through the lenses of economy, emotion, nationality, gender, and history. Chapter 1 focuses on how the existing network to and strong emotional identification with South Korea fuel Korean Americans and Korean Chinese to navigate their return journeys. These return migrants' emigration history is bound to arouse their strong emotional

and cultural sympathy for South Korea, and their growth environments have ingrained Koreanness into their daily lives and subconscious since childhood. During the premigration stage, they imagined that their ethnic manifestation would lead them to the mainstream of Korean society. Before returning to South Korea, their Koreanness has already undergone modification and transformation in China or the United States. After arriving in South Korea with different legal statuses, Korean Chinese and Korean Americans have distinct experiences in the labor market; in Chapter 2, these experiences are juxtaposed, and the ways in which these return migrants are channeled by a sorting system into different occupational categories are explored. Due to a combination of coethnicity, educational credentials, and having the desired linguistic capital of English competence, Korean Americans are favored professional workers; in contrast, the financial demands, fluent Korean-language skill, and abundant human resources of Korean Chinese cater to the unskilled labor market in South Korea. Despite the broad differences in the experiences of these two types of return migrants, there are similarities in the ways in which the state uses return migrants to fill the labor market's requirements by granting them different types of visas. Going beyond the institutional level, the author uncovers subtle strategies adopted by Korean Americans and Korean Chinese. Korean Americans are prone to asserting their Americanness to emphasize their agency as return migrants, whereas Korean Chinese are likely to reclaim their Koreanness to increase their rights in society. Migrants in either situation are perceived neither as total foreigners nor as fully "family" in South Korea. Instead of regarding Korean Americans as a homogeneous diaspora community, the author shows in Chapter 3 how gender-specific strategies are adopted by Korean American males and females to solve the problems they encounter in social life in South Korea. The perceived masculinity of Korean American males in the United States sharply contrasts with that in South Korea. Korean American males join a "global hegemonic bargain" (p. 83) in which ethnicity, nationality, and economic capital boost them to claim social, sexual, and economic power in South Korea. Similarly, Korean American females also participate in this "global hegemonic bargain" (p. 83). They attribute their stigmatized image in South Korea to the changelessness of South Korean society, which is criticized as sexist and patriarchal. Via the process of claiming superiority to South Korean women, they idealize American society as gender progressive, leaving perplexing issues in the United States, such as racism and the glass ceiling, unexamined.

Ultimately, both male and female Korean American informants find niches in which they can maximize their social status by highlighting their foreignness relative to South Koreans. In contrast to Korean Americans, Korean Chinese stress the ethnic authenticity of being “real Koreans” to achieve treatment equal to that of other diaspora members in South Korea. Chapter 4 states that a sense of Koreanness has been well maintained from Joseon to the present and has become a malleable way for Korean Chinese to refute their unfair treatment in the South Korean nationalist project. Because Korean Chinese emigrated long before the division of the Korean peninsula, their cultural capital inherited from the past and South Korea’s demands of them as return migrants in the present are misaligned. Thus, the misalignment which incurred social and economic insulation induces Korean Chinese to consolidate Korean-Chinese in-group social networks and to make segregated neighborhoods support themselves in Korean society. Reflections on Koreanness seep into return migrants’ consciousness alongside aspirations for a new type of Koreanness in the future. In Chapter 5, the author uses the notions of “cosmopolitan Koreanness” (p. 128) and global citizenship to explain how Korean Americans and Korean Chinese think of themselves as “better Koreans” than South Koreans and the majority population in their other country of citizenship. “Cosmopolitan Koreanness” symbolizes the unconstrained mobility and open-mindedness that privilege Korean Americans and Korean Chinese relative to South Koreans, Han Chinese, and white Americans in terms of mobility while they are migrants on the move. After sharing the squarely and tightly interwoven stories of Korean Americans and Korean Chinese, Lee resolves the puzzle of the ambiguous position of the diaspora community in Korean society. Diaspora communities are positioned on a scale to measure ethnic inclusion and exclusion, with “foreign” and “family” on the two ends of this scale.

Between Foreign and Family offers theoretical insights on contested Koreanness. Drawing on the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s concepts of “signs,” “signifier,” “signified,” and “signification” (p. 12), the author conceptualizes Koreanness as a “sign” to which return migrants, South Korean institutions and South Koreans, ascribe meaning. A “signifier” is a form that Koreanness takes, which can include citizenship, blood, family, and culture. “Signified” refers to the meaning that Koreanness represents. Finally, “signification” represents the link between the signifier and signified, which indicates the connection between the representation of Koreanness and its inherent meaning. This connection

is called the “logics of transnationalism” and demonstrates the ways in which “citizenship,” “blood,” “family,” and “culture” make meaning of Koreanness for return migrants, South Korean institutions and South Koreans. After conceptualizing Koreanness, Lee builds her research on Micol Seigel’s discussion on race by adding ethnicity to the comparative dimension of transnationalism. According to Micol Seigel’s discussion on race, there is little reconciliation between a sign and the signified because racial schemas are ever changing (p. 13). Both Korean Chinese and Korean Americans experience the “simultaneous yet contradictory sensation of familiarity and foreign” (p. 15). During their return migration, the relationship between signifier and signified is deeply contested. These migrants’ hyphenated Koreanness continuously challenges the authenticity of Koreanness. The concept of the “logics of transnationalism” enables readers to weave together the wide range of elements involved in the process of making meaning of such migrants’ Koreanness.

Corresponding to the increasing number of ethnic returnees in South Korea, *Between Foreign and Family* joins the literature on diaspora studies and return migration studies and could be regarded as a cornerstone in discussion and reflection on the meaning of Koreanness and social acceptance of return migrants. As demonstrated in this book, homecoming is never a simple move. A process is required for return migrants to claim Koreanness on personal, collective, and institutional levels. The comparative examination of two return migration communities extends our understanding of transnationalism. Korean Americans and Korean Chinese are return migrants living in two societies within one city. They form “geo-ethnic bubbles” (p. 11) and know of one another’s existence but rarely transgress the boundaries of these bubbles. Lee promotes the explanation that divergence arose before they returned to South Korea and became further complicated while they were living in Seoul. *Between Foreign and Family*’s strengths lie in its originality and foresight in bridging the gap between Korean Americans and Korean Chinese. Diaspora communities and homeland need each other. Beyond the academic level, the book offers a platform by drawing attention to inequalities, discriminations, prejudices, and stereotypes that still exist in a supposedly welcoming homeland and deserve additional attention. The book merits reading to encourage reflection on the current social situation and pondering of the possible transformation of Koreanness in the future.

Ruixin WEI* (rxinw0506@gmail.com)
Goethe-University Frankfurt

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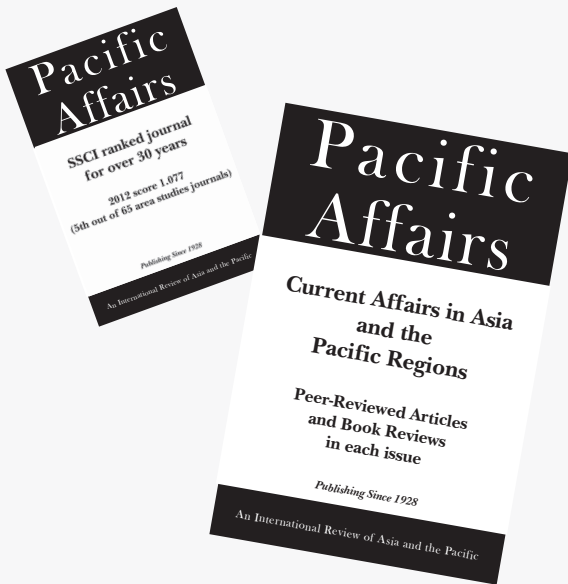
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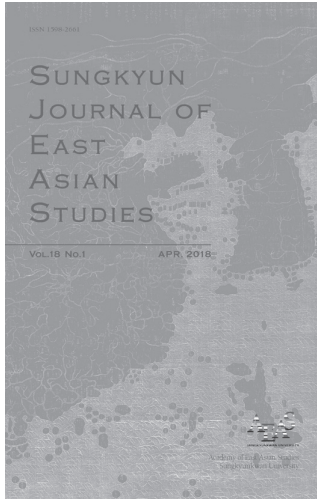
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