KOREAN-LATINO RELATIONS IN LOS ANGELES AND NEW YORK

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Abstract

This paper examines Korean-Latino relations based on the results of my own research in New York City and review of other empirical studies conducted in New York and Los Angeles. Korean-Latino relations have been established mainly through the employment of Latino immigrants in Korean-owned stores. Since Korean immigrants' heavy dependence on very disadvantaged Latino workers involves labor exploitation, it has been a source of Korean-Latino conflicts. There have been many cases of picketing against Korean stores by Latino employees in both New York City and Los Angeles. But Korean-Latino business-related conflicts have been much less serious than Korean-Black business-related conflicts. Moreover, the relationships between Koreans and Latinos have some positive aspects. First, due to cultural similarities and mutual benefits derived from the employer-employee relationship, many Korean merchants maintain strong personal ties with Latino employees, informally helping them and often sponsoring their applications for green cards. Second, Korean ethnic organizations staffed by 1.5- and second-generation Koreans in Korean enclaves in Los Angeles and New York City have recently expanded their services to Latino immigrant workers and Latino children. In particular, the efforts of the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates in Los Angeles to protect Latino workers from exploitation by Korean merchants have greatly contributed to establishing cultural, social, and organizational linkages between the two communities.

Keywords: Interethnic Relations, Workers' Centers, Community-based Activism, Comparative Ethnic Experiences

INTRODUCTION

Native Americans have the longest history in the United States. Asian and Pacific Islander Americans have a long history in Hawaii, California, and other West Coast states, while Mexicans are native to California, Texas, Arizona, and other southwestern border states. Yet, before the 1960s, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders comprised only small fractions of the U.S. population, with Whites maintaining

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numerical supremacy. The only statistically significant racial minority group before the 1960s was African Americans. However, the influx of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean Islands since the late 1960s has led to a radical increase in minority populations and a concomitant reduction in the proportion of the non-Hispanic White population, from 89% in 1960 to 70% in 2000. Meanwhile, Black, Latino, and Asian American populations increased to 12%, 13%, and 4.5%, respectively (Min 2002). In addition, both Muslim and Middle Eastern populations have also experienced phenomenal growth over the past three decades.

The U.S. government is unlikely to revise the current immigrant laws to reduce the number of annual immigrants in the foreseeable future. Moreover, researchers have warned that once social networks between U.S. destination cities and non-U.S. places of origin have been firmly established in this global period, the U.S. government will not be able to change the tide of the current immigration flow through restrictive measures (Massey 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996, pp. 272–284). Thus, the current level of immigration is likely to continue in the future. According to population projections, the non-Hispanic White population will decrease to 53% in 2050, while the Latino, Black, and Asian American populations will grow to 25%, 14%, and 8%, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996, p. 19). As immigrants and minority members are heavily concentrated in large metropolitan cities, minority members comprised, already in 2000, the majority of the population in forty-eight of the one hundred largest cities (Schmitt 2001).

The radical increase in the Latino, Asian American, Caribbean, and Muslim populations affected by the post-1965 immigration stream has led to changes in race/ethnic relations in the United States, including Black-White relations, minority-minority relations, and White-minority (non-Black) relations. The census count of multiracial individuals from the 2000 U.S. Census has added to the complexities of race relations in the United States (Perlmann and Waters, 2002). At present, conflicts among minority groups are as serious as are majority-minority conflicts (Chang 1993; Johnson and Oliver, 1989; Oliver et al., 1993; Joyce 2003; Min 1996; Oliver and Johnson, 1984). It is a widely known fact that Korean immigrants' business activities in Black neighborhoods led to many long-term boycotts of Korean-owned stores in Black neighborhoods and other "Korean-Black conflicts" in the 1980s and early 1990s (Joyce 2003; Kim 2000; Min 1996). The 1992 Los Angeles riots involved Koreans, African Americans, Latinos, and Whites as both victims and victimizers, demonstrating the complexity of race and ethnic relations in the United States today. But minority-minority relations also involve mutual help and coalition building, as well as intergroup conflicts (Chung 2007; Min 1996; Saito 1998).

As a result of the radical increase in other minority populations, the traditional race-relations theories based on White-Black, majority-minority relations do not capture the dynamics of race and ethnic relations in the contemporary United States (Chang 1993; Cho 1993; Omi 1993; Omi and Winant, 1986; Rumbaut 1991, 1994; Saito 1993). We need to examine minority-minority relations and to consider other minority groups, including Caribbean Blacks, along with African Americans, when examining and theorizing majority-minority relations in the United States. Many scholars have speculated about the future development of race relations and intergenerational mobility of post-1965 immigrants in the United States (Alba and Nee, 2003; Gans 1992, 1999; Massey 1995; Portes 1995; Portes and Zhou, 1993). However, researchers have made little effort to document minority-minority relations using empirical data.

Competition for scarce resources is a significant source of minority-minority conflicts. In fact, resource competition is the main cause of conflicts between Latino

immigrants and African Americans. A number of studies document that African Americans have complained that jobs and community and school resources are taken away from them by Latino and Caribbean Black immigrants (Oliver and Johnson, 1984; Navarro 1993; Oliver and Johnson, 1984; Oliver et al., 1993; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003; Waters 1999). But Korean-Black and Korean-Latino conflicts are caused mainly by Korean immigrants' commercial activities involving Blacks as customers and Latinos as employees. Many books and articles have examined Koreans' business-related conflicts (Lie and Abelmann, 1999; Joyce 2003; Kim 2000; Kim 1999; Lee 2002; Min 1996; Yoon 1997). But researchers have neglected to examine Korean-Latino relations, about which we consequently have very limited information (Chang and Diaz-Veizades, 1999; Cheng and Espiritu, 1989; Chung 2007; Yoon 1997).

This paper examines Korean-Latino relations based on findings from my own research about Korean immigrants' business-related conflicts with White suppliers, Black customers, and Latino employees, and their reactive solidarity in New York. In addition to findings from my own studies and personal knowledge, I also draw upon other studies that shed light on Koreans' relationships with Latinos. Korean merchants' heavy dependence on documented and undocumented Latino immigrants has led to Korean-Latino conflicts in the form of Latino workers picketing against Korean stores. But painting Korean-Latino relations mainly as a relationship of owner-employee exploitation results in a distorted, one-sided picture. Korean business owners and Latino employees often maintain strong personal ties and mutually benefit from these ties. Moreover, at present, several 1.5- and second-generation ethnic organizations provide services and support for Latino immigrant workers and their children. In this paper, I try to provide a more balanced picture of Korean-Latino relations by looking at both sides of these relations.

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS' HIGH DEPENDENCE ON LATINO EMPLOYEES AND KOREAN-LATINO CONFLICTS OVER LABOR ISSUES

Korean merchants have depended heavily on Latino, especially Mexican, employees. Often these employees are undocumented residents. The relationships between the business owners of one group and the employees of another group have the potential for intergroup conflicts, as much as do those between business owners and customers with different ethnic backgrounds. Many Korean merchants who have hired Latino workers have violated labor laws relating to minimum wage, overtime pay, and fringe benefits. As a result, there have been many cases of picketing by Latino workers, often organized by White labor union leaders.

Los Angeles has the largest Korean population in the United States. It is also a major destination of Mexican documented and undocumented immigrants. Beginning in the late 1960s, Korean merchants hired many Mexican workers for their businesses. Early on, Korean immigrant merchants' dependence on Mexican workers in Los Angeles was most conspicuous in garment manufacturing. A number of studies document Korean garment subcontractors' heavy dependence on Mexican workers (Bonacich 1994; Light et al., 1999). The tendency of Korean merchants to hire Mexican and other Latino employees in Los Angeles gradually extended to other types of Korean businesses and other cities, as Mexican documented and undocumented immigrants dispersed widely to other cities (Light 2006). Thus, Korean merchants' heavy dependence on Latino employees is now a prominent feature of Korean-immigrant business operations throughout the United States.

According to my 1986 survey, Mexican employees comprised at that time 48% of all employees in Korean-owned stores in the Los Angeles Orange County area, while Korean and Black employees accounted for 31% and 5%, respectively (Min 1989). The 5% Black employees were largely limited to Korean businesses located in South Central Los Angeles. But Korean businesses in South Central Los Angeles were found to depend on Latino employees (54%) far more than on Black employees (16%) (Yoon 1997, p. 213). The results of my 1992 survey reveal that Korean merchants in three Black neighborhoods in New York City hired more Latino employees (44%) than Black employees (32%) or Korean employees (23%) (Min 1996, p. 114).[1] In New York, Korean-owned garment factories are not the only businesses heavily dependent on Latino employees: produce and grocery stores, clothing/gift shops, dry cleaners, Korean restaurants, and other Korean ethnic enclave businesses depend upon Latino workers as well.

In his 1995 survey of Korean merchants in Los Angeles, Yoon asked whether they preferred Blacks or Latinos as employees. Of the respondents, 80% preferred Latinos to Blacks as employees, while only 10% preferred Blacks (Yoon 1997, p. 209).[2] In their responses to an open-ended question about the reasons for preferring Latino employees, 50% emphasized Latino employees' "work ethic and personality traits" as one of three main reasons, and 19% pointed to "cultural similarities" (Yoon 1997, p. 211). Among those similarities are that both Korean and Latino immigrants put emphasis on family and kin ties, children's respect for parents and other adults, and patriarchal values. Both groups also like soccer games; I found in the early 1990s that the Korean Sewing Contractors Association of Los Angeles organized monthly soccer games between Korean merchants and Mexican employees, in order to forge their ties.

Much of what Korean merchants consider as "work ethic and personality traits," such as punctuality and dependability, are both cultural values and behavioral patterns created by their disadvantaged immigrant status. Thus, their shared immigrant status is an important factor that leads Korean and Latino immigrants to like one another. As disadvantaged immigrants, they share the "American dream" ideology—the belief that if they work hard in the United States they can make it.

Results of my survey in New York City corroborated the Korean merchants' preference for Latino employees over Blacks. In my survey of Korean merchants in Black neighborhoods, I asked Korean shopkeepers with no Black employees why they were not hiring Blacks. Most merchants said that Black employees were not responsible or punctual and therefore not dependable, and that Latino employees were much better than Blacks with respect to these characteristics (Min 1996, pp. 114–115). A Korean retail store owner in Brooklyn who had previously hired Black workers said:

> Black employees are not responsible, not reliable. They often do not come to work without giving any notice. They have no motivation to continue working unless they need money immediately. Two years ago, my Black employee asked for money for lunch. I gave him money, but he did not come back to work after lunch (Min 1996, p. 115).

In Yoon's survey of Korean merchants in Los Angeles, 10% indicated "lower wages" as an important reason for their preference for Latino employees over Blacks (Yoon 1997, p. 211). I believe that Yoon's survey underestimates the importance of lower wages and other factors related to lower costs of Latino labor (no overtime and no fringe benefits) that contribute to Korean immigrants' preference for Latino

workers. It is plausible that, since wages below minimum wage, no overtime pay, and no fringe benefits violate labor laws, many Korean merchants would be unlikely to report one or more of these factors as the main reason why they prefer Latino employees to Blacks. Korean merchants probably also prefer Latino workers over Black workers because the former, ignorant of labor laws in the United States, are less likely to report violations of labor regulations to the Department of Labor than are Black workers. A few Korean merchants told me in confidence that they were reluctant to hire Black employees because they worried about Black employees possibly complaining about unfair or unlawful treatment to government agencies.

Not only Korean-immigrant merchants, but also other employers and managers, whether foreign- or native-born, prefer Latino and Caribbean immigrant workers to African American workers for the same two reasons described above: their more positive attitudes toward hard work and the cheapness of their labor. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) show that, in Los Angeles, managers in the lower-skilled sector prefer Latino-immigrant workers to African American workers mainly because they view Latino immigrants as possessing the positive characteristics summarized above and native Blacks as lacking them. Waters's (1999) study of Caribbean immigrants and their children in New York City also reveals that managers prefer Caribbean immigrant workers over African American workers for similar reasons. Bobo and his associates (1997) call this preference "*laissez-faire* racism." Managers reject Black workers on the putative grounds that their work ethics violate capitalist norms such as hard work, frugality, and punctuality.

Although employers or managers in general tend to prefer Latino workers, not all immigrant groups have a similar level of dependence on them for business operations. Currently, Korean, Chinese, and Indian immigrants are most active in small businesses. But Korean-immigrant merchants have a greater dependence on Latino workers than do either Chinese- or Indian-immigrant merchants. Table 1 shows the ethnic composition of employees for Korean-, Indian-, and Chinese-owned businesses in New York City, based on telephone interviews conducted in 2005 and 2006.[3] Coethnic employees comprise about half of the employees in Korean-owned businesses, compared to 86% of the employees in Chinese-owned businesses and 58% in Indian-owned businesses. Latino employees make up 38% of the employees in Korean-owned businesses, compared to 15% in Chinese or Indian businesses. Korean immigrants own more businesses proportionally than either Chinese or

Table 1. A Comparison of Korean-owned Businesses with Chinese-owned and Indian-owned Businesses in the Racial Composition of Employees in New York City (2005)

				D				
Ethnic Group	A	B	C	Ethnic	Other Asian	Latino	Black	White
Korean	91/108	433	4.0	220 (51%)	25 (6%)	163 (38%)	15 (3%)	10 (2%)
Chinese	29/33	197	6.0	171 (86%)	5 (3%)	17 (15%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Indian	26/37	113	3.1	66 (58%)	10 (9%)	17 (15%)	8 (7%)	12 (11%)

Source: Results from a 2005 telephone survey of Korean immigrants in New York City
A = businesses with at least one paid employee per total main business
B = total number of paid employees
C = the mean number of paid employees per business
D = racial composition of employees

Indian immigrants, and they also depend on Latino workers to a much greater extent than either of those groups. This is the main reason Korean-Latino relations, more so than Asian-Latino relations, are a sociologically important issue.

Chinese-immigrant businesses depend heavily on coethnic employees mainly because large numbers of lower-class immigrants, including many undocumented immigrants, have recently arrived in New York City (Kwong 1997; Liang and Ye, 2001). To these business owners, new Chinese immigrants seem to be as hardworking and as cheap as are Latino immigrants. This means that such business owners do not need to hire many Latino workers, who do not speak Chinese. In contrast, the reduction of the Korean immigration flow since the early 1990s, the relatively high class background of new Korean immigrants, and the overabundance of small businesses in the Korean-immigrant community have made it difficult for Korean business owners to find Korean workers for lower-level jobs. The scarcity and higher cost of coethnic labor have pushed Korean store owners toward Latino employees (Kim 1999). Korean business owners usually depend on coethnic workers for managerial and sales positions and use Latino workers for various lower-level jobs (dishwashing, cooking help, ironing, garment manufacturing, and moving and stocking retail items).

Latino employees in Korean-owned businesses are paid less than the Korean-immigrant employees who hold higher-level jobs (Yoon 1997, p. 215). This does not seem to be a significant issue. Rather, the main issue is to what extent Latino employees are subjected to exploitation such as labor-law violations and rude treatment by Korean business owners. While we need more systematic research to answer this question, newspaper articles and my conversations with Korean immigrants suggest that, until recently, many Korean merchants in the New York–New Jersey area had paid Latino workers subminimum wages and failed to pay overtime wages or cover sick days and holidays. Anecdotal information also suggests that Korean merchants or managers have treated Latino workers rudely in personal interactions, often screaming and cursing at them. Although these are isolated cases, some Korean merchants or managers have even treated Latino workers inhumanely. For example, about three years ago, Korean dailies in New York reported that a large Korean ethnic grocery store often did not allow Mexican employees to eat lunch when the store was very busy.

LATINO WORKERS' PICKETING AGAINST KOREAN STORES IN NEW YORK CITY

Most Latinos working in Korean-owned businesses in New York are of Mexican descent. Ecuadorians are the second largest Latino group but a much smaller group than the Mexicans. The immigration of Mexicans to New York City began to explode in the late 1980s (Smith 2001). Latino employees in Korean-owned stores, especially in Korean restaurants, were visible in the early 1980s. Their numbers rapidly increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Latino workers in Korean produce stores in Manhattan became visible, local labor organizations began to organize Latino workers to picket against Korean-owned shops in the early 1990s.

Picketing against Korean produce stores by Latino workers, by local union staff members, and by pan-Latino organizations was reported a few times in the early 1990s, but it accelerated in the late 1990s. In 1999, the Local 169 of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees, largely staffed by Mexican employees, approached several Korean produce stores in Manhattan and asked the owners to allow their employees to join the labor union. When the Korean owners declined,

the Local 169 organized Latino employees to picket in front of the stores. The Community Labor Coalition based in the Lower East Village helped the Local 169 in its effort to unionize Mexican employees of Korean produce stores. In 2000 and early 2001, eight Korean produce and deli stores in Manhattan, mostly located in the Lower East Village, were targets of long-term picketing. A few of these stores were forced to close in 2001 (*Korean Central Daily New York* 2001).

Pressured by the Association of Mexican American Workers and the Local 169, Governor Eliot Spitzer, the New York State attorney general at the time (in 2001), investigated the Korean produce stores targeted for boycotts. He discovered that Latino workers employed in those Korean stores were usually paid around $240 per week for seventy-two hours of work: twelve hours per day and six days a week (Kershaw 2001). This amount gravely violated minimum wage and overtime laws; the workers should have been paid $463 for the long hours of work per week. In 2000, the attorney general threatened to investigate all Korean businesses and seek large amounts of money in back pay for minimum wage and overtime violations. Spitzer's tough enforcement of labor laws prompted Korean business and community leaders to take action so as to educate Korean business owners about labor laws and to negotiate with the attorney general to work out settlements acceptable to both Mexican workers and Korean merchants. The attorney general brokered an agreement among the AFL-CIO, the Korean Task Force for Resolution of Labor Disputes, and Casa de Mexico (a group representing Mexican immigrants) on a code of conduct in September 2002 (Greenhouse 2002). Under the code, Korean business owners would have to pledge to pay minimum wage and 1.5-times wage for any overtime above forty hours per week. They also would have to pledge to provide paid sick days, a week of paid vacation per year for each employee, and to allow investigators from a monitoring firm to inspect their workplaces and financial records at least twice per year. Spitzer warned that he would bring enforcement actions against Korean business owners who did not sign the code of conduct by December 31, 2002, seeking stiff penalties in back pay. In fact, in November 2002 Spitzer levied heavy penalties on three Korean produce stores who did not sign the code.

About 200 Korean produce owners, mostly in Manhattan, are known to have signed the code of conduct, and most of them have complied with minimum wage and overtime laws. Other Korean business owners, of stores located outside of Manhattan, have generally not signed the code, but most have significantly raised wages for Latino workers, although many employers still do not observe labor regulations strictly. The labor disputes between Korean merchants and Latino employees in New York, although bitter for about three years (from 1999 to 2002), have never taken the form of collective conflicts between Koreans and Latinos, as has been the case between Koreans and Blacks. Many Latino workers did participate in picketing against Korean stores in Manhattan during this period, but they made up a tiny fraction of the Latino workers in Korean-owned stores in the area. Moreover, in almost all cases, picketing was organized by the local labor union, which paid some of the regular Latino protesters.

The local labor union may have organized picketing against Korean stores mainly to increase their union dues through membership drives rather than to protect Latino workers. This ulterior motive was arguably revealed when several Latinos, who had been employed by the union to picket against Korean stores, exposed a shocking story. After having been fired by the union on grounds of improper English, workers picketed in front of the local union headquarters. One of the picketers, Jorgé Hernández, said that the union paid him only $100 for forty hours of work per week (Casimir 2001; *Sae Gae Times* 2001). The Korean Task Force

for Resolution of Labor Disputes and the Korean Anti-Discrimination Association, established to resolve labor disputes with Latino workers, criticized the Local 169 for targeting Korean merchants but never blamed Latino workers for participating in the picketing.

STRONG PERSONAL TIES AND MUTUAL DEPENDENCE BETWEEN KOREAN MERCHANTS AND LATINO EMPLOYEES

I have examined in the preceding sections Korean merchants' great dependence on Latino employees, and also their labor-related conflicts. However, many Korean merchants have also established close personal relations with Latino employees. This section provides evidence of close personal ties between Korean merchants and Latino employees based on my personal interviews with six Korean merchants who hired either a few or a large number of Latino employees. The results of three of the interviews conducted in 2006 are reported here.

Relationships between Korean merchants and Latino employees are based on formal business transactions: Korean merchants pay Latino workers for their labor. Because of their business nature, these relationships have the potential for exploitation and conflict. However, in most cases, Korean merchants and Latino employees get what they are looking for through these exchanges. Many Latinos, usually young men, migrate to the United States to find jobs that pay them enough money so that they can either invite family members to join them or else send remittances back home. Many of these workers are undocumented residents who want to change their legal status to that of permanent residents. My interviews with Korean merchants suggest that many Latino workers achieve their goals through working in Korean-owned stores. Korean merchants need inexpensive and dependable workers to operate their businesses. They often meet this need by hiring Latino workers. As we have seen, many Korean merchants have expressed the view that Latino workers are better (more industrious) than other workers, including Koreans, and that they would have difficulty operating their businesses efficiently without Latino workers.

Light et al. (1999) draw a distinction between ethnic and immigrant economies. The *ethnic economy* is created when one immigrant group brings both business capital and labor to create businesses. But the authors also examine the situation in which members of one immigrant group bring capital, but use nonethnic immigrant labor for their business operation. Light et al. refer to this as the *immigrant economy*, and interpret Korean-owned garment factories in Los Angeles, almost entirely dependent on Mexican workers, as a typical example of this type of economy. In order for the immigrant economy to sustain itself over a long period of time, immigrant merchants and nonethnic immigrant employees need to derive maximum mutual benefits, which Korean merchants and Latino employees seem to do.

Case One: Chun-Soo Lee owns five bagel/deli shops in Queens. According to Lee, 90% of about thirty employees working in his five shops are Latinos, mostly undocumented residents. His Latino employees include many Mexicans, a few Ecuadorians, a Peruvian, and a Salvadorian. While eating bagels over coffee in one of his bagel stores, I asked Lee why and how he came to depend heavily on Latino workers. In response to my question, he made the following comment:

> I benefited a lot from Latino workers for [the] operation of my several stores. Once they start work, they continue. Most of my Latino workers have worked for four to six years for me. The Peruvian woman working in this store [pointing

> to her] started to work during her high school years. She has got married and is attending college now. But she has continued to work here. Latino employees also work hard and do not complain. I used to have two White employees. When I gave instructions, they often talked back. I got tired. I had two Korean employees. But they often complained and demanded wage raises quickly. But Latino employees are simple and do not complain much.

Lee said that he liked the Mexican workers best of all. When I asked him why, he responded:

> In addition to hard work and steadiness, Mexicans have two additional favorable characteristics as employees. One is their cultural similarities to Koreans. It is hard to pinpoint what are exactly our cultural similarities. But we share many things to make us feel comfortable to talk to each other. I joke with a few Mexican workers like good friends. The other is their honesty. One time, by mistake I gave $70 more for his weekly wage to a Mexican employee. And he brought the money back to me the next day.

This Mexican worker started his employment in Lee's store four years before the time of the interview, as an undocumented resident. He became a documented resident through his marriage to a U.S. citizen. He was paid $480 per week for his forty-eight hours of weekly work and received two free meals a day from Lee. Lee planned to train the Mexican employee to be the manager of one of his bagel shops. He said that an Egyptian was working as the manager of one of his other shops.

No doubt, Lee has benefited more from the stable, "paternalistic" owner-employee relations than his employees have, and I do not deny that the relationships between Lee and his Latino employees can still be exploitative. I cannot generalize the level of Latino workers' satisfaction with their employment in Lee's stores without directly interviewing them. But the fact that most of them had worked for a few or several years in undesirable jobs (baking bagels, making sandwiches and serving them) at his shops suggests that they derived some level of satisfaction in terms of wages and general treatment. In addition to stable wages, Latino employees derived other benefits from their informal relations with the owner. Lee would invite each employee and his/her spouse to a Korean restaurant to celebrate his/her birthday each year and also lend them money in emergencies. When the above-mentioned Mexican employee got married two years before, Lee said, he negotiated with a Korean manor for a wedding ceremony at a discounted price.

Case Two: Pyong Hae Kim, a fifty-two-year-old Korean immigrant, has run a dry cleaning shop for ten years. He has opened a second shop in Fort Lee, New Jersey. His wife runs the main shop, and a Korean manager runs the second one. Kim moves back and forth from one store to the other in order to supervise. He has ten employees for the two stores: three Koreans and seven Latinos. The nationalities of the Latino employees are different: four Mexicans, an Ecuadorian, a Salvadorian, and a Peruvian. These employees have worked for him for from five to seven years. He inherited two Black employees from the previous owner when he purchased the second store, but he said that he could not keep them because:

> They demanded too much money [$750 per week]. It was also difficult to control them. Just as we have prejudice against Blacks, they have prejudice against Koreans. They treated me as "old Chinese." I had a lot of stress in

> dealing with them. I could not work with them when they became [a] hindrance to [the] operation of my business.

Kim said that Latino workers were a lot better than Black workers and that Korean immigrants could not operate businesses without Latinos. He, too, emphasized the advantage of having Mexican workers over other Latinos:

> Mexican workers are very innocent, follow my instructions closely, and do not make trouble. Other Latino employees like Ecuadorians and Salvadorians some-time[s] give me trouble. They get late in the morning or do not come to work when they do not need money in the week.

Responding to a question about wages and other fringe benefits, Kim said that he paid a Mexican worker with a college degree in Mexico $750 per week, the other two Mexican workers $600, and all others $500; all were working forty hours per week. In addition, Kim provided lunch for all employees on Saturday and took them to Korean restaurants a few times a year. Kim was happy to find that his Latino employees liked Korean food. He told me that he felt as though his Latino employees were his own children, and offered some of them informal aid from time to time:

> When my employees go to [the] hospital for emergency treatments and come up with big bills, I lend them money to pay for them and deduct certain amounts of money from weekly wages. I do not have to worry about their paying me back. Even if I forget about it, they let me know about the weekly deduction. When they have personal problems, they often call me for help. For example, three employees have old cars. When their cars stop on the street, they call me for help. In addition, I sponsored a Korean employee and two Latino employees to help them apply for green cards.

Case Three: I talked with In-Sook Nam, a Korean woman in her early fifties who co-owned with her husband a big twenty-four-hour deli and grocery store in Manhattan. (She is my wife's friend from Catholic church services.) Twelve of Nam's sixteen employees are Latinos (most are Mexican). The other four are Korean. I asked her how she felt about her Latino employees. She responded:

> All of them work hard and cause no trouble at all. I feel like they were my own children. It hurts me to think about their miserable situation. At ages when they [should] go to school under parental protection, they work for menial jobs. And they work hard to keep their jobs. To help them, I have sponsored four of them to get green cards, in the order of employment. They don't know how to file green card applications. So I have done it for all of them. Helping them get green cards is similar to giving them two wings to fly in this country. With their hard-working attitudes, they can do anything here if they get green cards. I would feel happy if they [were to] find better jobs at other places after they get green cards. I have not done it to keep them in my business.

Nam and her husband are very compassionate people who donate a lot of money and spend a great deal of time at their church for charitable activities. While Nam's compassionate treatment of her Latino employees may be an isolated case that cannot be generalized to Korean merchants in general, it appears that the strong personal ties between Korean merchants and their Latino employees reflected in

these three examples are not isolated cases. I have heard similar stories from other Korean immigrant merchants.

YOUNGER-GENERATION KOREAN ETHNIC ORGANIZATIONS' SERVICE PROVISIONS AND SUPPORT FOR LATINO WORKERS AND CHILDREN

I have discussed four cases in which Korean merchants have maintained close, informal ties with their Latino employees. In this section, I illustrate the efforts of 1.5- and second-generation Korean ethnic organizations to provide services for and protect the interests of Latino workers and their children. In her book *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (2007), Angie Chung documents in detail how two younger-generation Korean ethnic organizations in Los Angeles have tried to bridge the Korean and Latino communities through shared social services and advocacy. My analysis of the work being done by two younger-generation Korean organizations to serve and support Latino workers and children in Koreatown, Los Angeles, is largely based on Chung's book[4] but also draws on a few other works. My analysis of similar community organizing efforts in Flushing, New York, is based on preliminary research conducted in 2006.

Close to 50,000 Korean Americans were settled in Koreatown in 2000, but they accounted for only 20% of the population in the Korean enclave, with Latinos comprising the majority of the population (Yu et al., 2004). Traditional Korean ethnic organizations in the area previously provided services only for Korean immigrants and their children. But two major 1.5- and second-generation organizations—the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) and the Korean Youth and Community Center (KYCC)—recently started providing services and support for Latino immigrant workers and their children. Given the huge increase in the Latino population in Koreatown and the lack of Latino social service agencies there, the efforts of the two younger-generation Korean organizations to expand their services to Latino residents may have seemed natural. However, Chung argues that the progressive ideological framework of the leaders for more interethnic cooperation has been an important contributing factor to the organizations' extension of services to Latinos.

KIWA was founded in 1992 to protect Korean immigrant workers from exploitation by Korean merchants. Immediately after its establishment (in 1992) and two years later (in 1994), KIWA found two golden opportunities to help Latino workers, when two Korean corporations purchased two major hotels in downtown Los Angeles and refused to give unionized contracts to workers, most of whom were Latinos (Cho 1992; Chung 2007; Saito and Park, 2000). In the case of the 1994 labor dispute, Hanjin International, a conglomerate in Korea, fired nearly 600 (mostly Latino) unionized workers upon purchasing the Hilton Hotel International. The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 11 that represented the Latino workers built a coalition with KIWA to fight against the Korean corporation. KIWA publicized in Korean ethnic media and started letter-writing campaigns, demonstrations, and a boycott of Korean Air Lines, which was owned by Hanjin International (Chung 2007). As a result of this interethnic cooperation, the managements of both corporations were forced to negotiate with the protest leaders and to rehire unionized workers.

Later, KIWA focused its efforts on helping about 2000 workers employed in nearly 300 Korean restaurants in Koreatown to resist labor exploitation. In 1995 and 1996, KIWA organized massive demonstrations against Korean restaurants with

poor working conditions and which failed to provide their employees with overtime, minimum wages, and/or workers' compensation. The Korean Restaurant Owners Association (KROA) and the owners of the targeted restaurants blacklisted KIWA members as members of the Communist Party in North Korea, leading KIWA to take on a $500,000 lawsuit for punitive damages. Despite severe attacks and nasty tactics by KROA and conservative Korean merchant elites, KIWA has been successful in making KROA and other Korean restaurant owners acquiesce to its demands for minimum and overtime wages, and to re-employ the Korean and Latino workers who had been fired (Chang and Diaz-Veizades, 1999, pp. 89–90; Chung 2007). Although KIWA lacks significant financial resources, its strength lies in its ability to mobilize both Korean and Latino workers for collective action.

Now serving a large population of Latino workers, KIWA has hired several Latino staff members. According to Chung, KIWA's official activities involve strongly bilingual and bicultural elements that use both Korean and Spanish and incorporate both cultures in the workplace. Moreover, Korean and Latino workers' solidarity, as revealed in many demonstrations against Korean businesses, has contributed to strong Korean-Latino ties, although it has weakened Korean internal solidarity. Interestingly, as noted above, in New York City local labor unions organized Latino workers to demonstrate against Korean stores, and in Los Angeles a Korean labor organization organized Latino workers to fight against Korean business owners. In addition, KIWA's efforts to align with several local and national Latino-based organizations to fight against powerful Korean business elites have contributed to Korean-Latino organizational linkages (Chung 2007).

The Korean Youth and Community Center (KYCC) is the largest Korean social service agency in Southern California, with a 5 million dollar budget and seventy-five staff members in 2005. KYCC was founded in 1975 mainly to serve "recent immigrant, low-income and high-risk youths and families," but it has expanded its programs to business training and other areas since the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Although it has served mainly immigrant children and immigrant families, the KYCC staff has undergone a gradual generational shift from immigrants to 1.5- and second-generation Koreans. By 1994, Bong Hwan Kim, the executive director, and most other employees of KYCC were younger-generation Koreans (Min 1996, p. 164). The new vision of its younger-generation leaders, the need for services to the diverse population in Koreatown, and funding from mainstream institutions in the aftermath of the 1992 riots have all contributed to the extension of KYCC services to the non-Korean population. Latinos comprise the vast majority of KYCC's non-Korean clients. Latino young people have participated in KYCC's juvenile delinquency, after-school, and youth leadership programs, while Latino immigrants have participated in business development and employment programs.

KYCC has several Latino staff members. But Chung (2007) reports that only a few Latino staff members work in KYCC's main office alongside the Korean staff members, and several other Latino employees in charge of the environmental program work in a physically separate office. In contrast to KIWA, KYCC has not incorporated Korean-Latino cultural elements into its organizational activities. Moreover, KYCC recruits Latino clients mainly from mainstream organizations, such as schools and the police, rather than from Latino organizations. Thus, while KYCC has not forged strong linkages with Latino organizations, it has created another important bridge to the Latino community through service deliveries.

Korean immigrants in New York established a Korean residential and commercial center in Flushing in the early 1980s (Min 2006). About 25,000 Koreans in Flushing comprise 25% of the Korean population in New York City, but they make

up only 18% of the population in the neighborhood. Two other important minority groups in Flushing, a multiethnic neighborhood, are Chinese (24%) and Latinos (22%). In addition to the several hundred Korean ethnic businesses with Korean-language signs, dozens of Korean ethnic organizations are located in Flushing. Since few Latino social service agencies have been established in Flushing, some of the Korean social service agencies have recently started to serve Latino clients.

According to my interviews conducted in 2006, three Korean organizations in this area provide services to Latino youth and immigrants. The Young Korean American Service and Education Center is the most important Korean empowerment organization in New York, led by 1.5-generation Korean leaders. Founded in 1984, it has served as an advocacy organization for immigrant rights, through lobbying Congress and organizing many demonstrations in New York and Washington to put pressure on Congress to pass legislation that would legalize undocumented residents. Since Latinos would be the main beneficiaries of such a liberalized immigration law, this Korean organization has coordinated closely with local Latino organizations and mobilized more Latino than Korean immigrants to participate in demonstrations for immigrants' rights. It also provides social service and training programs for Latino and Korean clients, including an ESL program, a job training program, and an immigrant-rights clinic. Although the center is home to the Korean Worker Rights Project, this has not been expanded to include Latino workers, probably so as not to antagonize the Korean community.

The Korean Community Service of Metropolitan New York (KC) is the largest Korean social service organization in New York, with a 3 million dollar budget and thirty-one staff members. KC provides services to Latino and Chinese clients through two programs: the "on-the-job" program and the ESL program. According to its executive director, KC staff members are predominantly immigrants, but there are plans to recruit more 1.5- and second-generation members to expand services to non-Korean clients. The (Korean) Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) began as a Korean ethnic social service agency in 1978. The YWCA has run a youth program, a kindergarten, and a college for the elderly, as well as children's and elderly women's choirs. It also recently expanded services to non-Korean clients for the youth program and kindergarten. All staff members in these two programs are 1.5- and second-generation Koreans. About 10% of the clients of these programs are non-Korean, mostly Latinos.

CONCLUSION

Business owner and managers in general tend to prefer Latino workers, including undocumented immigrants, mainly because they regard them as "cheap and docile." But because of their highly entrepreneurial activities and lack of coethnic employees, Korean immigrants depend on Latino employees for their business operations to a greater extent than any other immigrant group. In short, Korean-Latino relations are employer-employee relations between members of the most highly entrepreneurial immigrant group and the immigrant group most vulnerable to labor exploitation.

Korean-Latino relations are problematic precisely because of this power differential, with its potential for exploitation. As has been revealed in New York City, until very recently a significant proportion of Latino employees working in Korean-owned businesses did so for subminimum wages and with no overtime pay. In response, many Latino workers, organized by local labor unions between 1999 and 2002 in New York City, participated in picketing against several targeted Korean

deli, grocery, and produce stores. Picketing, investigations, and threats made by the state attorney general seem to have forced most Korean business owners in the New York area to observe minimum wage and overtime laws. But some Korean merchants may still fail to observe these labor laws when they hire Latino employees. Other Korean business owners still treat Latino employees rudely, for example, by cursing at them in Korean.

Yet Korean immigrants' business-related conflicts with Latino employees were much less serious than those with Black customers and residents. For example, according to Joyce's review of local newspaper articles, Korean merchants in Black neighborhoods in New York City were faced with fourteen boycotts, seven of which were long-term, i.e., lasting four or more weeks (Joyce 2003, p. 70). The 1990 Brooklyn boycott of two Korean produce stores lasted seventeen months. During that boycott, Black leaders organized several mass demonstrations in which more than one hundred Blacks participated, while Korean immigrants organized a major demonstration in front of City Hall to put pressure on the mayor to take action to terminate it (Min 1996, pp. 77–78). There may have been up to two dozen cases of picketing against Korean stores by union leaders and Latino employees in New York City in the 1990s and early 2000s. But these cases of picketing drew only a small number of participants. Few Koreans considered picketing by Latino workers as a major Korean-Latino conflict, whereas Korean immigrants regarded Black boycotts of Korean stores as major interracial conflicts and threats to Korean immigrants' economic survival.

It is interesting that a Korean labor advocacy organization should have played a central role in protecting Latino workers from exploitation by Korean business owners in Los Angeles, while a local labor organization led the Latino labor movement against Korean businesses in New York City. The Latino labor resistance against Korean stores led by a bottom-up Korean immigrant labor organization in Los Angeles was more effective in protecting Latino workers' economic interest than were the Latino protest demonstrations organized by local labor unions. Although protest demonstrations against Korean stores in Los Angeles drew more Latino workers and were more intense than those in New York City, they strained Korean-Latino relations to a lesser degree because they were organized by a Korean labor organization. At the same time, they succeeded in enhancing class solidarity across ethnic lines.

My personal interviews suggest that both Korean merchants and Latinos derive from the other side what they need: Koreans get steady and responsible work necessary for their business success, and Latinos get stable and decently paying jobs for their educational level and status. This is why Latino employees stay with Korean owners for relatively long periods, despite their relatively menial jobs. Personal interview data also reveal that Korean merchants have established strong informal relations with their Latino employees, by providing them with personal aid and sponsoring them for green card applications. Some Korean business owners, such as Nam (discussed above), may continue to maintain ties with some of their Latino employees, even after they leave their jobs. I suggest that sharing the immigrant dream ideology is the key to making it possible for Korean merchants and Latino employees to maintain strong informal relations. Although I have introduced only three cases in this paper, the other three interviewees have similar stories. Further interviews with Korean merchants and with Latino employees will be needed to validate the findings from this preliminary research.

Koreans and Latinos maintain ties not only through their merchant-employee relations but also through Korean ethnic organizations. Korean social service and

empowerment organizations in Koreatown in Los Angeles and Flushing in New York City have recently extended services to Latino resident workers and students. The settlement of many Latinos in these two Korean enclaves and the involvement in Korean social service agencies of 1.5- and second-generation Koreans with a more multicultural vision have made it possible to extend services to Latinos. In the process of providing services to Latinos, Korean ethnic organizations have contributed to Korean-Latino cultural and social integrations and organizational alliances. In particular, KIWA's efforts to protect Latino workers from exploitation by Korean business owners in Los Angeles have made a significant contribution to Korean-Latino coalitions for social justice. More and more Korean organizations are likely to be staffed by younger-generation Koreans in the future. Given that Latinos comprise a significant proportion of the population in many other Korean enclaves—for example, Fort Lee in New Jersey—Korean-Latino linkages through Korean ethnic organizations will likely expand in the future.

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NOTES

1. That Korean merchants in Black neighborhoods do not hire enough Black employees is one of the major complaints by Black community leaders.
2. Almost all respondents who chose Blacks were found to have businesses in heavily Black neighborhoods in South Central Los Angeles. This means that they felt obligated to hire Black employees mainly because of the Black customer base.
3. The random surname sampling technique was used for the survey. But Indian Christians and Muslims who were not included in Indian surnames were located through personal channels and interviewed separately. In all, 370 Chinese, 282 Indians, and 277 Korean immigrants who had a job at the time of the interview or within five years before it were interviewed. The numbers of Chinese, Indian, and Korean respondents in row 1 in the table indicate those who were self-employed.
4. Chung's book was published in 2007. I would like to express my thanks to her for allowing me to use her unpublished book manuscript and to cite it in my paper.

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