IMPACTS OF FEMALE OUT-MIGRATION
ON ETHNIC KOREAN COMMUNITIES IN CHINA

by
AMELIA SCHUBERT-ZHANG
B.A. Arizona State University, 2007
M.A. University of Colorado at Boulder, 2011

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Geography
2016
This thesis entitled:
Impacts of Female Out-Migration On Ethnic Korean Communities in China
written by Amelia Schubert-Zhang
has been approved for the Department of Geography

________________________________________________
Timothy Oakes

________________________________________________
Fernando Riosmena

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol #13-0301
Abstract

Schubert-Zhang, Amelia (Ph.D., Geography)

Impacts of Female Out-Migration on Ethnic Korean Communities in China

Thesis directed by Prof. Tim Oakes

This dissertation examines how immigration circuits linking China’s Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture with South Korea have altered social practice in immigrant-sending communities. I argue that South Korea’s gender ideologies have become a proxy for sovereign power in the Yanbian area, which otherwise and more typically is enacted through direct territorial control. This sovereign power, while not negating nor fully undermining the Chinese identity of Yanbian’s ethnic Korean residents, acts by reshaping the dreams, desires, and life expectations of women especially. As migration patterns between China and South Korea have stabilized over the last 20 years, rural Korean communities in northeastern China have experienced a continual population decline. In particular, women of reproductive age have left in search of both marriage and work opportunities in South Korea. Here I set out to query three aspects of this migration flow: how intra-ethnic marriage patterns have changed as a result, how the social status of women has been affected, and what new presences have been introduced into migrant-sending communities via migration networks. I demonstrate how Korean Chinese communities have transformed to accept South Korean social norms, in particular normative gender behavior, and how Yanbian is increasingly absorbed into a transnational and deterritorialized social formation that centers on South Korea. But this incorporation into South Korean society is partial at best. While Korean Chinese femininity and masculinity have both been redefined to better accommodate South Korea socio-economic demands, women have
found new and seemingly fulfilling subjectivities in the South Korean social order, performing new and exciting cosmopolitan gender and ethnic identities through undertaking paid and unpaid domestic reproductive labor linked to the global city of Seoul. Conversely, Korean Chinese men have been left with few opportunities to enact a fulfilling masculinity, leaving them in a marginalized and unstable position in households and in their communities. Yet I simultaneously emphasize that these changes are neither universal nor permanent, rather capturing one moment in an ongoing conversation between the Chinese central government, the South Koreans, and the Korean Chinese.
Dedication

To my family,  
with love
Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to all the individuals in China and South Korea who shared personal stories, experiences, and insights with me. In the interest of protecting their privacy, few are acknowledged by name in this dissertation; nonetheless, it has been their artful negotiations of cultural, political, economic, and personal boundaries that inspired and fueled this research project. I hope I do justice to their ingenuity and creativity.

My dissertation committee has offered consistent support in this endeavor. Dr. Tim Oakes has provided invaluable guidance as my advisor for seven years of graduate studies at CU-Boulder. He has led by example, demonstrating the rewards of building long-term relationships in the field. I thank him for my growth as a scholar, writer, and individual over the course of my graduate studies. I am also indebted to Dr. Emily Yeh for her encouraging feedback and careful reading of this dissertation; she inspires me with her lived commitment to her work in Tibet. Dr. Fernando Riosmena has been a constant source of support, guidance, and inspiration in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies, and as a scholar more generally. Dr. Jennifer Bair introduced me to the literature on feminist theory and methodologies, and her work shows the value of its application. Dr. Yeong-Hyun Kim of the Ohio University Department of Geography, one of the few American scholars who has attended to the Yanbian area, has taken extensive time to help me build contacts in Yanbian and Seoul. I thank them all profusely.

Portions of this research were funded by grants from the FLAS Fellowship program, a Adam Kolff Memorial Fellowship, a SSRC Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship, a Korea Foundation Graduate Studies Fellowship, a Jenn Dinaburg Memorial Fellowship, a Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Program in China Studies Pre-dissertation Research Grant, a James A. and Jeanne B. DeSana Graduate Research Scholarship, a Mabel Duncan Memorial Fellowship, a Fulbright CLEA Fellowship, and a Fulbright Research Fellowship. This work was facilitated by the Geography Department at Yanbian University in China, and the Social Science Korea team in the Geography Education Department at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea. The material makings of this dissertation are due to them, and I am very grateful for this support.

My friends and fellow graduate students at CU-Boulder and elsewhere shared support, solace, commiseration, and celebrations over these years. They make the lifestyle fun. I wouldn’t be here without them.

Finally, I thank my family for their encouragement and critiques. I write more legibly because of them. More importantly, thanks to them I have maintained a semblance of balance and perspective in the course of developing, researching, and writing this dissertation.
Contents

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. x
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
Chapter I: Background and structure of the study ............................................................................. 11
  I.1. Background ................................................................................................................................ 11
    I.1.A. Historical Background of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture ..................... 12
    I.1.B. Gender Imbalance in the ROK ......................................................................................... 33
    I.1.C. Globalization and Multiculturalism .................................................................................... 38
  I.2. Research Questions ................................................................................................................... 42
    I.2.A. Has female departure affected intra-ethnic marriage patterns? ................................. 42
    I.2.B. How has the possibility of out-migration affected the social status of women? .......... 42
    I.2.C. What new presences are introduced into sending areas via marriage migrant networks? ......................................................................................................................... 43
  I.3. Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................. 44
    I.3.A. Transnationalism and the new mobilities paradigm ....................................................... 45
    I.3.B. Border and Borderlands Theory ....................................................................................... 49
    I.3.C. Performativity and the Social Construction of Space ....................................................... 50
    I.3.D. Gender, Marriage, and Reproduction at the Border ......................................................... 54
  I.4. Methodology and Research Methods ......................................................................................... 58
    I.4.A. Feminist postcolonial ethnography ............................................................................... 58
    I.4.B. Methods for addressing research questions .................................................................. 62
    I.4.C. Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 69
    I.4.D. Timeline and Field Sites .................................................................................................... 71
Chapter II, Transnationalization of Family Ties ................................................................................. 74
  II.1. Introduction: Presence, Absence, and Mobility in Yanbian ............................................... 78
  II.2. Theoretical underpinnings of transnational theory ................................................................. 82
    II.2.A. Locating the Social in Migration Studies ..................................................................... 82
    II.2.B. Spread of Cultural Studies in Migration ..................................................................... 84
    II.2.C. Theories of practice: Bourdieu and habitus ................................................................. 88
    II.2.D. Performativity, subjectivity, and Butler ...................................................................... 90
II.3. Emergence of Transnational Migration Studies ................................................................. 93
   II.3.A. The Age of Migration ........................................................................................................ 93
   II.3.B. Transnationalism and the rejection of methodological nationalism ......................... 95
   II.3.C. Transnationalism and Globalization .............................................................................. 97
II.4. Gaps in Transnationalism: Mobility, materiality, and agency ........................................ 99
   II.4.A. Mobility, Assemblages, and the New Mobilities Paradigm ........................................ 99
   II.4.B. Materiality and Actor-Network Theory .................................................................... 104
   II.4.C. Agency: Bridging the material/discursive divide with performativity ....................... 106
   II.4.D. Governmentality and the Performance of the State ..................................................... 111
II.5. The Rise of Transnational Practice in Yanbian ............................................................... 114
   II.5.A. Absence ......................................................................................................................... 115
   II.5.B. Presence ....................................................................................................................... 121
   II.5.C. Mobility ......................................................................................................................... 132

Chapter III: The Korean Chinese among the diaspora ......................................................... 136

Reflection II: Holidays in Yanji, Holidays in Seoul ............................................................. 136

III.1. Introduction: State, Nation, and Diaspora ................................................................. 141
   III.1.A. History of Korean Chinese immigration to South Korea ............................................. 143
   III.1.B. South Korea’s structural inequalities ......................................................................... 148
   III.1.C. Age, ethnicity, and gender inequalities faced by the Korean Chinese ...................... 150
III.2. Structuring Power: State, Nation, Territory, Diaspora ................................................. 152
   III.2.A. States and Citizenship ............................................................................................... 153
   III.2.B. Rights .......................................................................................................................... 157
   III.2.C. Sovereignty .................................................................................................................. 159
   III.2.D. The Ethnic Nation ...................................................................................................... 161
   III.2.E. Diaspora ....................................................................................................................... 166
   III.2.F. Cultural Hegemony ...................................................................................................... 170
   III.2.G. Deterritorializing Discipline ...................................................................................... 179
III.3. Reuniting the Diaspora? Impacts of ethno-national ‘reunification’ ................................. 182
   III.3.A. Korean Chinese marriage and family patterns ............................................................ 184
   III.3.B. Alternative perspectives on the ethnic diaspora ......................................................... 190
   III.3.C. The Chinese Diaspora: A Case for Comparison ......................................................... 196
 III.4. Conclusion: Ethnicity and the diaspora .......................................................................... 199
Chapter IV: Gender and Development among the minzu

IV.1. Economic change in northeast China
   IV.1.A. China’s neoliberal shift in the reform era
   IV.1.B. Development Theory
   IV.1.C. China’s (big-D) Development Push: Different approaches to geographic and social inequalities
   IV.1.D. Gender and Development
   IV.1.E. Returning women to reproductive work

IV. 2. Development in Yanbian
   IV.2.A. Development work among the minzu
   IV.2.B. Yanbian’s female-led development
   IV.2.C. Dreams for masculinity: infrastructure and investment

IV.3. Emergence of new ethnic boundary practices
   IV.3.A. Encounter with ROK increases awareness of unique Korean Chinese identity
   IV.3.B. Intra-ethnic conflict and inter-ethnic marriage

IV.4. Conclusions

Chapter V: Conclusions

V.1. New Hybrids and Hierarchies
   V.1.A. South Korean creep
   V.1.B. New Hierarchies
   V.1.C. The ‘knowing’ of South Korea

V.2. Territorial power, biopolitical power
   V.2.A. Biopolitical conflicts and territorial cures
   V.2.B. Effective sovereignty, affective sovereignty
   V.2.C. A hybrid borderland

References
List of Figures

Figure 1: Mural depicting early immigration into Yanbian; Yueqing Town, May 2014 .......... 12
Figure 2: Map of present-day DPRK.................................................................................. 13
Figure 3: Photos of a Japanese school in Yanbian................................................................. 14
Figure 4: Memorial site on Yanbian University campus....................................................... 17
Figure 5: Painting depicting Japanese massacre of Yanbian residents............................... 17
Figure 6: Yanbian Prefecture, marked in red....................................................................... 18
Figure 7: View of Longjing from the top of nearby Mao'er Mountain, May 2014 .......... 27
Figure 8: Respondents......................................................................................................... 62
Figure 9: A group selfie, Antu City, 2015.............................................................................. 68
Figure 10: Further selfies, Yanbian, 2013-14..................................................................... 68
Figure 11: Dedoose chart of respondent descriptor ratios .................................................... 70
Figure 12: Dedoose bubble-charts of code ratios................................................................. 70
Figure 13: View from Tumen City, of the DPRK city of Namyang, July 2015...................... 75
Figure 14: Leisure spaces in Tumen City, May 2014.......................................................... 77
Figure 15: A Yanbian Changbaishan F.C. game, July 2015.................................................. 78
Figure 16: Commercial imaginings of Yanbian’s transnational position, June 2014........... 82
Figure 17: Author with shaman, May 2014, photo credit anonymous ............................... 115
Figure 18: Woman murdered by husband on Yanji shopping street, February 2014 ........... 121
Figure 19: Yanbian’s PRC-ROK Plastic Surgery Academic Exchange............................... 125
Figure 20: A Korean shopping center in Yanji, October 2013............................................. 126
Figure 21: Village homes advertising “South Korean satellite TV service” July 2014......... 130
Figure 22: Rural field site visit, a house with two satellite dishes, October 2013................. 130
Figure 23: Korean Chinese dining table, January 2014...................................................... 139
Figure 24: The Korean Diaspora, credit Korea JoongAng Daily, 2013 ................................. 143
Figure 25: South Korea’s skewed labor force. Source: The Economist 2013 .................... 149
Figure 26: A Korean-Chinese birthday party in Seoul, 2014 ............................................. 152
Figure 27: Seoul-based Korean Chinese travel agency, June 2012 ..................................... 164
Figure 28: Seoul-based Korean Chinese travel agency, June 2012 ..................................... 165
Figure 29: Yanji men’s clothing store, advertising “South Korean casual style,” May 2014... 165
Figure 30: Yanji-branch of South Korean coffee shop (Cafe Bene) advertisement ............ 166
Figure 31: Population distribution of the Korean diaspora.................................................... 169
Figure 32: South Korea’s Brand Book, Core Values........................................................... 172
Figure 33: South Korea’s Brand Book, explanation of logo .............................................. 172
Figure 34: Karaoke center in Yanji, October 2013............................................................... 178
Figure 35: Hip-hop dance show in Yanji, March 2014........................................................ 183
Figure 36: Korean Chinese engagement pictures, taken in South Korea in late 2013 ......... 185
Figure 37: Korean Chinese wedding stage, January 2014................................................... 185
Figure 38: Yanji wedding hall during Korean Chinese wedding, January 2014 .................... 186
Figure 40: Introduction to Hongqi Village Museum .......................................................... 200
Figure 41: Interior of Hongqi Village home, October 2013 .................................................. 202
Figure 42: The ondol when lit, which heats the house, October 2013 ................................. 203
Figure 43: Small houses in Hongqi Village, October 2013 .................................................. 203
Figure 44: Ginseng-sellers in Yanbian .................................................................................. 204
Figure 45: An exhibit in the Hongqi Village Museum, July 2015 .......................................... 205
Figure 46: The author with a Hongqi Village tour guide, July 2015 ..................................... 205
Figure 47: The author at a Hongqi Village Museum outdoor replica of a well, July 2015 ...... 206
Figure 48: Dinner with traditional Korean folk dancing on stage, July 2015 ....................... 206
Figure 49: The high-speed train arrived in Yanbian in 2015 .............................................. 230
Figure 50: Jilin Province Public Finance, Deusche Bank 2016 ............................................. 231
Figure 51: Inside a North Korean restaurant, Dandong, China, Sept. 2013 ....................... 241
Figure 52: Yanji's North Market, photo credit Susan Schubert ........................................... 243
Figure 53: "North Korean seaweed for sale", May 2014 ....................................................... 244
Figure 54: Yanji street market advertising North Korean food products ............................. 245
Figure 55: A typical Yanbian village in winter, January 2014 ............................................. 250
Figure 56: Agricultural village in Yanbian, May 2014 ....................................................... 252
Figure 57: A Korean-Chinese wedding in Tumen, May 2014 .............................................. 254
Figure 58: Scheme to increase marriage rates in Harbin, China, July 2013; ..................... 257
Figure 59: Dining with a respondent, 2014 ...................................................................... 271
Introduction

This dissertation examines how immigration circuits linking China’s Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture with South Korea have altered social practice in immigrant-sending communities. I argue that South Korea’s gender ideologies have become a proxy for sovereign power in the Yanbian area, which otherwise and more typically is enacted through direct territorial control. This sovereign power, while not negating nor fully undermining the Chinese identity of Yanbian’s ethnic Korean residents, acts by reshaping the dreams, desires, and life expectations of women especially. As migration patterns between China and South Korea have stabilized over the last 20 years, rural Korean communities in northeastern China have experienced a continual population decline. In particular, women of reproductive age have left in search of both marriage and work opportunities in South Korea. Here I set out to query three aspects of this migration flow: how intra-ethnic marriage patterns have changed as a result, how the social status of women has been affected, and what new presences have been introduced into migrant-sending communities via migration networks. I demonstrate how Korean Chinese communities have transformed to accept South Korean social norms, in particular normative gender behavior, and how Yanbian is increasingly absorbed into a transnational and deterritorialized social formation that centers on South Korea. But this incorporation into South Korean society is partial at best. While Korean Chinese femininity and masculinity have both been redefined to better accommodate South Korea socio-economic demands, women have found new and seemingly fulfilling subjectivities in the South Korean social order, performing new and exciting cosmopolitan gender and ethnic identities through undertaking paid and unpaid domestic reproductive labor linked to the global city of Seoul. Conversely, Korean Chinese men have been left with few opportunities to enact a fulfilling masculinity, leaving them in a
marginalized and unstable position in households and in their communities. Yet I simultaneously emphasize that these changes are neither universal nor permanent, rather capturing one moment in an ongoing conversation between the Chinese central government, the South Koreans, and the Korean Chinese.

**Shifts in the deployment of sovereignty:**

This work pivots on the geographic unit of Yanbian. But theoretically, its purpose is to argue that transnational networks facilitate the expansion of inequality regimes, that removing the blind acceptance of the territorial nation-state border allows us to recognize shifts in sovereignty, *not* through territorial holdings, but through control of patriarchal gender hierarchies and policing of ‘authentic’ cultural practice. Sovereignty is conventionally understood as the political and military control of territory, which is demarked through political borders. But here I offer an alternative. I draw specifically from Foucault’s notion of sovereignty as developed in his later work, *Sovereignty, Territory, Population*. In his earlier work, Foucault described a sovereign power that operates directly on the body, rendering life subject to the sovereign’s will. In contrast, discipline emerges as a new form of power that acts on the mind, which then directs the body to act in keeping with the interests of the authorities. Yet as Elden (2007, 30) points out, Foucault moved away from this either/or dichotomy in later work: “Foucault is not simply proposing a linear narrative from a society of sovereignty to a disciplinary society to a society of government. Rather he proposes a triangle of sovereignty–discipline–government (governmental management), whose primary target is population, whose principle form of knowledge is political economy and whose essential mechanism or technical means of operating are apparatuses of security […] Conceiving of these three ‘societies’ not on a linear model, but
rather as a space of political action allows us to inject historical and geographical specificity into Foucault’s narrative.”

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault argues that “…sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population” (Foucault 2009, 25). This opens up the possibility that sovereignty and discipline can overlap, simultaneously acting upon individuals as they move through territory. Sovereignty is not exclusively defined by the ability kill with impunity; rather, it is spatialized power that is not tied to specific individuals’ bodies. Conflicts over maritime territory demonstrate the importance of such (disembodied) sovereignty. Thus sovereignty and discipline emerge as complementary forms of power, acting separately but simultaneously through political control of populations and cultural “marking” of territory.

In northeast China, South Korea demonstrates this ambiguous power by reshaping perceptions of normativity in Yanbian Prefecture. South Korea offers a different form of subjectivity to the Korean Chinese who live there – offering a place in the new globalized world, a chance to belong in a world city like Seoul, in a way that (as a marginal minority group) they can never belong in Beijing or Shanghai. But because South Korea currently only lacks women (for low-wage “pink-collar” jobs and as marriage partners for their sex-skewed population), these desirable subjectivities are only gendered female. The subject positions available to non-White men in South Korea are highly stigmatized, isolated, and often physically dangerous, because they are linked to (often illegal) jobs in manual labor. Here the Chinese state attempts to step in and offer men meaningful social positions through developmental interventions in the Yanbian area; they have not yet seen much success. But by reformulating Korean Chinese femininity as a desirable and upwardly socially-mobile identity to fill a gap in South Korean
society, and simultaneously redefining Korean Chinese masculinity as dangerous and lazy to keep them out, South Koreans do succeed in expanding the sovereignty of their state. Using ethnographic data, I analyze how Korean Chinese women and men have shifted their self-perception to be always in conversation with South Korea, accepting South Korean social practices as the “norm” against which to measure themselves and other Chinese ethnic groups. This points to the key theoretical intervention of this work: that migration circuits facilitate a new kind of sovereignty, one that compels not through territorial control, but rather through a discursive discipline whose power emerges through its potential for economic and socio-cultural exclusion. In Yanbian, where the Chinese state’s efforts at economic reform have not yet born fruit, this becomes a potent weapon indeed.

Chapters:

In Chapter I, I offer a historical overview of the Yanbian region, and a review of the social issues in South Korea that prompted immigration to begin. This background is key to understanding who so many Korean Chinese women are willing to leave their families and homes to move to South Korea, as well as allowing readers to contextualize the cultural differences that have emerged between the Korean Chinese and South Koreans in their 50-year separation. From this background, my research questions emerge in response to specific points of encounter between South Korea and Korean Chinese immigrant-sending communities. I then briefly summarize my theoretical approach to this research, using performativity theory to examine how Korean Chinese social spaces have been reshaped through hegemonic discourses originating in South Korea. I interrogate three specific ways these discourses break the
boundaries of the nation-state and piggy-back on globalizing economic, labor, and cultural flows. This leads to a discussion of methodological concerns, as I approach research with an ethical commitment emerging from feminist and postcolonial studies. I conclude Chapter I with a summary of my research methods, exploring how each of my research questions calls for specific research tools.

Chapter II focuses on social practices in Yanbian Prefecture. Here I provide a more thorough exploration of transnational theory, in particular highlighting how transnational theory could be improved by the addition of a performative understanding of subjectivity. Drawing from Bourdieu and Butler, I explore how new subjectivities emerge from new performative responses to new situations, and how transnationalism in particular is presenting actors with many such opportunities. I bring this into conversation with more empirical work in immigration studies, to demonstrate how a deeper understanding of mobile transnational society can only be achieved through praxis. Applying this approach to observed phenomena in Yanbian, I analyze three themes that now characterize daily life among the ethnic Korean Chinese: absence, presence, and mobility.

Chapter III approaches the Korean Chinese as they exist in relation to South Korea, and the broader Korean diaspora. In addressing the relationship between the ‘homeland’ and its diaspora, I explore how power is structured through channels like state territory, citizenship, rights, and ethnicity. I reveal how South Korea valorizes membership in the Korean ethnic nation but imposes socio-cultural criteria on membership, forcing the Korean Chinese to adapt to South Korean normative behavior in order to access the benefits of co-nationhood. Importantly, this is done through deterritorialized disciplining, as Korean Chinese are made subject to South
Korean cultural hegemony through discursive regulation of norms, behaviors, and desires. This subverts traditional understandings of sovereignty that rest on direct territorial control.

Chapter IV considers how the experiences of the Korean Chinese emerge from the context of northeast China. With particular regard to China’s economic restructuring in the post-Mao reform era, I consider how the socio-economic performances of masculinity and femininity have changed. I find that the economy of northeast China has been reconfigured to exclude men. The industrial jobs that formerly provided men with the opportunity to properly perform masculinity (in the workplace and in the home alike) have been eliminated. While Han Chinese men have found alternative ways of performing masculinity through internal migration (Choi and Peng 2016), Korean Chinese men neither have the necessary social connections (guanxi) to find success in other parts of China, nor have they been terribly successful in South Korea. As a result, Korean Chinese women now perform many of the activities that previously defined men’s social roles. The Chinese state, aware of the risks of a large and discontented population of minority men living near the state’s border, has attempted multiple developmental interventions to offer alternative livelihoods for men.

I conclude by revisiting some of the main themes in this dissertation. Previous social hierarchies like gender, class, and ethnicity are being exponentially complicated as they are stretched across national borders. Being a well-educated Korean Chinese woman in Yanji City takes on a host of new meanings when one goes to work as a hotel cleaner in South Korea; a subsistence farmer on the outskirts of Tumen Township is no longer low-class if his daughter marries a South Korean man. Through exploring the ways that these new subject positions emerge and are made legible in Yanbian’s social milieu, I end with the open question of how China’s marginal people will move forward in the coming decades – by embracing a
deterritorialized globalization, by retrenching in nationalist or patriarchal rhetoric, or by experimenting with new subjectivities and new ways of being marginal in a world increasingly characterized by hybridity.

**On the rectification of names:**

Choosing among conflicting name-systems is a contentious and power-laden exercise in granting (and denying) legitimacy. The ethnic Korean minority in China, whose official Chinese name is *Chaoxianzu* (朝鮮族), usually take the Korean form of this name (*Joseonjok, 조선족*) when referring to themselves. In South Korea, though, it is considered more polite and politically correct to refer to them as *Jungguk dongpo* (중국 동포), which translates as ‘Chinese brothers and sisters,’ and which is more comparable to the terms South Koreans use for Korean Americans (*Jae-mi gyopo, 재미교포*) and Korean Japanese (*Jae-il gyopo, 재일교포*) (for discussion, see H.J. Kim 2010, 58). The importance of proper naming, and the ease of making mistakes, was emphasized in two interviews with Korean Chinese professors in China, who described themselves as the vanguard of the Korean Chinese elite. One, a mid-40s female professor of sociology in Harbin, told me:

*Chaoxian ren* (an official name for North Koreans, 朝鮮人) is sometimes still used to describe *Chaoxianzu-ren* (ethnic Korean Chinese, 朝鮮族人), especially by older people, but this is offensive and should be avoided. Now it should be used only to describe North Koreans, and the two groups should not be confused [personal interview, in Chinese, Harbin, June 2013].

Another Harbin professor, a woman who teaches Korean language, told me that:

Many old people, and even young people now, describe us [Korean Chinese] as *Chaozu* (朝族). But do you know who started this? It was the Japanese. During the colonial era, they wanted us in Manchuria to forget that we came from *Joseon* [朝鮮, old name for the Korean peninsula, also the source of the Chinese name *Chaoxian*/朝鮮] and that we are related to *Chaoxianren* [朝鮮人, used here to describe all ethnic Korean people]. [Personal interview, in Chinese, Harbin, July 2013].
In this dissertation, I typically use the names by which countries and peoples refer to themselves, as it can be most clearly translated into English. In addition, the following acronyms are frequently used:

- **PRC**: The People’s Republic of China, used interchangeably with China.
- **DPRK**: The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, used interchangeably with North Korea (and North Koreans are occasionally referred to as DPRK Koreans).
- **ROK**: The Republic of Korea, used interchangeably with South Korea (although I usually retain South Korean as an adjective for ROK Koreans).

The various groups of Koreans who live throughout northeastern Asia each have several names, in multiple languages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Ethnic Koreans in China</th>
<th>Koreans in DPRK</th>
<th>Koreans in ROK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean: The primary conflict lies in employing either 조선 (Choseon, the DPRK’s term for the Korean peninsula) or 한국 (Hanguk, the ROK’s name for the Korean peninsula).</td>
<td>조선족 (People of Choseon nationality, Choseon was an ancient kingdom of the Korean peninsula and the current official name of the DPRK; this is the Korean term ethnic Korean Chinese usually use for themselves)</td>
<td>조선사람 (People of Choseon, a term used by ethnic Korean Chinese to refer to DPRK Koreans)</td>
<td>한국사람 (People of Hanguk; Hanguk is the official name of the ROK and ROK Koreans apply it to the entire Korean peninsula)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>중국 조선족 (People of Choseon nationality, a clarification of the previous term, used mostly among ROK Koreans)</td>
<td>조선인 (A person of the country of Choseon, a term used by DPRK Koreans to refer to themselves)</td>
<td>남조선인 (A person of southern Korea; this is a humorous term used by ethnic Korean Chinese to imply that Choseon is the legitimate name of the Korean peninsula and thus the DPRK the legitimate government; it is offensive to ROK Koreans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>한국 동포 (Chinese compatriots/co-ethnics, a politically correct neologism used in the ROK, which nonetheless some ethnic Korean Chinese find offensive because it implies that their primary identity is Korean, not Chinese)</td>
<td>북한사람 (People of northern Korea, a term used in the ROK which used the ROK’s name for the Korean peninsula, Hanguk, rather than the DPRK’s name for the peninsula, Choseon).</td>
<td>해외 동포 (overseas compatriots, a larger category used by ROK Koreans to refer to all ethnic Koreans outside of the ROK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>해외 동포 (overseas compatriots, a larger category used by ROK Koreans to refer to all ethnic Koreans outside of the ROK)</td>
<td>해외 동포 (overseas compatriots, a larger category used by ROK Koreans to refer to all ethnic Koreans outside of the ROK)</td>
<td>해외 동포 (overseas compatriots, a larger category used by ROK Koreans to refer to all ethnic Koreans outside of the ROK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese: Similarly, the main conflict lies in choosing between the DPRK’s name for Korea (朝鮮, Chaoxian) and the ROK’s name for Korea (韩国, Hanguo). This conflict is not as apparent for Chinese-speakers, because most simply accept that the DPRK is 朝鮮 and the ROK is 韓國, and the country’s populations follow the country names. Greater confusion exists for what to call the Korean language (朝鮮语, literally “language of Chaoxian,” or 韓國語, “language of Hanguo”)</td>
<td>朝鮮族 (People of Chaoxian nationality; this is the official Chinese name for ethnic Korean Chinese, and the Chinese term ethnic Korean Chinese use for themselves)</td>
<td>朝鮮人 (A person of [the country of] Chaoxian)</td>
<td>한국人 (A person of [the country of] Hanguk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>中國朝鮮族 (Chinese people of Chaoxian nationality; a clarifying term for Chinese-speakers, since non-Korean Chinese often confuse the terms for ethnic Korean Chinese and DPRK Korean)</td>
<td>北朝鮮人 (A person of northern Chaoxian, which Chinese-speakers sometimes employ to indicate awareness of the division of the Korean peninsula, and which sometimes distinguishes DPRK citizens from the PRC’s ethnic Korean Chinese population, who would by contrast be called a 朝鮮族)</td>
<td>南朝鮮人 (A person of southern Chaoxian, which I have only heard used playfully among Korean Chinese and some people who work in the DPRK, as a way to razz the ROK and humorously invert the perceived hierarchy that elevates the ROK above the DPRK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>朝族 (a shortening of the official term 朝鮮族, this is often done by non-Korean Chinese and young Korean Chinese as a slang term; many older Korean Chinese find it offensive)</td>
<td>朝族 (a shortening of the official term 朝鮮族, this is often done by non-Korean Chinese and young Korean Chinese as a slang term; many older Korean Chinese find it offensive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this dissertation, I will use the translated term Korean Chinese, rather than phonetic terms like Joseonjok, Chaoxianzu, Jung-guk dongpo, etc. This follows the general convention of placing ethnic qualifiers before citizenship (as in African American, Chinese Singaporean, or white Australian).

Some further confusion can exist over the name of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture itself. Historically, this area was known in Chinese as 间岛 (JianDao) and in Korean as 간도 (Kando/Gando). But as that was the official name used by the Japanese during colonial times, it was rejected and unofficially banned from use under the PRC (Setsure 1979, 93).
Chapter I: Background and structure of the study

I.1. Background

I begin here by offering a historical overview of the Yanbian area and the Korean minority in China. Understanding the origin stories and evolving situation of Yanbian and the Korean Chinese allows us to see how the contemporary moment, of intense cross-border flows between Yanbian and South Korea, is such a break with its past. Yanbian’s history can be read as one minor plotline of the Cold War, and its reconnection with South Korea might be one of the few remaining Cold War breaches being healed. But Yanbian’s story, and the stories of its people, are no less a unique product of China’s tumultuous domestic politics during and since the Mao era. The opening section of this chapter therefore aims to give the reader a sense of Yanbian’s own character, and how it has evolved as a borderland minority area in relation to a broader China. This leads into my research questions, which engage key points of discontinuity between Yanbian’s past in the Mao era and its lurching transition into reform. I then offer a short overview of the theoretical engagements that animate this work. While these are taken up for discussion more fully in subsequent chapters, they also inform my research methodology. Connecting this understanding of transnational space’s performative construction with the political concerns raised by feminist postcolonial methodologies, I conclude with a detailed review of my field research and data analysis methods.
I.1.A. Historical Background of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture

The current borders of Yanbian Prefecture, comprising almost one-quarter of northeast China’s Jilin Province, were essentially drawn in 1885 by the Qing Dynasty, which set aside this land for settlement by Korean refugees fleeing a drought on the Korean peninsula. This drought, coupled with widespread peasant unrest that culminated in the 1894 rebellion known as the Tonghak uprising, produced a famine that drove tens of thousands of Koreans north across the Tumen River (Armstrong 2003, 18). Settlement in this region had previously been prohibited, since it was seen as the spiritual home of the Manchu people. But with increasing numbers of Koreans coming anyway, and in an effort to push back on Russian settlers, the Qing acquiesced. By 1910 an estimated 210,000 Koreans were living north of the Korea-China border (Enze Han
The vast majority of these Koreans came from the provinces of North Pyeongan, North Hamgyeong, and South Hamgyeong, all in today’s DPRK.

Figure 2: Map of present-day DPRK

While this first wave of Koreans entering China sought to escape a famine, the second wave fled political persecution. The Japanese invaded Korea in 1905 and took it as an official colony in 1910. This led to another wave of migration as political refugees fled Japanese control. During this time, the Japanese began expanding their sphere of influence into northeastern China, relying initially on “soft power.” As agreed in the Treaty of Portsmouth, which ended the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the Japanese managed the South Manchurian Railway, “a quasi-governmental corporation with many subsidiary enterprises and one of the largest research organizations in the world until 1945” (Duara 2006, 2). On the basis of the South Manchuria Railway, Jilin began to develop as a source of iron and coal for Japanese industries located in Liaoning Province, where the Japanese had taken over the “lease” on the
Liaodong Peninsula (then called the Kwantung Leased Territory) including the key port city of Dalian (Cotton 1996, 1087).

In addition to this economic expansion, Japan began to exert socio-cultural influence in northeastern China by opening free schools. In an interview, Professor Li Hong of Yanbian University recounted the importance of these schools in facilitating cultural assimilation:

These assimilation policies were first implemented on the Korean peninsula, but when they arrived in the northeast, even until the ‘nine-eighteen incident’ [9.18.1931, the Mukden Incident1] there were some assimilation policies, but they were not mandatory. Japan in the ethnic Korean parts of China established many ordinary schools, Japanese schools, but they were not mandatory, only those who wanted would come. Because the Japanese didn’t totally occupy northeastern China before the 1931.9.18 incident. But after the Mukden Incident, it became mandatory, one must definitely speak Japanese, sing Japanese songs, and one definitely could not oppose Japanese, rather one must definitely become a Japanese person (Interview, 8/4/2015).

[最初是在朝鲜半岛实行了同化教育，但是到了东北，就是在九-一八事件之前，延边地区，对于东北的朝鲜族采取了一些同化教育，但不是强制性的。日本在朝鲜族部落建立了很多普通学校，日本的普通学校，但不是强制性的，你愿意来就来，是自愿的。因为九-一八事件之前，日本还没有完全占领东北。但是在九-一八时间以后就是强制性了，一定要说日语，一定要唱日本歌，不仅你不能反对日本，而且你一定要变成日本人。]

---

1 “On September 18, 1931, an explosion destroyed a section of railway track near the city of Mukden. The Japanese, who owned the railway, blamed Chinese nationalists for the incident and used the opportunity to retaliate and invade Manchuria” (Randolph 2015).
The third wave of Koreans entering China were forced there as part of a Japanese resettlement plan. By 1931 the Korean population of northeastern China had already reached 900,000 (Armstrong 2003, 18). After Japan occupied Manchuria in 1931 and established the country of Manchukuo there in 1932, they “gifted” large tracts of land in southern Korea to Japanese settlers. The Koreans who had previously lived and farmed that land were forced north, into the largely uninhabited region that now form Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces of China (called the Northeast, or 东北 [dongbei], in China). Koreans were especially wanted there, because they imported a special wet-paddy rice farming technique (水田) that dramatically increased agricultural output; as one Japanese scholar wrote,

Paddy cultivation was introduced about that time [1900] by Korean peasants, whose skill and toil enabled them to surmount many difficulties and make production feasible. The damp land, which Chinese farmers and peasants were loath to cultivate, had been allocated to Korean peasants, who applied their skill to convert it into paddy fields. By the 1920s, through gradual improvement of their techniques and the irrigation system and through the use of better seeds, paddy fields came to be more productive and to have a higher value than the dry fields. The expansion of paddy cultivation was not limited to Yenpien [Yanbian] but also occurred in other parts of the Northeast as well, with Koreans being the chief cultivators (Satsure 1979, 107).

In addition, labor shortages in Manchukuo prompted the Japanese to conscript Korean workers for mines. During the height of the Japanese occupation, an estimated 2 million Koreans lived north of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers (Armstrong 2003, 18). Enze Han (2013, 68) estimates the Korean population of China in 1945 at 2.16 million.

During this time, Koreans became close collaborators with the Chinese communists in the region. As those resisting the Japanese were offered training and material assistance by the Soviet Union, both Koreans and Chinese formed guerrilla military units fighting under the direction of the USSR. The Korean units were formally incorporated as the Korean Volunteer Army (Kr: 조선 의용군, Chosun Uiyonggun; Ch: 朝鮮义勇军, Chaoxian Yiyongjun) in 1919,
and officially transferred from subunits of the Korean Communist Party under Soviet direction to full Chinese command in 1928 (Armstrong 2003, 20, citing Suh 1972). Key leaders in the Korean communist resistance movement in Manchuria during this time include Kim Il-Sung, Kim Tu-bong, and Pak Hon-yong. Originally organized into separate communist groups (the Chinese Communist Party and the Choson [Korean] Communist Party), the Korean Communist Party was disbanded and merged with the Chinese Communist Party in 1928, placed in 1930 under the leadership of the Manchurian Provincial Committee (Min-Dong Paul Lee, 2005). The Koreans at this time numerically dominated the communist group: “in 1930, over 90% of all CCP members were Koreans; 93% of the Communist Youth Organization members were Koreans; and virtually all of the 10,000 organized peasant families were Korean families. Even as late as 1934, more than half of all CCP members in Manchuria were Korean, and over 95% of guerrilla armies consisted of Koreans” (Min-Dong Paul Lee, 2005, p. 109). This collaboration was nonetheless marred by ethnic strife. The “Minsaengdang Incident” of 1931, in particular, in which the Manchurian Provincial Committee killed over 1,000 Korean communists falsely accused of collaboration with the Japanese, left a legacy of suspicion and paranoia among Koreans in the Yanbian area (Han 1999).
It should simultaneously be noted that a significant number of Koreans also fought on the side of the Japanese. In response to the guerrilla warfare in Manchuria, the Japanese organized the “Gando Special Force” (간도 특설대, 间岛特设队) in 1938. Comprised of pro-Japanese ethnic Koreans, this unit was a branch of the Manchukuo Imperial Army tasked specifically with counter-insurgency in the present-day Yanbian area (Jowlett et al, 2004, 34). Beyond those
fighting specifically in Yanbian, a large number of Koreans advanced to high ranks within the Japanese Imperial Army on the Korean peninsula. Many of them, including Pak Chung-hee, later became important officials for the Republic of Korea, endorsed and supported by the US. While it will be discussed below, it is interesting to note here that the leaders of the anti-Japanese forces in Manchuria later formed the leadership of the DPRK.

Figure 6: Yanbian Prefecture, marked in red

At the end of the war, Koreans in China were offered the opportunity to return to their hometowns on the Korean peninsula. For many, this was not realistic; their hometowns had been destroyed, their lands had been re-divided or repossessed, or they could not afford the return
journey. Many likely expected that they would be able to return at a later time. In addition, many were stopped and turned back by suspicious Soviet guards at the Korean border (Cathcart 2010, 31). Roughly 600,000 Koreans left Manchuria for the Korean peninsula in 1945 (Si Joong Kim, p. 103; for discussion of this number, see Cathcart 2010 footnote 22), but 1.1 million chose to remain, forming the first generation of the Korean minority that is recognized today. China in 1945 was engaged in a civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists; the Koreans in the northeast, having fought alongside the Chinese under the same communist banner against the Japanese, again served as vital allies for the Communists in the civil war, totaling up to 16,000 soldiers serving under Chinese communist command (Kim Donggil 2012, 233). They were further motivated in this by the land seizures and forced evictions wrought by the Chinese Nationalists in Manchuria, who officially viewed all Koreans as Japanese collaborators (Cathcart 2010, 31; The Korea Society p. 177). Nationalist-led mobs killed an estimated 75 Koreans in Changchun City, Jilin, and official Nationalist officials set up concentration camps for Koreans in Liaoning Province (Cathcart 2010, 32). Ethnic Koreans fled en masse to relatively safer areas like Harbin and Yanbian. The unpopularity of the Nationalists in the predominantly-Korean Yanbian area ultimately led to their defeat there; the last of the Nationalists in Yanbian surrendered to the CCP in 1947 (Cathcart 2010, 32). While the Nationalists’ actions had the immediate effect of increasing Korean support for the Communist cause, their long-term implications for the geographic distribution of Koreans in northeastern China are still seen today, as the majority of ethnic Koreans remain concentrated in Yanbian and near Harbin.

The Korean communist leadership also underwent important changes between 1945 and 1950. Much of the wartime leadership, at the behest of the Soviets, left Manchuria for the Soviet-controlled northern part of the Korean peninsula. There they would form the core of the
DPRK leadership for decades to come. Most of these men, including Kim Il-sung, Kim Yong-Bom, and Kim Changman, had extensive contacts among the Chinese communists (all had spent time at Yan’an, the CCP revolutionary base) but were primarily affiliated with the Soviets, having fled into the USSR during the anti-Japanese struggle and remaining there from 1940-45 (Lankov 2002). By contrast, the Korean communist leader Chu Tok-hae (주덕해, 朱德海) had remained based at Yan’an through the end of the war, working closely with the Chinese communist leadership. Chu was therefore selected by the CCP to oversee cooperative efforts between Koreans and Chinese in the Yanbian area after 1945. Communist leadership expressed suspicions over the durability of the Yanbian Koreans’ loyalty, noting that (due to 35 years of Japanese education) many Koreans were fluent in Japanese (Cathcart 2010, 35). Chu’s efforts were deemed successful, and in late 1949 he was invited to Beijing to participate in discussions on China’s minority nationality policy.

Chu had long advocated for the Koreans in the northeast to be granted the status of minority nationality (少数民族, 소수 민족), including full Chinese citizenship. Chu felt that this would reaffirm the absolute loyalty of the ethnic Koreans to the new Chinese state. At the same time, Chu worked to maintain relations between the Korean Chinese and their brethren in the newly-formed DPRK. Trade and educational exchanges between Yanbian and Pyongyang accounted for the bulk of assistance that Yanbian received in the immediate post-war years. This would come back to haunt Chu during the Cultural Revolution, but the groundwork he laid between 1945 and 1950 has unquestionably shaped the world up to today. Without his personal networks, it is questionable whether China would have come to support the DPRK during the Korean War or maintained the close alliance that endures even now.
The outbreak of the Korean War was prefaced by thousands of provocations and indignities by both the DPRK and the ROK. Administered under the “trusteeship” of the USSR and the USA respectively, the Korean peninsula had been scheduled for joint elections in 1948 that would produce a unified peninsula. But with both the USSR and the USA installing and supporting their favored leaders in the areas under their control (Kim Il-sung in the DPRK, Syngman Rhee in the ROK), the two governments held separate elections. The ROK formed as a nation on August 15, 1948; the DPRK came into formal existence on August 25, 1948. In the ROK, especially, the lead-up to this election was marked by massive anti-leftist atrocities, with ROK troops, openly aided by US military, massacring up to 100,000 ROK citizens (Halliday and Cumings 1988).

Meanwhile, the DPRK leadership was working closely with its Soviet patrons to prepare for a war of reunification. The USSR committed military supplies and financial support to the war, but refused to supply troops. The PRC, for its part, was not directly involved in the initial planning or preparation for war. As Kim Donggil (2012, 231) has shown, the Chinese communist People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at the end of the Chinese civil war had three divisions of ethnically Korean soldiers fighting under its command. In April 1949, claiming that an attack by the ROK was imminent, the DPRK sent a delegate to Beijing to petition Mao Zedong for the use of the three Korean divisions of the PLA. Mao agreed to immediately send two divisions, one from Shenyang and one from Changchun, explicitly for the defense of DPRK territory against an ROK offensive. These two divisions, totaling over 20,000 soldiers, arrived in the DPRK on July 20 and 25, 1949. Importantly, both Mao and Stalin interpreted this transfer as a way to ensure peace and stability in the region while it recovered from the devastation of the Japanese occupation, the Second World War, and the Chinese Civil War. But by January 1950,
Stalin had come to support for Kim Il-sung’s repeated proposals to reunify the peninsula by force (“By the end of 1949, Kim had asked Stalin more than 48 times to permit an attack on the South” Kim Donggil 236). In March of the following year, apparently at the request of the soldiers themselves, the third Korean division of the PLA was transferred to the DPRK, adding another 14,000 PLA veterans (Kim Donggil, 234). Mao appears to have been made aware of the agreement between Stalin and Kim Il-Sung in May 1950, and offered “muted approval” (Wingrove 2000) on the assumption that China would not be asked to supply troops or material support. When the United Nations intervened on behalf of the ROK, and the USSR backed out of its supporting role, China intervened only to keep foreign troops off its soil. Ironically, in these efforts Mao Zedong’s own son Mao Anying fought and died there (“Hungry Ghosts” p. 321).

In Yanbian, the outbreak of the Korean War was not anticipated, but welcomed after the fact. Known as the War to Resist American Aggression and Help Korea (抗美援朝战争, or 朝战) for many it was a continuation of the campaign of resistance against imperialism, especially since the US had allowed most Japanese-era military administrators to retain their positions in the ROK (Stueck 1997, 31). At the same time, the spectacle of Koreans dividing their loyalties between the USSR and the USA put the Korean Chinese in an awkward position. As early as June 30, 1950, five days after the initial DPRK invasion, Yanji City held a rally to show support for the communist cause and for the PRC (Cathcart 2012, 42). Chu Tok-hae especially was careful to always link anti-American rhetoric to the PRC’s causes in both Korea and Taiwan, avoiding any show of favoritism. But as the war progressed, and the front crept back up towards Yanbian’s border with the DPRK, shows of support became more serious. Yanbian University recruited up to 10,000 local youths and sent them to fight in the DPRK; Cathcart (2012, 43)
reports that 6,981 were killed or left missing in action. Campaigns to find “alleged spies air-dropped in from South Korea” (Cathcart 2012, 45) were led by Chu Tok-hae, presumably to further demonstrate loyalty to political state over ethnicity. In another telling show of distance, in Yanbian the war was usually referred to by its Chinese name, and never by the DPRK name "War for Liberation of the Fatherland" (조국 해방 전쟁).

The Korean and Chinese communist military alliance, stretching from the early 1900s’ guerrilla warfare against the Japanese up to the bloody chemical warfare of the Korean War, has served as the cement bonding China and the DPRK together up to today. For many locals in Yanbian, the figure of the American imperialist remains the paramount enemy; this often came up as a semi-apology, semi-accusation during interviews. In addition, while there are no independently verified accounts of battles taking place north of the Tumen River, many locals claimed that bands of American soldiers did cross the border and engaged local militias on Yanbian soil (interviews held 1/22/2014 and 4/13/2014). I suggest that these stories, regardless of any documented facts behind them, serve further to demonstrate the loyalty, patriotism, and sacrifice of the Korean Chinese for the sake of their new homeland.

Korean cultural tradition, very similar to Chinese, dictates that one’s ancestral hometown (고향,故乡) is the source of many immutable personal characteristics, and that there exists a type of biological bond between the soil, the agricultural products, and the people that inhabit and consume from that land. Koreans trace this back for generations, and although the upheavals of the 20th century led to unprecedented internal displacement (recent waves of urbanization not being the least of these), every informant I met in both Yanbian and Seoul could tell me with great precision the name, location, and local history of their ancestral hometown. But more than 20 of my Yanbian informants supplemented their actual ancestral hometown with a local history
- how and why their family came to belong physically to the soil of Yanbian. Most often, these histories rested on the shedding of blood, in either the Anti-Japanese War or the Korean Civil War. As their family’s blood mixed with the local soil, a new biological bond was formed. This new bond simultaneously gives legitimacy to the speaker’s residency, dissolves the stigma of refugee, and evokes a heroic pioneer imagery.

Following their collaboration against the Japanese and in tandem with their shared military action against the US, the Koreans were rewarded with their own autonomous region in Jilin Province, called Yanbian. Yanbian was established as a minority administrative area on September 3, 1952. At its founding, it was declared an autonomous region (自治区, zizhiqu), but still administratively subordinate to Jilin Province. In 1955, then, it was redefined as an autonomous prefecture (自治州, zizhizhou) (Colin 2009, footnote 10, citing Zhonghua renmin gongheguo diming cidian, Dictionary of Geographical Names of the People’s Republic of China, volume on Jilin, Peking, Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994, pp. 252-253). Chu Tok-hae was appointed prefectural leader. Yanbian was held up as a model prefecture, even hosting a delegate of Tibetans who came "to observe how a faithful and nominally autonomous ethnic region should be run" (Cathcart 2012, 46).

Despite the official record of military glory and national unification, the 1950s were remembered by my research participants as primarily a time of hunger. One man, born in 1941, recalled the 1950s:

"Back then, the farmers were really poor, it was really hard to get a cow to plough the fields. Back then too food was not plentiful, it was just a hungry lifestyle, so back then people would eat trees in place of real food, or we would eat bean-cake [豆饼/du-byeong], back then eating bean cake was real luxury. Bean cakes were made with beans and oil, and it was all dregs. Now that is cattle feed. That oil was squeezed out as residue [was left over from other uses]. If there wasn’t that then we ate nothing. If we couldn't get that to eat, and there was also no oil, we would put a drop of water in the pot and mix it with the wild vegetables. So if there was too little
of that (the corn) we would fill it up with wild vegetables, and by means of that we would replace rice.” (Interview, Yanji City, 1/28/2014)

The Great Leap Forward, begun in 1958, exacerbated the weak economic situation throughout China in the 1950s and resulted in widespread famine (known in English as the Great Chinese Famine, in Chinese as either the Great Three-Year Famine, 三年大饥荒, or the (politically-correct) Three Years of Natural Disasters, 三年自然灾害). Yanbian was not exempt from this, and food-production in the area largely stopped, as farming was temporarily considered a politically reactionary activity. To escape the famine, many Korean Chinese crossed the border into North Korea, reversing the process that brought their kin into China in the 1860s. At that time the border was fairly porous, legally undefined (Choi 2012, 512), and cross-border movement was neither explicitly illegal nor socially condemned. As Choi (2012, 514) writes,

"...the Korean-Chinese were welcomed by the North Korean government, and they received North Korean citizenship once they arrived in North Korea, as a part of the [DPRK’s] War Reconstruction Project. It is estimated that during the Great Famine in China between 1959 and 1962, around 300,000 undocumented Korean-Chinese crossed the border [into the DPRK], and half of them resettled in North Korea (Democratic Labor Party of Republic of Korea, 2004). A similar occurrence of undocumented migration happened again during the Cultural Revolution."

With the end of the great Leap Forward in 1961, and the slow resuscitation of Chinese agriculture, the early 1960s were a time of stability if not prosperity in Yanbian. Research participants stated that the 1960s, much like the 50s, were a time of ongoing hunger for them:
“In the 60s even if you had money there was nothing to buy. When we were going to have a wedding, the day before, in order to buy a piece of cloth, we would take the wedding certificate to get a ticket, and we could get a piece of cloth, but there was no blanket (the marriage bed), but another person had two, so back then there were no things and nothing to buy. Other things were even busier (worse). For alcohol, there was nothing other than local wine. We didn’t get more than 5 geun (1 geun = 0.6 kg). When we married we would take the wedding certificate and get 5 geun. Back then, there weren’t consumer products so this degree of today’s “having money and being able to go anywhere” lifestyle, is so very comfortable and the level we now here was unthinkable back then. But today the lowest income levels receive poverty and welfare subsidy. Those people back then had no income. They had nothing.” (Interview, Yanji City, 1/28/2014)

The late 1960s also brought the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution to Yanbian.

Yanbian, like many minority areas, was hit especially hard because of its ethnic character. "Ethnic splittism" became a common charge targeting many local residents of the capital city Yanji, as well as smaller nearby towns like Tumen, Antu, and Longjing. Estimates of between 2,000 (Choi 2012, 514) and 4,000 (Korea Society, “Korea: Lessons for High School Social Science Courses” p. 177) Korean Chinese were killed, and many thousands more were subject to arrest or “sent down to the countryside.” Chu Tok-hae, who at that time had advanced to being an alternative member of the CCP Central Committee and the vice-governor of Jilin Province, “was denounced in August 1968 as ‘China’s Khrushchev representative, a nationalist factionalist, local nationalist, and would-be monarch of an independent kingdom’” (Setsure 1979, 99).

Sebastian Colin (2003, footnote 13) writes that “Zhu Dehai [Chinese pronunciation of Cho Tok-hae] was very close to Zhou Enlai and had acquired great power during the 1950s and 1960s.
Along with Zhou, he had been party to the negotiations setting out the frontier with North Korea and had been an important element in defining China’s foreign policy towards North Korea. […] The attack upon him now was undoubtedly connected with the state of China’s relations with North Korea, which became very hostile at precisely this period.” He was killed by Red Guards in 1971 (Cathcart 2012, 47).

One 55-year-old Korean Chinese research participant recounted how her father, a medical doctor from the small town of Longjing, was forced to publicly confess his ‘crimes’ of trying to advance the ethnic Korean minority at the expense of the Chinese nation. Their entire family, consisting of the father, mother, and their two daughters, were ‘sent down’ to a tiny village outside of Longjing and forced to farm for ten years. This research participant, explaining that she had been very young at the time, claimed to thoroughly enjoy her time in the village. She had much more freedom than when they lived in the town; she didn’t have to go to school, and could play outside with her sister all the time. Only in hindsight did she recognize the hardship that this time brought to her parents (Interview, Yanji, 05/25/2014).
This experience of targeted cultural persecution was of course not unique to Yanbian, but was especially concentrated here. Persecution of the Korean Chinese was led personally by the nephew of Mao Zedong, Mao Yuanxin. As Colin (2003, footnote 13) documents, “Mao Yuanxin lived in Harbin in a province of Heilongjiang. His arrival in Yanbian in August 1967 coincided with a radicalisation of the Cultural Revolution, and it was from this period onwards that a real policy of assimilation was launched against Yanbian’s Korean minority […] Why Mao Yuanxin went to stay in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is very unclear; even a specialist on that period, Lee Jeanyong, admits that he does not know the reason. It is very likely, however, that Mao Yuanxin came there on the orders of his uncle, Mao Zedong.” In Yanbian, this persecution resulted in the stoppage of minority language education for almost 20 years, large scale Han Chinese immigration that left the Koreans in the minority, and an enduring sense of grievance against the ethnic Han majority (Choi 2012, Sensure 1979). As mentioned above, this persecution also prompted many Korean Chinese to undertake short-term, temporary, or even permanent migration into the DPRK, just across the long, mountainous, largely-unguarded border from Yanbian. As the DPRK economy at this time received extensive support from the Soviet Union, in the form of fertilizers, mechanical support for agriculture, and favorable terms of trade, economic and social conditions there were considerably better than in China. Choi (2012, 512) describes one man she interviewed in Yanbian; born there as a Korean Chinese, he officially took DPRK citizenship during the Cultural Revolution, only to flee back across the border into China in the 1990s as an illegal immigrant. He states that he is not alone; “Among North Koreans who live in China as illegal migrants, many were born in China or have families or relatives in China like me.”
This historic moment, in which persecuted and starving Koreans from China fled across the border and received help from their DPRK brethren, remains a vital and living memory for many people in Yanbian. This is the unspoken subtext informing much of the tension between DPRK citizens and Korean Chinese, between Korean Chinese and South Koreans, and between Korean Chinese and Han Chinese today. On four separate occasions, Korean Chinese research participants have told me of encounters with DPRK defectors seeking help in China. In each case, the participant cited this legacy of mutual assistance as her or his rationale for offering help. One woman, from the border city of Tumen, stated:

“North Koreans come almost every year to ask for money or food. They knock on our doors after dark. Sometimes they claim they are a part of our extended family, or we have some distant connection that isn’t real. I know that isn’t true, but still, they are so poor, my parents and I usually give them something. During the 1970s, actually Yanbian was even poorer than North Korea, and they helped us then” (Interview, in English, Tumen City, 11/19/2013).

Another man, whose mother was from the DPRK and whose father was Han Chinese, indignantly expressed what he saw as the ingratitude of the Korean Chinese; he told me “The Korean Chinese now have forgotten their own history, but they were so poor in the 1970s that they went begging to North Korea” (Interview, Yanji City, 1/25/2014). While some of their stories seemed possibly exaggerated, and of course could not be independently verified, I was nonetheless struck by their shared emphasis on the idea that the Korean Chinese have a personal debt of gratitude to the DPRK, going back to the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, concluding with the death of Mao Zedong and fall of the Gang of Five, brought respite from overt persecution in the Yanbian area. The 1980s, then, were a time of slow socio-cultural recovery and gradual adjustment to Deng Xiaoping’s political reforms. These reforms included the imposition of the Family Planning Policies (often called the One-Child Policy) and the dismantling of much state-run heavy
industry. Since China’s Northeast (the three provinces of Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning) had been structured as the industrial heartland, the economic reforms were fairly devastating to the region. Changchun City, capital of Jilin Province, since 1956 has been the headquarters and manufacturing center for FAW Group (First Automotive Works), China’s first state-owned automaker (Sit and Liu 2000). But with the post-reform rise of imports, private production, and competition, the floundering of large state-run heavy industry has been felt keenly throughout this region. The decline of centrally-planned economic activity and the implementation of the CCP’s Coastal Development Strategy in 1988, has left Jilin high and dry: “As a land-locked province, Jilin would have to rely upon linkages to coastal provinces (especially Liaoning), and would have to wait for a transfer of technology and capital from those provinces until their development had reached a point where such advantages could be exported” (Cotton 1996, 1087). FAW Group, initially centered in Changchun for its proximity to the Soviet Union, has opened factories in ten other provinces, and begun joint-ventures with multi-national corporations like Daewoo (Sit and Liu 2000, 661). Without ports or high-speed rail connections, the Northeast failed to keep up with the development along China’s eastern seaboard.

This slow reorientation of the 1980s was radically shaken up in 1992. In that year, China and the ROK established diplomatic relations for the first time since both counties’ founding. The ROK’s economic and cultural influence had grown immensely throughout the 1980s, but the lack of official connection with China had prevented any meaningful flows of money, people, ideas, or goods between the countries. Kim Hakjoon (1994, 33) argues that the “weakening of ideology in world politics in general and strengthening of pragmatism in Chinese policies in particular, which became more manifest in the late 1970s and the 1980s” encouraged the ROK to launch a new “Northern Policy” in 1988, seeking to establish diplomatic relations with
communist and socialist countries. While this new policy is often cited in academic and policy work as a turning point in relations, 33 of my adult and older research participants cited the 1988 Seoul Olympics as the moment they became aware of the ROK and its economic miracle. In any case, the 1992 accord between the ROK and the PRC governments opened the door to direct relations between the ethnic Korean Chinese and ROK Koreans. It has been this relationship, rather than the foreign factories and SEZs in other parts of China, which has remade the social, cultural, and economic landscape of Yanbian.

Economically, the 1990s were a period of extended boom in Yanbian. The ROK began offering short-term, easily attainable “industrial trainee” visas for Korean Chinese unskilled laborers. The rural population of Yanbian flooded out via ferries heading from Dalian to Incheon, as much as 25% of the population migrating at least temporarily between 1992 and 2000. Their remittances came flooding back, reaching US$1 billion in 2006, at least equaling (and probably surpassing) Yanbian’s local GDP (Luova 2009). This whirlwind of incoming cash fed a boom in Yanbian, as people built new apartments and houses, bought cars and TVs, modernized farms, and opened karaoke centers and bars. This circular flow of migrants and monies led to significant changes in social practice and material culture, which is fundamentally the basis of this dissertation.

Social changes emerged as a response to the physical absence of so many people, especially young, working- and reproductive-aged people. While specific causes, experiences, and results will be detailed in the body of this dissertation, I am interested in three broad structural changes in social practice. First, since ROK visas were available only to ethnic Korean Chinese, the resulting demographic gap was specific to ethnic Korean sectors of the population and economy; furthermore, since ethnic Han Chinese were ineligible for the lucrative
jobs in the ROK, more ethnic Han Chinese came to live and work in Yanbian. Second, the
ROK’s labor market for immigrants was and remains highly gendered; immigrant men mostly
perform manual labor like construction, and immigrant women work chiefly in the service
industry. This division gives immigrant women a significant advantage over immigrant men in
terms of earning power – and has resulted in a relatively higher emigration rate for women. Thus
household structures in Yanbian have altered to accommodate the absence of women, the
presence of left-behind fathers and children, and a growing reliance on immigrant remittances.
Third, this migration network brought the Korean Chinese into contact with ROK society just as
the Korean Chinese entered a phase of newfound wealth. This has led to a radical shift in
consumption, entertainment, and style choices in the Yanbian area.

The euphoric rush towards the ROK in the 1990s has been described in accounts like
Caren Freedman’s *Making and Faking Kinship* (2012) and Outi Luova’s 2007 doctoral
dissertation *Ethnic Transnational Capital Transfers and Development - Utilization of Ties with
South Korea in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, China*. Both studies describe
various ways that the Korean Chinese sought to capitalize on their newfound connections to The
ROK during the 1990s and early 2000s. Although these authors trace different types of flows -
Freedman researching marriage migrants and Luova focusing on investment capital - their stories
follow similar trajectories, with the early 1990s a time of enthusiastic collaboration, ethnic
“reunification,” and unbounded possibility, followed by several high-profile scams and frauds,
which led to a turning of the tides in the early 2000s as suspicion and distrust between the two
populations increased. This distrust was crystallized in 2003, when the ROK rewrote its
immigration laws to by and large exclude the Korean Chinese (N. H.-J. Kim 2008). This
dissertation aims to pick up the narrative after 2007, yet another turning point, when the ROK
again liberalized its visa regulation system to bring it in line with international human rights conventions (Kim H.-I. and I. Oh, 2012). At this point, an estimated 400,000 ethnic Korean Chinese were living in the ROK. Unlike other low-wage immigrants in the ROK (low-wage immigrants coming primarily from China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa, but excluding high-wage immigrants like English teachers from the U.S., Canada, and Europe), the ethnic Korean Chinese did not remain isolated in immigrant communities on the outskirts of Seoul. Rather, the majority of Korean Chinese moved into low-income neighborhoods within Seoul and also other cities, while another portion of marriage migrants settled in small rural villages in the ROK countryside (Kim Choong Soon 2011).

I.1.B. Gender Imbalance in the ROK

This marriage migration emerged from complex social conditions and relationships; in the ROK, the most visible motive was its skewed demographic profile. Since the 1970s the country has demonstrated a demographic transition, as birthrates decline in tandem with increasing life expectancy. But it has also retained many traditional gender roles and family practices, including low levels of extra-marital fertility (childbirth out of wedlock), late departure from the parental home, and low frequency of divorce (Chung & Das Gupta, 2007; Suzuki, 2008). ROK fertility rates have thus fallen below the level necessary for population replacement, 2.1 births per woman. Indeed, in 2013 it registered a birthrate of just 1.19 (“Fewer and Fewer,” 2014). Many countries with extremely low birthrates have redressed this issue through economic and policy interventions, especially offering financial and institutional support to working mothers (Myrskyla, Kohler, & Billari, 2009). The ROK, however, has moved towards the dual-income domestic model and reached high levels of development without recovering a higher
birthrate (Goldstein, Sobotka, & Jasilioniene, 2009). As a result, its population is aging at an unusually fast pace, rapidly reducing the pool of potential spouses (Kim, 2009).

The ROK’s demographic profile has been further distorted by a large sex-ratio imbalance. With a traditional patrilineal preference for boys, sex-selection has produced a widely skewed sex ratio since the 1970s (Chung & Das Gupta, 2007). A normal sex ratio at birth is an average 105 boys born per 100 girls. This sex ratio imbalance peaked in 1990 at 116.5 boys born per 100 girls (Choe, 2007) and remained above 114 throughout the early 1990s (Guilmoto, 2007, p. 2). The ROK government, as of the late 1980s has attempted to redress this, but a decline in the sex ratio was not seen until 2002, though by 2006 the rate had dropped to 107.4 (Choe, 2007). Recent census data shows 2011 as the first year on record with a sex ratio within the range of standard deviation, recorded at 105.7 (Choi, 2012). However, this return to “normalcy” masks an enduring rural-urban gender divide. In the year 2000, for example, ROK rural villages showed a sex ratio of over 300 (boys born per 100 girls) for the age groups between 25 and 34 (Lee, Seol, & Cho, 2006, p. 167).

One obvious impact of this gender imbalance is the lack of marriageable women. The shortage of women, combined with educational and economic opportunities in the cities, gives women little incentive to settle for marriage to poor farmers, but leaves the most economically marginalized men with few options (Lee, Seol, & Cho, 2006). To remain unmarried in the ROK has traditionally carried very negative social connotations, which further stigmatize those already struggling economically. The gravity of the bachelor farmers’ plight was driven home during the 1980s and 90s with dozens of protest suicides by bachelors, drawing public attention to the issue (Kendall, 1996; Freeman, 2011, p. 37).
In 1992, against this background of socio-demographic imbalance, the ROK and China normalized diplomatic relations. This event drew ROK public awareness to the ethnic Korean minority living in Northeast China. In this unique geographic and historic context the Korean Chinese and the South Koreans rediscovered each other. South Koreans, struggling with a gender imbalance that threatened the social continuity of their ethnically homogenous nation (Freeman, 2011, p. 43) saw the Korean Chinese as still essentially Korean and thus compatible with ROK Korean wifely ideals. The Korean Chinese, imagining the ROK to be a uniformly wealthy “Asian Tiger” nation, expected clear benefits from stronger ties. In December 1990, a small ROK organization called the Overseas Korean Institute, run jointly by a political science professor and a former South Korean congressman, made the first match between a rural South Korean man and a Korean Chinese woman from Yanbian (Chung, 1990). This event was much publicized in the national media. Consequently, local governments and agricultural associations in rural districts of the ROK began arranging and subsidizing “marriage tours” for South Korean farmers to visit China to meet and marry ethnic Korean women (Kendall, 1996, p. 5).

This practice was soon expanded into a private industry, with marriage agencies specializing in matches for Korean Chinese women. Hye-kyung Lee (2008, p. 111) reports that between 1990 and 2005, almost 110,000 Korean Chinese women came to the ROK for marriage. In the South Korean imagination, these were desirable foreign spouses precisely because they were not quite foreign as they had retained Korean culture and language (M. Kim, 2008, p. 24). The existence of a specifically Korean geographic space within China, a bounded cultural zone, further contributed to the belief in the uncontaminated and pure ‘Korean-ness’ of the Korean Chinese. This understanding can be partially credited to the Chinese government, which actively promoted the cultural autonomy of some of its minority populations. South Koreans thus widely
presumed that the Korean Chinese women could integrate seamlessly into their society. Similarly, in the Korean Chinese imagination, the ROK was the ethnic homeland, a wealthy “Asian Tiger nation” where they would be received as equals and have the same economic opportunities and standard of living as South Korean citizens. Thus both populations initially anticipated marriage migration would be beneficial and fairly unproblematic.

However, through these divergent imagined contexts, the Korean Chinese and the South Koreans had mismatched expectations from such marriage migration. Korean Chinese brides had expected wealth and comfort. In reality, the South Korean men who sought wives abroad were those who had more or less failed to do so in the domestic marriage market. This was often because of marked poverty, lack of future options, or social stigmas like physical or mental disability (Abelmann & Kim, 2005, p. 109). Korean Chinese women therefore often found themselves married into poor rural families where they were expected to shoulder the heavy burden of agricultural labor and produce children who would eventually do the same. As Suan Lee (2010, p. 39) discusses, this experience of moving from periphery to periphery, remaining marginalized in both host and home countries, characterizes such women as “margizens.”

The South Korean men, by comparison, were unprepared for the very real differences between the two groups of Koreans that had developed during over fifty years of separation. The Korean Chinese have a strong local dialect, different taste in clothing, cuisine which incorporates Chinese ingredients, and many other local habits, which differ from the (also internally diverse) habits of South Koreans. But as Seol and Skrentny (2009) document, South Koreans overwhelmingly fail to view the Korean Chinese as “full or true Korean” (158). Their study reveals Korean Chinese labor migrants have long reported discrimination in the workplace, reflecting a broader attitude of “hierarchical nationhood.”
As a result of these mismatched expectations, “these marriages have been fraught with considerable marriage fraud and domestic violence, high divorce rates, and cultural tension” (Abelmann & Kim, 2005, p. 110). Statistics for 2007 show that roughly 13 percent of international marriages of South Korean men ended in divorce within the year (“Divorce among,” 2007). This rate increased to 16 percent by 2009; for comparison, South Korea’s overall divorce rate in 2010 was 7 percent (“Divorced”, 2011). Specific reasons for divorce vary. Based on anecdotal evidence, Freeman (2011) reports that many of these marriages were in fact fraudulent from the start, with Korean Chinese women paying huge sums for South Korean men to officially marry them, and then divorce them after they acquired citizenship.

There is more documentation of conflict around gender roles within marriage (Freeman, 2005; M. Kim, 2008, p. 173). Korean Chinese women, having experienced sixty years of communist ‘reeducation’ on gender equity, expect far greater parity in household labor. South Korean men, however, retain very traditional ideas of gendered duties. When these expectations are not met on either side, by “unfeminine” wives or “oppressive and patriarchal” husbands, the results can range from physical abuse to abandonment. This has resulted in a two-pronged portrayal of such failed marriages in the ROK press. Either the women are described as victims of abusive by uneducated rural men (Pak, 2007) or as manipulative visa-seekers who never intended to remain married (M. Kim, 2008; Choe, 2003). These perceptions continue to persist; in 2010 an official at the governmental bureau Statistics Korea was quoted as saying “we have data showing that about 500 Korean women who married Chinese men last year are actually former Chinese citizens who were naturalized by marriage to Korean citizens,” implying that these were Korean Chinese women who obtained ROK citizenship through marriage, then divorced their ROK husbands and married Korean Chinese men (Jung, 2010). Due to this bad press, South Korean
bachelors are increasingly seeking brides in Southeast Asian nations, perceived as untainted by progressive gender roles (M. Kim, 2008). Despite this, the Korean Chinese remain the largest source of foreign brides for South Koreans.

I.1.C. Globalization and Multiculturalism

The ROK government played a pivotal role in shaping the marriage migration of Korean Chinese women, although the legal framework has changed dramatically over 20 years. The development of an international marriage migration policy has closely paralleled the development of international labor migration policy, with early patchwork laws revised into harsh legislation in 1997, and relaxed again between 2003 and 2006 due to human rights violations (N.H.J. Kim, 2008). This evolution has generally occurred as a reaction and response to popular discourses of nationhood and belonging, as negotiated firstly between the Korean Chinese and South Koreans (J. K. Kim, 2011). And again, similar to Korean Chinese labor migration, this process has culminated in an understanding of the Korean Chinese as a group external to the Korean nation, one of several minority ethnic groups within the (ROK’s) Korean nation-state.

As mentioned before, the first documented case of a Korean Chinese-South Korean marriage was arranged by a former member of the South Korean National Assembly, and widely publicized in the ROK press (Chung, 1990; Freeman, 2011). This inspired several local governments in agricultural areas to finance marriage migration tours to Korean areas of China (Lee, 2008, p. 111). Hence the state’s role in marriage migration was both vital and visible from the beginning. In the early years, up until 1996, the ROK government had no specific procedure for dealing with international marriages and so essentially maintained an open-door policy.
Simultaneously, however, Korean Chinese labor migration was becoming a larger phenomenon. Between 1992 and 1996, this labor migration was regulated by small businesses rather than national legislation and the number of Korean Chinese people hoping to seek work in the ROK far surpassed the number of small businesses willing or able to bring them over (N.H.J. Kim, 2008).

Marriage migration, in contrast was a much easier route into the country; it resulted in immediate and unconditional citizenship for a bride, and offered the additional perquisite of two “parent” visas, to allow her parents to visit her in the ROK. The lack of regulation left marriage migration open to abuses in the early 1990s. Three types of marriage fraud resulted: first, Korean Chinese women would legally marry South Korean men when neither party actually wanted to enter into real marriages. This usually entailed some payment to the South Korean men, and resulted in speedy divorces. The second type of marriage fraud was that of “runaway brides,” wherein a Korean Chinese woman would enter into a marriage with a South Korean man and then either disappear or file for divorce immediately upon receipt of citizenship, to the shock and horror of the new bridegroom (Freeman, 2005, p. 93). Finally, the “parent” visas were often used not by the parents but rather given or sold to friends or relatives in search of South Korean employment (Freeman, 2011, p. 172).

The runaway bride phenomenon, in particular, garnered much attention in the South Korean press. Reports of heartbroken bachelor farmers who had invested their life savings in paying for marriage tours were played up in popular images of the cunning Chinese duping honest Koreans (Freeman, 2005; M. Kim, 2008). This eventually produced a legislative reaction, and between 1996 and 1997 an extremely strict Nationality Law was passed in the ROK. This required Korean Chinese women to prove first that they were unmarried, then register their new
marriages with the Chinese government, bring proof of the marriages to the ROK to apply for a visa, then wait two years on a temporary visa before becoming eligible for citizenship (Lee, 2008, endnote 4). During the waiting period, marriage migrants had no legal rights in South Korea. They were barred from working, from welfare benefits, and from the state-run healthcare system. This was roundly criticized by human rights groups, and for good reason. In fact many of the “runaway brides” were leaving abusive conditions. The new law essentially criminalized the victims, demanding immediate deportation of foreign brides who left their marriage within two years with no exceptions. Abused women had no recourse; this was especially atrocious in cases where the couple had children, in that the children remained the non-negotiable property of the husbands. A non-citizen battered wife then had one legal option available to her, which was deportation back to her country of origin, leaving her children behind (Lee, 2008, p. 113).

By 2003, public awareness of human rights abuses experienced by foreign labor and marriage migrants alike prompted the government again to revise the laws. The new legislation, which did not go into effect until 2006, had a two-pronged approach to international migration. Addressing labor and marriage migrants, it eased visa and entry requirements for both groups. This had the immediate effect of decreasing the number of Korean Chinese women marrying South Korean men, while the number of labor migrants increased. The new law also sought to address problems and discrimination faced by foreign brides. Building on the arguments of Songwoo Hur (2013), this can also be read as a developmental effort to bring the growing reality of a diverse population under greater state control and harnessing the well-being of immigrant women under further state control. Drastically expanding its intervention into international marriages, the ROK government created a bureaucracy with seven explicit goals, worth quoting verbatim:
(1) [R]egulation of international marriage agencies and protection of foreign wives before entry into Korea; (2) support for victims of domestic violence; (3) support and orientation for newly arrived foreign wives, such as offering Korean language and culture classes; (4) support for children of international marriages in schools; (5) providing social welfare to foreign wives; (6) raising social awareness of multicultural issues; and (7) making a comprehensive support system to attain the goals. (Lee, 2008, p. 116, her translation, quoting the mission statement of the ‘Grand Plan’ of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family).

According to Lee (2008) and Lim (2010), this mission statement constitutes the first significant use of the phrase “multicultural” (다문화, damunhwa) by the ROK government to characterize its immigration policy. It represents a sea-change in the ROK government’s approach to foreign marriage migrants, essentially abandoning the ideal of maintaining cultural and racial homogeneity (Lim, 2010, p. 69). ‘Multicultural’ has since become a veritable buzzword in the ROK, where it is expected to bring the state in line with international standards of equality. But as Joon K. Kim (2011) has convincingly argued, the South Korean state’s deployment of this term is at best uncritical, and at worst, re-inscribes the ethno-racial hierarchies that it professes to erase. Drawing on Pamela Crossley’s (2006) discussion of ethnic nationalism, ‘multicultural’ is now used in ROK media and government reports as an uncritical substitute for ‘ethnic’ or ‘racial’ Other.

Yet rather than merely accept the Korean Chinese as a mutant strain of “true” (implicitly ROK) Korean culture, drifting aimlessly between the legitimately territorialized authorities of China and the ROK, it behooves us to examine this issue with more depth of cultural analysis and greater breadth in historical analysis. This dissertation, therefore, takes a dual approach to situating the issue of female out-migration from ethnic Korean communities in northeastern China. It seeks to position the Korean Chinese within the ethnic Korean diaspora globally, and thereby chronicle how an ethnic group’s experiences become fragmented and variegated by geographic location. Simultaneously though, it retains a focus on the place of Yanbian, the
designated space for Koreans-in-China, asking how new policies, new flows, and new connections have changed the character of the place.

I.2. Research Questions

To understand how the Korean Chinese’ relationship with South Korea, intersecting with their simultaneous embeddedness within the larger Chinese state, has changed Yanbian society since the early 1990s, I chose to investigate three facets of society where these intersections seemed most likely to introduce changes: marriage patterns, gender hierarchies, and material practice.

I.2.A. Has female departure affected intra-ethnic marriage patterns?

With significantly fewer Korean-Chinese women available, how do local men find partners? This project finds that the ‘marriage market’ has become increasingly competitive, with poorer or disabled men at a disadvantage, either forced to remain single or opting to marry outside of the ethnic community. Evidence shows that there is increasing Han Chinese-Korean Chinese intermarriage, although still less than one might expect, and social disapproval remains strong. There is also increasing evidence of DPRK Korean-Korean Chinese intermarriage.

I.2.B. How has the possibility of out-migration affected the social status of women?

Literature has alternately suggested that women will become more highly prized, or more frequently trafficked, in conditions of scarcity (Yi et al. 1993; Belanger and Tran 2011). Assuming these are not mutually exclusive outcomes, this project investigates how family and community members perceive the status of women to have changed in the community since migration began in 1992. I conclude that out-migration has drastically increased the social status
of Korean Chinese women who are able to leave. But this has created a divide between mobile women, and those who are unable to leave due to financial, familial, or legal obligations, and those who come in to fill the socio-economic places of absentee women (such as teachers, DPRK Koreans, and Han Chinese immigrants). In addition, while the overall social status of women has increased in tandem with their earning power, local political power remains almost exclusively in the hands of men.

I.2.C. What new presences are introduced into sending areas via marriage migrant networks?

What objects, habits, or ideas – such as remittances or investments, articles or means of consumption, transportation and communication infrastructures, educational or work opportunities, or exposure to foreign cultures – are introduced into migrants’ natal communities as a result of these new transnational ties? On the one hand, the space of Yanbian is being flooded with ROK Korean food, clothing, Christianity, consumer electronics, media images, hairstyles, and slang patterns (and this is not limited to Korean Chinese, but applies also to all people in Yanbian). But on the other hand, the stories of immigrants in the ROK which have filtered back to Yanbian – tales of domestic abuse and economic exploitation, of capitalistic excesses, greed, and discrimination – have turned the ROK into a terrible, inhumane, corrupted Other. I argue that this Othering of the ROK serves to reinforce a distinct Korean Chinese identity and creates a new sense of Yanbian as a space of purity.
I.3. Theoretical Framework

This dissertation pivots on the geographic unit of Yanbian. But theoretically, its purpose is to examine how transnational networks facilitate the expansion of inequality regimes, how removing the blind acceptance of the territorial nation-state border allows us to recognize shifts in sovereignty, not through territorial holdings, but through control of patriarchal gender practices and policing of ‘authentic’ cultural practice. I argue that this control reveals the workings of both sovereignty and discipline, because these norms are projected spatially at the regional level and also personally at the individual scale. This dissertation asks how diasporic cultural hegemony is built, using a transnational social formation (which expands beyond the territorial nation-state) as the unit of geographic analysis.

Yet to assume that a “transnational social formation” exists as a coherent unit risks obscuring the ways that such a network emerges from a host of individual acts and performances. As individual people choose, day in and day out, how to enact their identities (in terms of what clothes to wear, how to pitch their voices, whether or not to apply to graduate school or show up for work, how fast to drive their cars), they face an ongoing calculus of the cost-benefit outcomes of these choices. Weighing the risks and rewards attached to each of these choices, individuals simultaneously shape other people’s risk/reward calculus, through their reactions to other people’s choices (offering a job to a well-dressed and well-educated candidate, reporting deviant behavior to supervisors, reprimanding or docking the pay of lazy employees, harassing or even assaulting women who dress in particular ways). The cumulative effect of these risk/reward decisions is that of structure: when a certain group of people collectively and iteratively choose to enforce a body of rules, norms, or standards, and other people react by conforming to those rules, norms, or standards, then effects like governments, states, classes, genders, and
nationalities emerge. These effects are enacted through engagements with (and sometimes resistance to) both physical and symbolic representations: language requirements, educational credentials, immigration policy, China’s household registration (户口) policy, China’s minority (少数民族) policy, transportation infrastructure (highways, cars, buses, train tracks, trains, airport, airplanes, ports, rivers, boats), communication infrastructure (telephone lines, telephones, cell towers, cell phones, wireless internet connections, computers, fiber optics cables, package delivery companies, postal service), financial services (banks, wire transfer services, currency exchange services). All of these outcomes influence the ability of individuals to enact their own desires, by attaching different costs and benefits to different choices, and producing the effect of different structures of opportunity.

In Yanbian (and in many other places), these structures of opportunity have recently changed as the borders of the state have become permeable in new ways. Suddenly individuals are faced with a new calculus, attempting to gauge the outcomes of their choices in multiple social spheres, and particularly on the margins of multiple spheres. A transnational approach – enriched by drawing from new mobilities paradigm, borderland theory, and a performative approach to the construction of space – assists us in understanding how this new calculus is made.

I.3. A. Transnationalism and the new mobilities paradigm

While a more thorough review of this literature is offered in Chapter II, I briefly summarize my use of transnationalism here, to aid in the framing of my research questions. I begin from transnational migration scholarship, which explores the ways that migrants engage in social life in multiple places simultaneously, creating life-worlds that literally transcend national
boundaries (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995; Guarnizo 1997). This body of work productively suggests scales of analysis beyond the nation-state, implying that the national polity is not coterminous with society, and calling attention to ways that people, things, and practices can exist simultaneously in multiple social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). This literature has highlighted “the need to distinguish between patterns of connection on the ground and the conditions that produce ideologies of connection and community” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1006, citing Gomez and Benton 2002 and Ostergaard-Neilsen 2003). This attention, to both the materiality and the local structure of feelings that link distant places into one social field, defines a transnational approach.

While this literature has been embraced and celebrated for recognizing migrants as complete social beings rather than merely mobile laboring objects, research in transnationalism has nonetheless overemphasized the economic aspects of migration. The myriad causes, forms, and results of mobility have been obscured by the emphasis on monetary remittances, context of reception, policy and enforcement issues, and migration-as-development (Portes 2007; Glick Schiller and Faist 2010). In addition, transnational scholarship has been criticized for exaggerating migrant agency and overemphasizing the liberating aspects of transnational life (Bailey et al. 2002; Waldinger 2008). Further, while much transnational research has adopted multi-site or ‘follow-the-thing’ research methods (Elmhirst 2012), transnationalism overall has undertheorized mobility in favor of “both the ‘sedenterist’ and ‘nomadic’ production of knowledge” (Blunt 2007, 684).

To balance out these shortcomings, and to foreground the fundamentally spatial nature of migration-induced changes, I incorporate ideas from the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and
This body of research begins by asking “how the fact of movement becomes mobility. How, in other words, movement is made meaningful, and how the resulting ideologies of mobility become implicated in the production of mobile practices” (Cresswell 2006, 21, quoted in Blunt 2007, 685). Like transnationalism, new mobilities work addresses but is not limited to the phenomenon of migration. It interrogates the regulation of mobility, inadvertent or clandestine movement, memories and literature of displacement and dispersion, and virtual or imaginative travel. Unlike transnationalism, it focuses on the enabling conditions, the process, and the results of movement, without specifying in advance what type of social forms may result and what kinds of borders must be crossed.

New mobilities work also treats humans as just one component of mobility, noting that even the most powerful of mobile people remain almost entirely at the mercy of technological systems and infrastructure (Sheller and Urry 2006, 222). Finally, while not coming exclusively from geography, new mobilities work nonetheless emphasizes the spatiality of mobility, extending the idea of a relational sense of place (Massey 1994) to suggest that people are also constituted as social beings through their spatial relations to the world. This challenges scholarship to examine how subjects are reconstituted through the process of mobility.

This further recognizes the validity of alternative views on transnationalism, which call for the equal recognition of the trans-state, the trans-locational, the trans-local, or the trans-cultural. Transnational is indeed a problematic term to refer to the crossing of state borders. Trans-state, as discussed by Thomas Faist (2010, 65), is a clear alternative with the same meaning that most theorists use when they say transnational. Trans-locational (Anthias 2008, 5), although not widely used, attempts to capture a broader sense of place, addressing “issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time
related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions.” Yet another alternative, translocal, itself has multiple overlapping definitions. Oakes and Schein (2006) use ‘translocal’ to call attention to “the relationship between mobility and space,” “to examine a broader network of social, cultural, and financial linkages that mobility forges,” and to examine “a space of mobility, rather than just a sending or receiving zone of transnational linkages” (xii).

Not entirely similarly, Ulrike Freitag (2005, 2, translated from German and quoted by Gottowick 2010, 181), uses ‘translocal’ to:

…focus […] on the mobility of actors, ideas, commodities, and artefacts between different regions of the South and the consequences of exchange, circulation, and transfer beyond real or imagined boundaries. The emphasis is not on crossing national boundaries, but on overcoming spatial differences. In this context, it is stressed that there are many borders, inside and outside the nation state, which are likewise important. There is rather a multiplicity of borders, which are not necessarily political, but economic, social, religious, etc.

This recognition of the multiplicity of borders resonates with the remarks and sentiments of my Korean Chinese respondents. The name of their place, Yanbian (延边), was created in the 1920s to replace the name Gando (간도/间岛) by which the Japanese called the Sino-Korean border region. The two Chinese characters of Yanbian (延边) were chosen by combining the name of the major city Yanji (延吉), and the word for “frontier” or “border” (边境, bianjing). The new name was an attempt to erase the Japanese history from the soil (Goma 2006, 869, footnote 2). But it simultaneously highlighted the nature of Yanbian as a borderland. Physically, Yanbian bumps up against the DPRK for 522 kilometers on the south, and Russia for 232 kilometers on the east. Culturally, linguistically, and economically, Yanbian is the site of confluence for China, Russia, and both Koreas.
I.3.B. Border and Borderlands Theory

Social scientists and cultural theorists have long recognized the unique situation of borderland regions. Gloria Anzaldua, a founding theorist of the borderland, left a rich legacy of work with clear implications for a place like Yanbian, and a people like the Korean Chinese. “Being Mexican,” she writes, “is a state of soul – not one of the mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders” (1987, 2954). Borderlands theory highlights the myriad ways that proximity to borders can create spaces of liminality, danger, opportunity, hybridity, suspicion, and displacement, while emphasizing the variety and specificity of different social and spatial positioning. No two borderlands are identical, and no two experiences of being at or in a borderland are identical. Oskar Martinez, another foundational theorist of borderlands, suggests “there is a borderland continuum stretching from a situation of full cross-border integration in which the existence of the border is hardly felt, to a situation of borderland alienation in which there is no contact at all between the peoples on either side of the line of separation” (Martinez 1994, cited in Newman 2012, 38). While borderland theory gives voice to the mestiza consciousness that defies simple dualistic thinking, there has also been pushback suggesting that borderlands theory (much like early transnational work) was overly celebratory and emancipatory. Some, like Pablo Vila, argue “‘that current mainstream border theory essentializes the cultures that must be crossed’ and fails ‘to pursue the theoretical possibility that fragmentation of experience can lead to the reinforcement of borders instead of an invitation to cross them’ (Vila 2003, 307, emphasis in original, quoted in Naples 2010, 507).

These critiques are important to keep in mind when seeking to use the ideas developed in a specific time and place (much borderland theory came from studies of the US-Mexico border.
in the 1980s and 90s) to understand the experiences of different people in separate places at other historic moments. Indeed, in many ways, reading the work of Anzaldua while contemplating Yanbian is laughable, as it offers such a stark and sobering contrast. Anzaldua writes “We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant norteamericano culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they’ve created, lie bleached” (1987, 2955). I try to imagine my Korean Chinese respondents saying anything similar – these friends who haltingly mumbled their parents’ tales of the Cultural Revolution, who lowered their voices to describe DPRK defectors, who sandwiched their stories between praise for CCP leaders and support for “unity of the nationalities” (民族团结). The discourses of defiance, resistance, pride in a unique minority identity and rejection of attempts to pass, melt, or otherwise assimilate, were absent in Yanbian. But it is worth asking why Yanbian is different. Anzaldua also writes that “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (1987, 2974); to this, perhaps my respondents might relate.

I.3.C. Performativity and the Social Construction of Space

The interdisciplinary borderland theory that emerged from Chicano and feminist studies thus offers a powerful theoretical lens that can sharply call out some of the unique aspects of the Yanbian case. But borders have long been a concern of geographers, and it is curious that these literatures have not been in more direct conversation. Indeed, geographic theorizing of the border goes beyond the cataloging of borderland life to query the foundations of the border, to ask how borders emerge and become signified, and to argue that “centers and margins are most usefully conceptualized not as places in themselves but as located in and between bodies in a
variety of ways as they move through and perform space at a variety of scales and over time” (Andrucki and Dickinson 2015, 203). It is this insight that gives geographic approaches an analytic advantage. Space – including the space of borders – is not an a priori fact. Space is a social construction, and not a static one at that. Space is an ongoing production, produced continuously by the performance of individuals coming together at shared sites, and the resulting characteristics of the space rely on the features of the actors themselves. The relative degrees of power and the resources available to the actors (not all of whom are human) become central questions determining the nature of the space produced.

In seeking to understand the production of space, I draw from feminist and queer performativity theory. Usually credited to Judith Butler’s books Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993), performativity posits that:

…discourse produces the subject that it names (e.g. “girl” or “white”) through reiterated acts (Mirón and Inda, 2000: 94). The repetition of these practices is compulsory in that it is the reiteration of social norms, specifically norms that correspond to the subjectivities named. Through the repeated statements and enactments of what a subject is (and that it ought to be, i.e. the norm) the subject “acquires a naturalized effect” or becomes “sedimented” (ibid) (Hickcox 2012, 8).

While Butler focuses on reiteration of citational acts, geographers have expanded these ideas to explore how space itself is constituted through performance. Gregson and Rose (2000, 441) argue

…performances do not take place in already existing locations: the city, the bank, the franchise restaurant, the straight street. These ‘stages’ do not preexist their performances, waiting in some sense to be mapped out by performances; rather, specific performances bring these spaces into being. And, since these performances are themselves articulations of power, of particular subject positions, then we maintain that we need to think of spaces too as performative of power relations.

In conceptualizing the construction of a space like Yanbian by means of this performative theory of space, the most overt characteristic is that of the marginalized border. Yanbian, like so
many of China’s minority areas, is at the physical, political, economic, and cultural periphery of China. And yet, this supposedly-peripheral space is experienced very differently by the ethnic Korean Chinese, Han Chinese, ROK Koreans, DPRK Koreans, Korean Americans, and occasional White Americans who intermingle there. Yanbian is a borderland, but the intersectional identities of individuals (Crenshaw 1989) produce internally variegated vectors of mobility, specific spheres of social contact, and differential access to sites of production for political/religious/linguistic/culinary spaces. Yanbian is a dangerous place for some people. It is an isolated cultural backwater, a site of social banishment, for others. It is a space of peace and hominess for many. It is the absolute center of the world for some. Geographic work on the performative production of space recognizes this reality: that the same geographic coordinates exist as entirely different spaces for different people. This raises the question of whose experiences come to dominate commonly-held understandings of the meaning of a space.

The production of space relies upon the performances of diverse and unequal actors. The most powerful of those actors are those with the most resources (financial, economic, military/police, intellectual or social capital, etc.) or abilities at their command. Thus in the contemporary world, the actors who can best perpetuate powerful structural effects like nation-states, multi-national corporations, and supra-national organizations tend to receive the most credit for the global production of space. Indeed, these powerful actors tend to have the greatest ability to enact their wills, particularly because they have the most control over the cost/benefit opportunity structures that influence the choices of other individuals (through means like those listed above, including language requirements, educational credentials, immigration policy, China’s household registration (户口) policy, China’s minority (少数民族) policy, transportation infrastructure, communication infrastructure, financial services).
And yet, theorists of performativity have repeatedly called attention to the instability of seemingly-strong performances and the powerful potential for subversion by seemingly-weak actors; “since performances of subject positions are iterative, slippage is always possible, and that this applies too to the spaces produced through them” (Gregson and Rose 2000, 441). Often people make choices based on factors mostly outside the control of the state, influenced by family, intimate partners, local cultural trends, personal taste or emotions, or without a clear logical calculus at all. Similar ideas were developed in Michel de Certeau’s 1980 work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which proposed a distinction between the strategies of institutions like states, productive of most spaces of human life, and the tactics that less-powerful actors use to re-appropriate and redefine that space in accordance with their own interests. This ongoing struggle, and the persistent possibility of slippage, subvert the image of unwavering dominance that powerful actors like states try to project.

Drawing this back to border theory, I use an expanded conception of the border by recognizing its performed nature, but also by acknowledging the diversity of actors involved in its production. Powerful institutional actors vie – not always successfully – with smaller-scale actors like migrants, ideas, images, diseases, catchy pop melodies, USB memory sticks, invasive species, an endless variety of agents marking out their identities at the border. Borders demark the territorial limits of the state; but borders, as noted in Anzaldúa’s eagle/serpent/ocean metaphor above, are rarely impermeable barriers to power. Borders are “leaky;” they do not now, nor have they ever, fully controlled symbolic or material flows (Gilbert 2007).

Nonetheless, states seek to demonstrate the reach of their powers most stridently at their borders, precisely because that is where their performance of power is most likely to falter. As Martinez argues, “residents of border towns face the constant threat of foreign invasion, deal with
heterogeneous populations, interact with foreigners, and feel separated or isolated from their countrymen” (1994, cited in Parhman 2013, 95). The actors involved in the production of border space are thus much more diverse than those which perform the stable interior or center. “The state, through its policies, actions, and customs, thus performs itself as sovereign—and this is particularly visible at borders when the self-evidence of the state’s control over populations, territory, political economy, belonging, and culture is so clearly in question” (Salter 2011, 66, cited in Rose-Redwood and Glass 2014, 1).

I.3.D. Gender, Marriage, and Reproduction at the Border

Perhaps the most visible and impactful method by which a state creates border-space is to ban the flow of bodies across a chosen line. This action gives rise to a host of other state-like behaviors, such as demarking the border, reinforcing the border, policing the border, debating and enacting border policies and immigration laws. The work of producing and reproducing border-space is never done. At the same time, as transnationalism highlights, human society does not conform to state borders. It leaks and stretches towards opportunities, radiates along kinship lines, evades hazards and threats, and, while undoubtedly state borders can pose an impediment to certain kind of social life, the state should be understood as one constraint among many.

Indeed, state borders intersect with other forms of constraint to create differential permeability of state (and non-state) borders. In Yanbian, it is readily apparent that the border is more permeable for women than men. Of my respondents, 40 out of 58 women from northeast China had traveled to the ROK; 22 of 42 men had. Other studies, too (Noh 2011, Yang, Wang, and Liu 2011) have similarly documented this gendered aspect to Korean Chinese migration.
There are several apparent reasons why this is so. Most prominently, the ROK labor market offers significantly better opportunities for immigrant women. Secondarily, Korean Chinese men have reported greater difficulty in obtaining both PRC passports and ROK visas. Further, Korean Chinese men have also reported higher levels of discrimination in the ROK, leaving them less willing to take the jobs available to them there (Seol and Skrentny 2009). That such a small and supposedly homogenous group should have such radically different encounters based on gender begs the question of why; why the social experience is so drastically segmented by ideologies of female and male; why economic preferences skew along gender lines; why suspicions cleave more to males than females; why sex is accepted as a fundamental category of human division, when other categories (like race, height, age, eye color) have been disavowed as bases on which to discriminate. Feminist theorists have suggested that the answer to that question lies in the endurance of patriarchy as the foundation of much human society today.

I use patriarchy here as the “gender-based allocation of power and roles in a given society” (Sechiyama 2013, 1), and “the correlation of sexual difference with political difference” (Pateman 1988, 34). Early conceptions of patriarchy drew from Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). Here, Engels argues that patriarchy developed in tandem with the rise of private property, as a means to eliminate potential uncertainty around the paternity of children via strict control of women, women’s activities, and women’s sexuality. With paternity assured, men could securely inherit property from their fathers. As society further developed away from agricultural and towards industrial production models, the sexual division of labor become more pronounced. Women’s labor came to be expropriated by men, who relied on women’s unpaid reproductive work in the household to supplement their own paid productive work. Feminists within geography, including Mackenzie and Rose (1983), McDowell (1983,
56

One of the key practices that fosters the reproduction of patriarchal forms is the institution of marriage. Monogamous marriage between one male and one female has been and remains the most common form of family formation throughout the world. As Carole Pateman has convincingly argued, marriage is a type of contract in which both parties give up certain freedoms in exchange for security; typically, it entails an exchange of (female) obedience for (male) protection (1988, 7). Marriage is also a unique form of interpersonal relationship in that it is regulated by the state. The intertwining of economic structures, gender norms, kinship relations, and state power in the institution of marriage makes it a key site of political contestation and control. When marriages cross state borders, intertwining with the already-complex issues of sovereignty and hybridity in spaces of meeting, this adds an additional layer of instability and potential for either subversion or constraint.

Despite these complexities, cross-border movement is an enduring feature of the institution of marriage in many places and cultures. Instability or demographic skew in a local population might prompt individuals to seek a mate elsewhere; in rural areas with limited local populations, exogamy is a common practice. This can be a personal or communal choice; in much of rural China, exogamy was viewed as a means to extend social and economic networks and therefore share risk (Davin 2008). Barabantseva, Chao, and Xiang (2015, 2) have noted the increased “governmentalization” of cross-border marriage, highlighting the “border work that the state authorities carry out” through policy and enforcement work. Chen (2015, cited in Barabantseva, Chao, and Xiang 2015, 3) discusses how, in the case of Taiwan’s governmental
regulation of marriage migrants arriving from China, investigative work and interviews to which marriage migrants are subject gives the government broad powers to determine who is fit or unfit for membership in the nation by virtue of their sexual engagements: “By monitoring international marriages, the normative sexualized national order is reinforced. In the process, the bedrooms of all Chinese-Taiwanese mixed marriages become ‘battlegrounds in the struggle for national security’.”

This comment further highlights the issue of scale in cross-border marriage. The intimate, domestic, and biological nature of marriage migration creates strong and significant bonds that typically exist at a scale below the public’s view. But governments are aware that the inter-cultural, intellectual, material, and emotional exchanges in intimate relationships between marriage partners, parents and children, and in-laws create durable networks often stronger than the citizen-state bond. Marriage migrants bear diverse cultural norms across political and cultural borders, directly into the destination household and can send back the norms they encounter there (Constable 2005). Marriage migrants deal equally with the public challenges of migration such as language, dress, and legal status, while also having to contend with the translation and reproduction of household responsibilities, sexual practices, maternity, and childrearing issues (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008). While all migrants receive state attention for their potential to subvert borders, the intimate and enduring cross-border kinship ties created through marriage migration raise the specter of foreigners “rearing the next generation of the state’s sovereign subjects” (Barabantseva, Chao, and Xiang 2015, 1).
I.4. Methodology and Research Methods

I.4.A. Feminist postcolonial ethnography

To address research questions pivoting on the community practices and material culture of a minority group in China, informed by a theoretical lens approaching social life as a power-laden spatialized performance unbounded (though influenced) by international political borders, I relied primarily on qualitative methods. Ethnography, in particular, offers a methodological approach that allows for the contingency and multiplicity of social issues, permitting questions to be answered without assuming the answers are the only ones. Indeed, as Sarah Whatmore (2003, 93) has argued, ethnography “can be argued to come closest to the notion of ‘generating materials’, as opposed to ‘collecting data’, of any method in the social sciences.” This statement acknowledges that social knowledge is never a pre-existing or disembodied artifact; it emerges out of social interaction, and often out of the interactions between the researcher and research participants (Haraway 1988). In recognition of this co-production of knowledge, occurring at sites where the researcher and research participants meet *unequally*, I draw heavily from feminist postcolonial work on research methodologies and praxis.

Feminist postcolonial scholarship on research methodologies begins from the power-laden relationship between the researcher and the researched. This critique charges that researchers subject research participants to uninvited privacy invasions; that research participants remain largely silenced by this approach; and that already-privileged researchers benefit most from this process, offering up the lives of their research subjects for the voyeuristic consumption of elites (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). This work, in highlighting the inequalities in the research relationship, demands that due diligence be paid to the ways that these people meet as actors positioned differently in a range of hierarchies (including, but not limited to, racial, ethnic,
The key insight that this work rests on is the intersectionality of identity – the concept that “it is no longer possible to consider gender as an analytic category that is separate from other systems of oppression or without consideration of context […] [R]ace, class, and gender are interlocking and interdependent oppressions that are simultaneously experienced (see, e.g., Hill-Collins, 1990, 2000; hooks, 1984; Razack, 1998)” (Mehrotra 2010, 417).

The “challenges of feminist and postcolonial theories made researchers extremely cautious about oral/life history and ethnography as both representation and as data, about shifting matrices of power relations in/outside the ‘field’, and about not imposing their own meanings and organizations onto ‘other’ people or places, or events of the past” (Benson and Nagar 2006, 583). In response, researchers have been prompted to “build complex analyses, avoid erasure, and specify location” (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996, 328). This has given rise to a diverse body of approaches, including collective publishing (as in the work of Gibson-Graham or the Sangtin Writers), an expansion of participatory action research (Pain and Francis 2010), and increased attention to the positionality and modes of interaction of the researcher (Moser 2008).

In the case of this research project, I began with a commitment to participatory action research, in the sense that I hoped my work would actively involve members of the Yanbian community and result in a vague and undefined “positive change.” The imprecision of this goal was intentional; scholarship from the field of development studies has extensively documented the folly of well-intentioned, typically Western, do-gooders arriving in unfamiliar locales and trying to “fix” the people or places they encounter, without a thorough understanding of the complexity underlying local situations (c.f. Mitchell 1988). This work points out the folly and arrogance of pathologizing life-situations different from one’s own (Chari and Corbridge 2008,
James C. Scott is perhaps the best-known example for his research among peasant communities, which argues that disparate groups have developed unique social systems of values and exchange, which do not subscribe to the capitalistic valuing system of the West. Subsequent research has built on Scott’s ideas, especially his conception of ‘weapons of the weak,’ positing that “…poor men and women fight back by foot-dragging, joke-telling, cheating and dissimulation [concealing the truth, using half-truths]. These are the classical politics […] of subaltern groups, and we have to learn to read these ‘hidden transcripts’ of resistance” (Chari and Corbridge 2008, 297, paraphrasing Scott 1998).

Heeding Scott’s cry to attend to subaltern voices in the multiple forms those ‘voices’ may take, many scholars have developed creative and insightful analyses of alternative engagements. This includes analyses of non-verbal forms like hand-drawn mental maps and dances (Jung 2012, McCormarck 2003); non-discursive actions like spirit possessions, dreams, and screaming (Ong 1987, Ngai 2000); and non-representational method that “aims to rupture, unsettle, animate, and reverberate rather than report and represent” and attends to “hybrid assemblages endowed with diffused personhood and relational agency” (Vannini 2015, 5). In planning my research design, then, I attempted to incorporate a diversity of methods. These included traditional approaches like interviews, oral histories, surveys, and participant-observation, but also drew on non-textual forms via mental mapping and field-based collaborative photography. I had hoped that, by employing diverse and multi-sensory research methods, I would expose myself to a range of people and perspectives that would be inaccessible in a traditional interview- or focus-group-based ethnographic study. This would, I reasoned, allow me to hear voices other than those most eager to talk with me, and allow me to see both positive and negative aspects of society, which individuals might hesitate to divulge to a foreigner in an interview or focus group. In the actual
execution of my research, I ultimately and unintentionally engaged in a much wider range of research practices, including field-based collaborations on issues of: cooking, eating, drinking, getting lost and trying to get correct directions, arguing, participatory action dancing, spontaneous song-elicitation, nodding and smiling when I had no idea what was being said, market-based negotiations for local food-stuffs and household goods, trying to find public restrooms and effective medicines, carrying furniture for friends when they moved houses, and babysitting.

In this process, I believe I met my own goals of seeking “to rupture, unsettle, animate, and reverberate rather than report and represent”; but what was primarily ruptured, unsettled, and animated were my own preconceptions of Korean Chinese society and the space of Yanbian. I found that, despite my theoretical preparation for diversity in my field site, I had still fundamentally anticipated finding a coherent narrative. I presented my research questions to interviewees and acquaintances, fully expecting them (as possessors of local knowledge) to have answers on the tips of their tongues, and ideally some ethnographic vignettes or personal stories as illustrations. What I found, more often than not, was that my interviewees and acquaintances told me wildly diverse, entirely incongruent, sometimes blatantly false or much exaggerated answers – if they would answer my questions at all. With particular regard to issues of marriage and inter-ethnic marriage, people offered me such a variety of responses that it seems an outright falsehood to present any single or conclusive answer to my research questions. Rather, I attempt to demonstrate some degree of the diversity.

The gap between the research methods proposed and those ultimately executed attests to what has been called in the scholarly literature “situated messiness” (Livingston 1992), is so often white-washed into “strategic omissions and erasures” (Elmhirst 2012). While I hope to
avoid such omissions and erasures, this dissertation has necessarily abridged the vast majority of my field-based encounters, to focus on those that most substantially address the thrust of my research questions.

I.4.B. Methods for addressing research questions

1. How has female departure affected local marriage patterns?

I intended to address this question through traditional ethnographic methods, including interviews, participant observation, and oral histories (Perecman and Curran 2006). I interviewed predominantly ethnic Korean men and women in three age cohorts, in order to provide investigate change across generations: young adults born between 1993 and 1980 (of age to consent), adults born between 1950 and 1980, and older people born before 1950. Twenty key informants in each generation were sought; after this requirement was met I continued to interview people on an ad-hoc basis. While I ultimately recorded information from over 150 people, I have culled my data down to 100 informants who had given informed consent and provided enough information to be formally included as a respondent. A separate 12 respondents were found in the ROK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Residency</th>
<th>Traveled to SK?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Primary (thru</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Yanji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young:</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult:</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Respondents

Young adults were selected through snowball sampling, beginning at Yanbian University and Yanbian University of Science and Technology. While a diverse socio-economic mix was sought, my network of contacts skewed towards university students; in addition, I found young people much more willing to share stories and ideas with me. As a result, of my 100 informants,
52 are in the “young” age group, and 32 of these had obtained (or were in the process of obtaining) a college degree. Adult participants were selected with the assistance of undergraduate and graduate students, and included twenty-three participants with immediate family members (sisters, daughters, aunts) married to South Koreans. The older population was solicited with the help of professors in Yanbian University’s Geography Department and Women’s Resource Center, and through personal contacts who introduced me to elderly parents or grandparents. While I sought to balance each generational sample between men and women, I found women much more willing to talk with me, both formally in interviews and informally in everyday life. Thus, 58 of my 100 informants are female.

Semi-structured interviews with young adults took place in coffee shops, clubs, restaurants, and at Yanbian University. Interviews with adults and older people took place either in these public spaces, at Yanbian University (where many were currently employed, previously employed, or attending elderly social clubs) or in their homes; typically I went to wherever the elderly people were already planning to be. I conducted interviews in Korean and Chinese, with a translator (usually a fellow grad student from the Yanbian University Geography Department). Interviews were recorded on my iPhone. Interviews were typically transcribed and translated within a week, with the help of a Korean Chinese grad student from the Yanbian University English Department.

Interview topics for the first research question sought evidence of non-traditional marriage (those outside of the ethnic Korean minority group, such as ethnic Han Chinese or North Korean) and new patterns of bachelorhood. I asked respondents in all three generational groups to address the following:

- describe their idea of a typical marriage pattern
- describe recent local trends in family formation
• whether or not they have noticed changes in gender or age composition of the local population
• their views on inter-ethnic marriage (between ethnic Korean, ethnic Han, or North Korean)

But given that people often censor and tailor their speech to the situation, and assuming that the range of experiences constitutive of a migrant-sending society cannot be captured by oral narrative alone, interviews were supplemented with participant observation. In the course of daily life in Yanbian, I kept an observational protocol recording events and activities, their locations, times, participants, material objects, perceived significance, and my own involvement. I also employed memoing to record mundane thoughts, observations, and experiences. Research thus sought behavioral, experiential, and material evidence to address these questions.

Finally, I also seek to draw a historical comparison with pre-migration trends. Unfortunately little ethnographic work exists for earlier periods, from which comparisons might be drawn. I therefore rely on oral histories to provide a broader context in which to locate changes wrought by out-migration. I asked members of the adult and older generations, including seven university professors, to reconstruct through memory the evolution of Yanbian society prior to 1992, during in-depth, multi-session narratives. While I initially hoped for three sessions with each informant, their busy schedules limited most of them to just two formal recordings. These were recorded with an iPhone 4s, and transcribed and translated within a week.

2. How has the possibility of out-migration affected the social status of women?

Changes in gender relations perceived by Yanbian residents were ascertained through interviews with the three generational groups, and supplemented by participant observation and analysis of media sources. Since Yanbian Koreans have not documented a skewed sex ratio at birth, it was not expected to find changes in gender preference for baby girls. However, evidence
from other cases suggest that, through marriage migration, women are increasingly viewed as primary breadwinners, which alters the gender balance of power within households and extended families (Belanger and Tran 2011). Through interviews with non-migrant women in Yanbian and marriage migrants in Seoul, I sought to identify changes in the self-perceived social status of Korean Chinese women, asking respondents to address the following issues:

- describe the different economic opportunities available to men or women
- assess whether one gender has greater earning power than the other
- describe how immediate and extended families are affected by marriage migration
- whether the respondent would approve of an immediate family member marrying a South Korean
- describe differences in mobility according to gender

Conclusions drawn from interview results have been triangulated against local statistics on employment and wages, as well as my own observations of local attitudes towards marriage migration.

3. What new presences are introduced into sending areas via marriage migrant networks?

Drawing methodologically from transnationalism, new mobilities paradigm, and performative theories of space (Gregson and Rose 2000, Rose-Redwood and Glass 2014), this project explores physical indicators of non-human flows into Yanbian which result from out-migration. Documenting newly introduced presences, research relies on field-based collaborative photography, which asks participants themselves to photograph meaningful changes (Twine 2006). Also called photo-elicitation, this method is employed for several reasons. First, it provides a means of direct communication unlimited by the constraints of language. As the bulk of this research has been conducted across a language barrier, this alternative allows some data to circumvent the literal translation process. Second, the types of biases articulated through
photographic representation are qualitatively different from biases expressed vocally. The
selection process, of what to photograph and how to properly frame a scene, involves assumptions
and associations that are not revealed in the course of verbal discussion. Following this process
grants me access to a different facet of informants’ perception. Third, it is a participatory method
that works towards closing the gap “between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’” (Beilin 2005). In
recognizing the ability of informants to pick out nuance and meaning in their physical
environment, collaborative photography accepts informants as partners in the construction of
knowledge.

Beyond the merits of the method itself, the photo-documentation is valuable in terms of
grounding discussions of cultural exchange and intangible flows. Shifts in taste and preference
are documented via specific examples of clothing, architecture, advertising strategies or décor.
Photographs record the physical acts that people engage in to express and enact beliefs, desires,
and understandings, providing grounded evidence to support or subvert their verbal claims.
Photographs also juxtapose contradictory realities, allowing research to recognize ways that space
is constructed and experienced differently by different people. These photographs serve as
primary material, “as a visual record to study the material and social settings in which my
research subjects live and as evidence for theory” (Twine 2006).

I initially intended to ask a total of ten young adult and adult research participants, and up
to five older generation participants, to take me to sites of recent change in the community, to
themselves photograph the site or object, and verbally narrate what has changed. I predicted that
sites for photography would include, but not be limited to: commercial businesses and products,
streets and sidewalks, buildings and architecture, advertisements for services and entertainment,
cars and traffic, people in public places, and the interior and contents of private homes.
Based on pre-dissertation research during the 2012 summer, it was expected that South Korean cultural influences have come to hold increasing sway in Yanbian. Stores advertising South Korean clothing, household products, media, and food were observed throughout Yanji. Beauty products and cosmetic surgery centers offered to make women look ‘South Korean.’ In the course of collaborative photography, I asked participants to describe how South Koreans look different from Yanbian Koreans, and where they have seen this difference (i.e. television, movies, or in person).

In fact, collaborative photography produced results far beyond what I could have imagined. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore the concept of the “selfie” (셀카/自拍) in Chinese and Korean cultures, this is surely a worthy project that needs attention. Asking my research participants, especially of the younger cohort, to go on mini-photography adventures produced a level of enthusiasm that American young people reserve for Christmas, or perhaps Spring Break in an exotic beach locale. My requests for collaborative photography met with far more enthusiastically than requests for interviews ever did, and this produced the ultimate problem of a totally overwhelming number of photographs, many of which don’t appear to have a great deal of significance at all. However, there are an adequate number of pictures which, in the days, weeks, or months after the fact, were remarked upon by their takers, and they now grace the pages of this dissertation.
These visual records are supplemented by economic data from the Yanbian prefectural government, as well as the local governments of Yanji, Longjing, Tumen, and Antu. Louva (2009) has described the efforts of Yanbian residents to deploy co-ethnic ties in seeking such investment. An enormous amount of investment in small-scale industry has come from the ROK
after 1992. One additional result has been the rapid in-flow of tourists and tourist dollars. Local villages, including Antu, have established ‘traditional Korean parks,’ were people can observe (staged) festivals and purchase traditional handicrafts. Most tourists come from the ROK, where they assume tradition has given way to modernity. The Yanbian government has also worked to develop nearby Changbai Mountain (Mt. Baekdu in Korean) into a tourist attraction; this mountain is sacred in both Korean and Manchu lore (Paik and Ham 2012). In addition to visiting these sites myself, I also collected some records of these and similar economic developments.

I.4.C. Data Analysis

To an extent, I employed interim analysis to continuously modify and inform research. Interviews, observational protocol, memos, and oral histories were transcribed and translated into .docx file format, usually within a week. During my fieldwork, I did very little in the way of formal coding. Upon return from the field, I relied on Dedoose, an internet-based qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software, to assist with my coding and analysis. Respondent descriptors were uploaded and matched to interview transcripts; I segmented and coded the transcripts, starting with a set of *a priori* codes, but eliminating and adding codes as analysis progressed. The Dedoose software package churned that data in many attractive visual representations, including both graphs and charts. I found these functions increased my enjoyment of the data analysis process, but did not necessarily deepen my understanding; in hindsight, computer-based interview coding might be done just as effectively with software like Microsoft Word, which does not require a monthly subscription fee.
Photographs were downloaded onto my laptop every evening, and grouped in folders labeled with place, time, and collaborator(s) for the photography. Verbal narratives from the collaborative photography were included, though not verbatim, in my daily field journal. My field notes from the experience and a physical description of the contents of the photo have been typed up and coded, along with the interview transcripts. Coding and analysis of visual data pays particular attention to the symbolic and affective import attributed to material structures and visual fields, such as landscapes, buildings, streets, and sites of change or continuity.
Internal validity has been ensured through a number of mechanisms (Creswell 2009). Interview and oral history transcripts have been reviewed by the informants themselves whenever possible, creating participant feedback. Employing multiple means of data collection has also allowed for triangulation, as common themes have emerged across interviews, oral histories, participant observation, and photographs. The spatial distribution of research sites across four municipalities of Yanbian create a check against extrapolating from a local abnormality. Additionally, repeated interviews with informants, spread over a 21-month period, controls for outlying opinions and allows me to verify ambiguities with informants prior to data analysis.

I.4.D. Timeline and Field Sites

This research was conducted over the course of four years, including two months in Yanbian from June to July 2012, four months in Harbin from July to October 2013, ten months in Yanbian from October 2013 to August 2014, four months in Seoul from August to December 2014, and one month in Yanbian during July 2015. During the 2012 summer, I was funded by the Social Science Research Center’s Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship; after a pre-fellowship workshop at the University of Poitiers, I enrolled at Yanbian University (延边大学, 연변대학교) for a summer Chinese language course. For eight weeks, I lived in the Foreign Student Dormitory with a South Korean roommate, and attended Chinese language classes for three hours a day, five days a week. This time allowed me to build an initial network of contacts in Yanbian, and in particular to build relationships with faculty and students in the Department of Geography and in the Foreign Student Office. These contacts, in particular Professor of Geography Nan Ying, then sponsored my application for a Fulbright Fellowship for the 2013-2014 academic year.
In addition to a Fulbright Research Fellowship at Yanbian University, I was also awarded a Fulbright Critical Language Enhancement Award (CLEA) to study Chinese at the CET Intensive Chinese Program, based at the Harbin Institute of Technology（HIT, 哈工大）for four months. I thus lived in the HIT Foreign Student Dormitory with a Chinese roommate from July - October, 2014. When this program ended in October, I moved to the city of Yanji and registered as a Senior Researcher in the Department of Geography at Yanbian University.

Arriving in Yanji for the second time, I was fortunate that another Fulbright Research Fellow had been living there the previous year. Our fellowships overlapped by 2 weeks, allowing for a much easier logistical arrival than I otherwise would have encountered. Typically foreign students and scholars are required to live on-campus; thanks to the precedent set by my Fulbright predecessor, this requirement was waived for me. My predecessor allowed me to stay with her for my first two weeks (her last two weeks) and effectively take over the lease on her apartment. She also introduced me to her network of friends, trusted shopkeepers, local services like water delivery, and explained local procedures like obtaining a public bus card and public library card, paying water and electric bills, using the university libraries, and various forms of transport within Yanji and connecting Yanji to other nearby towns and villages (for example, at night when the inter-city buses stop running, people wait on specific unmarked street corners to take shared private mini-buses to other towns).

In addition to all this material assistance and local information, my Fulbright predecessor also provided me with a candid alternative perspective on Korean diasporic politics in northeast Asia. As a Korean-American, actively engaged with the (ROK) Korean Protestant Church in Yanji, her experience and social network in Yanbian was radically different and largely inaccessible to me, as a non-religious White American. Our conversations over email prior to
our first meeting in Yanji, our two weeks of co-habitation, and our continued correspondence and occasional meeting since then has provided me with a sounding board and an (alternate) reality check for my own interpretations and experiences.

At the end of my ten months in Yanbian, I moved to Seoul for the fall 2014 semester. I had been invited there by the Ewha Womans University “Social Science Korea” research group, to simultaneously teach a class on political geography and conduct joint research. Through an introduction from a friend in Yanji, I was able to live for these four months with a “multicultural family” comprised of a Korean Chinese wife, a South Korean husband, and their ten-year-old son. In the interest of their privacy, I have included few direct observations or stories about them here, but this experience was fundamental to re-shaping my interpretation of marriage migration.

After returning to the United States in late December, 2014, I spent six months organizing and analyzing data, and beginning writing. I was fortunate to receive an invitation from the Yanbian University English Department to return to Yanji for the month of July, 2015, to teach a graduate-level course on pedagogy. During that month I was able to conduct follow-up interviews in the Yanbian cities of Yanji, Longjing, Tumen, Hunchun, and Dunhua.
Chapter II, Transnationalization of Family Ties  
Presence, Absence, and Mobility in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture

Reflection I: The Urbanization of Li Feng Hua

The smallest of the six cities in Yanbian Prefecture, by both population and area, is Tumen (Kr: 도문, Domun, Ch: 图们, Tumen). Tumen City sits on the northwestern bank of the Tumen River, which divides the land into DPRK and PRC. The name Tumen is a topic of endless dispute and confusion - in Chinese it is written both 图们江 and 豆満江 (although the second, 豆満, is technically pronounced Douman, and is the name of a small nearby tributary that runs through Yanji City and joins the larger border-demarking 图们/Tumen river at the city of Tumen). In Korean the border river is rendered as 두만강 (Duman Kang, used in Yanbian and the DPRK) and 도만강 (Doman Kang, used in the ROK), while the city is often called 도문 (Domun), which should not be confused with 두만강-동 (Dumankang-dong, often rendered as Tumenkang in English) a municipality in the DPRK city of Rason about 40 miles east of the PRC city of Tumen/도문/图们. In any case, because the Tumen River kinks north at the DPRK city of Hoeryang (회령시), Tumen City looks southeast across the river to its DPRK sister-city, Namyang (남양시). Chinese, South Korean, and Russian tourists flock to this city to float down the Tumen River in swan-boats and take pictures of the tiny figures seen working and living across the river.
Li Feng Hua is a Korean Chinese woman, originally from Tumen. I met her in Yanji City in 2012, introduced by Prof. Nan when he invited us both to attend a geography conference in Changchun City. She was 22 years old. Feng Hua at that time was working on her master’s degree in the Yanbian University Geography Department. She had written her undergraduate thesis about cultural change in Yanbian during the late 2000s. She hoped to continue that topic into her master’s degree, but Prof. Nan was then undertaking research on small cross-border enterprises between the PRC and DPRK, and she became his research assistant. This turned into a symbiotic relationship for us when I returned in 2013, because she was stuck doing field surveys of local factory managers and I was looking for help getting local interviews. I started tagging along on her field surveys; people were generally more willing to meet with her because she had a foreigner in tow, and she always helped me squeeze in some questions about local cultural norms, family formation patterns, and migration. She also translated my ROK-style, Seoul-accented Korean into local Yanbian dialect. After the interviews we would go to coffee shops and talk over the results. Feng Hua became, and remains, one of my closest friends in China.
Living in the dorms in Yanji City, Feng Hua took the train home every weekend to work at her parents’ restaurant. Her parents disapproved of her graduate studies. They wanted her to find a job and get married, preferably locally. Her older sister had gotten a work visa to South Korea several years ago. While there, this older sister met and married a South Korean co-worker. She and her husband moved to Shanghai, to work for a South Korean electronics company with a factory there. They have two children, and she brings them back to Tumen three or four times a year. Her husband rarely comes. They visit the husband’s parents in South Korea twice a year, for the Mid-Autumn Festival (추석, 中秋节) and the Lunar New Year (설날, 春节). Feng Hua’s parents do not want her to follow her older sister’s model. They want a daughter physically present in their lives. At the same time, the older sister’s husband had set up a job for Feng Hua’s father in South Korea, and from 2014 he started commuting monthly to Busan (the major port city in the ROK). This development actually increased the pressure on Feng Hua to quit her studies in Yanji and return permanently to Tumen. Her mother was lonely.

Feng Hua graduated with her master’s degree in the spring of 2015. She moved back into her parents’ home. She worked full-time in their restaurant (which meant starting each workday at four o’clock in the afternoon and ending after midnight). Her father was still spending three weeks of each month in South Korea, and Feng Hua was helping her mother to prop up the family business in his absence. She hated it. She felt isolated and trapped in Tumen. When I returned to Yanji in the 2015 summer, she was preparing to take the Chinese civil service exam, intent on becoming an independent and respected member of society. She didn’t want to be under her parents’ thumb forever. She wanted, as much as anything else, to move back to Yanji.

The distance from Yanji to Tumen is 17 miles, or 28 kilometers. It takes 40 minutes by bus, a one-way ticket costs 15 RMB ($2.50), and buses run every 20 minutes from seven o’clock
in the morning to nine o’clock at night. For comparison, the distance from my parents’ house in Arvada, Colorado, to the University of Colorado at Boulder is 18.2 miles, or 29.3 kilometers. The bus trip costs $5.00, one-way, if paying cash fare. I made that commute five days a week for two years, and in Colorado, that’s considered close. But distance is a funny thing, and it is measured in different ways by different people. In Yanbian, the cities of Tumen and Yanji are acknowledged as far apart. If one makes that journey, she or he typically will plan it at least a week in advance, and on the day of travel, nothing else is planned. After the journey, one will need rest. The idea of bopping back and forth between cities like a ping-pong ball is not, as I discovered, universally considered natural.

![Leisure spaces in Tumen City, May 2014](image)

After I left Yanbian again in August 2015, Feng Hua took and passed the civil service exam. She was assigned to teach geography at a high school in Yanji. She is now dating a former classmate from her undergraduate days, also Korean Chinese. They typically date by attending the local Yanbian soccer team’s games. The team, called the Yanbian Changbaishan F.C. (연변장백산, 延边长白山, though previously known as the Yanbian Baekdu Tigers), took the national championship in China’s second-tier domestic league (China League One) after an
undefeated 2015 season. As of writing (April 2016) the team has been advanced to the China Super League, the top domestic league, for the 2016 season (where, unfortunately, they have lost all of their 7 games so far). Feng Hua hates sports. But she now hoards a vast trove of statistical data about the Yanbian Changbaishan F.C. Should I attribute this to the influence of her boyfriend? Or is it a larger show of casual urbane living, now that she is a legitimate citizen of the cosmopolitan city of Yanji?

Figure 15: A Yanbian Changbaishan F.C. game, July 2015

II.1. Introduction: Presence, Absence, and Mobility in Yanbian

In this chapter, I explore the material impacts of female out-migration on Yanbian society. I begin by exploring why transnationalism offers the best possible theoretical lens for understanding the complexity of Yanbian society. I next situate transnational approaches to migration within broader theoretical debates about the nature of social life, and tracing how transnationalism has emerged from cultural theories of practice to work in tandem with geographic conceptions of the performative construction of space. I conduct a brief review of the literature on immigrant-sending communities, to provide a context for comparison. I next offer a more detailed description of Yanbian’s particular situation, framed under the ideas of absence, presence, and mobility.
While later chapters will discuss Yanbian’s position within the Korean diaspora, Chinese society, and increasingly hybridized global society, here I focus primarily on local issues within the Yanbian social milieu. My purpose in this chapter is to show how, in many important ways, Yanbian demonstrates the same patterns that in other places have given rise to the term “the age of migration” (Castles, de Haas, and Miller 2013). But simultaneously, I wish to highlight how Yanbian is a unique place, located in a unique geopolitical context, and these changes are emerging in a unique historical moment. In particular, this chapter provides a material basis for grounding many of the larger theoretical arguments I will make later in this dissertation regarding the remapping of sovereignty. Here I demonstrate how Yanbian’s population was gradually made subject to South Korean discursive power, via its slow incorporation into South Korea’s socio-economic sphere. First migrants, then their families, and the businesses frequented by the families, and eventually entire Korean Chinese communities became economically dependent on remittances from South Korea. Simultaneously, South Korean cultural products took on a new signification as cool, modern, wealthy, and global. The creep of South Korean social norms into Korean Chinese life gradually opened up the possibility of new subject positions for Korean Chinese men and women. This is not to say that South Korea has replaced China as the sovereign power in Yanbian. Rather, the interplay between Chinese and South Korean power in the Yanbian area illustrates how diverse forms of sovereignty can overlap and even complement each other. These Korean Chinese migrant flows reveal what political borders obscure – that sovereignty is not mapped exclusively by territorial holdings, but rather flows across landscapes, taking physical form as migrants, money, and material goods, directed from different center of power but acting on the same space.
Yanbian: Backwater and Labor Reserve?

The PRC and ROK established diplomatic relations on August 24, 1992. The ROK, facing a domestic shortage of low-wage workers after two decades of rapid development, was responding to pressure from small- and medium-sized businesses to ensure a supply of non-unionized cheap labor (Kim Wang-Bae 2004, 319). Simultaneously, as China entered its post-reform era, ROK businesses recognized the huge latent potential for access to Chinese markets (Kim Hanjook 1994, 34). As a result, Kim Wang-Bae (2004, 321-3) documents that the ROK went from having less than 50,000 legal foreign workers in 1991 to over 250,000 in 1997, 350,000 in 2002, 537,000 in 2006, and 1,742,000 in 2015 (Hankyoreh 2015). 54.7% of these (950,000 people) come from the China, with 690,000 of those being ethnic Korean Chinese (Hankyoreh 2015). Separately, roughly 150,000 Korean Chinese women have married South Korean men and become legal permanent residents of South Korea. Estimates for undocumented Korean Chinese in South Korea, who overstayed tourist or other short-term visas, vary widely, but the lowest hover at about 10% of total labor migrants. Thus, the total number of Korean Chinese who reside in South Korea hovers somewhere between 840,000 and 1 million persons. The vast majority of those arrive on working visas (H-2), which are only issued to ethnic Koreans in China or the former Soviet states who are of working age (over age 25). The sex ratio of labor migrants is almost even, at 51% male and 49% female (Seol 2012), but the marriage migrants are almost exclusively female (Kwaak 2014), thus skewing the overall sex ratio towards female. The total population of the ethnic Korean Chinese was just over 2.3 million in 2009; 770,000 of them are officially registered as residents of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (Choi and Moon, 2015). Thus, 40-50% of the total population is gone. Since the vast majority of these are young, working age people, what does that mean for their natal communities?
Yanbian could become a poster-prefecture for the hollowed-out community\(^2\) – working adults all gone, nothing but children and the elderly, all waiting their turn to leave one way or another. Indeed, much of life in Yanbian is marked by absence – the absence of mothers, wives, and children. And yet, no one familiar with the city could describe Yanji as a dull, deserted, or empty place. Yanji, and the smaller communities nearby, are chock full of new presences – cars, apartments, clothes, makeup, music, KTVs, introduced through physical and symbolic channels that accompany migration. In the course of my fieldwork, I found the complex interplay between absence and presence to be a key feature of life in Yanbian. Complementing this was the theme of mobility: everyone and everything had a stake in mobility, yet this mobility was unequally distributed. Some people who wanted to stay home had to leave. Some who wanted to leave couldn’t get visas, and had to stay. Some found their lives burdened by others’ mobility: saddled with grandchildren, siblings, and material responsibilities that fell to them by process of elimination. Accounting for this mixture of absence, presence, and mobility, traditional migration scholarship falls short. To conceptualize the processes at work in Yanbian, then, I draw from a diverse body of social theory, beginning with transnationalism.

\(^2\) Hollow villages are those whose working-age population has departed for urban areas, leading to a decline in agriculture and an increase in abandoned buildings; the remaining population often consists of the very young and very old, who remain dependent on remittances sent from relatives in urban areas. See Sun, Liu, and Xu 2011.
II.2. Theoretical underpinnings of transnational theory

II.2.A. Locating the Social in Migration Studies

Transnationalism emerged in the early 1990s as a new frontier in migration studies. Positing that immigrants could stretch their social worlds across national borders (given the communication and transportation technologies to enable this), scholars in this vein began exploring how migrants maintain active membership in the social spheres of their home communities while living in the physical space of a host community. Transnationalism continues to generate an immense amount of productive scholarship. It has been challenged in terms of its actual newness (Smith 2000, Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004), questioned as to whether it has any meaningful impact on immigrant assimilation (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003), and broadly critiqued for being vague and loosely applied to any and all phenomena that cross borders (Pries 2008). Often hailed as a groundbreaking qualitative intervention in the predominantly quantitative field of migration studies (Boccagni 2012), in fact transnationalism is
a logical outgrowth of ideas fundamental to the cultural turn of social science (Ang and Stratton 1996). Thus, rather than merely shifting the unit of spatial analysis, transnationalism opened a new space in migration studies for sustained discussion of the meaning and location of social life, and the role of shared symbolic structures of meaning across vast distances.

I am not the first to suggest that Yanbian’s migration networks have remade it into a transnational place. The work of anthropologists like June Hee Kwon (2013, 2015), Gowoon Noh (2011), and Caren Freeman (2012) has suggested as much. Kwon documents the ways that mobility (and immobility) have redefined the expectations of family life in Yanji, characterizing the Korean Chinese as a “mobile ethnicity” (2013) and exploring the diverse ways that the state of waiting for loved ones to return has become a recognized subject position (2015). Noh (2011) examines the social meanings attached to money, migration, and gender, concluding that the increased economic burden on women has led to new discourses of feminine morality. Freeman (2012) documents the diverse and often duplicitous ways that Korean Chinese sought to profit from connections to South Korea, especially through kinship connections, real, paper-based, fictive, or otherwise. All of these scholars’ work investigates the ongoing and reciprocal ties with South Korea, not as an international relation between China and South Korea, but as a strong, stable, yet spatially limited relationship between Yanbian’s ethnic Korean communities and South Korea. This relationship did not result from bilateral economic agreements or state-led treaties, but emerged through the cumulative enactment of a transborder community.

Transnationalism theoretically follows a vein of interpretation that emerges from cultural theory, and specifically presents a theory of practice (Lacroix 2014). Transnationalism rejects homo economicus utilitarian interpretations of migration, which originate with Adam Smith-type analysis assuming individuals act first and foremost to maximize their own economic utility.
These assumptions, when applied to migration, often incorporate rational choice theory to understand how migrants calculate their lifestyle decisions, taking for granted that migrants make outcome-oriented choices (Richmond 1988). Equally, most transnational work shies away from *homo sociologicus* norm-oriented theories of action (Elster 1989), associated broadly with Emile Durkheim and elaborated by Ralf Dahrendorf (1973), which deny individual agency by attributing actions and choices to socially-determined roles. Instead transnationalism emerges from cultural theory, and in particular it follows cultural theories of practice. That is, it rests upon the fundamental assumptions that social life emerges not from individual economic interests or reified social structures, but rather from shared symbolic systems, which originate from everyday practices (Guarnizo 1997, Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003, Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001).

II.2.B. Spread of Cultural Studies in Migration

Transnationalism is a natural successor to cultural studies within migration studies. Cultural studies as an academic field emerged mostly from the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1960s, under the tutelage of scholars like Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Richard Johnson (Nelson et al 1992). In Johnson’s words (1987, 39), cultural studies sought to interrogate how:

…cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial structuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency… [how] culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs… [and how] culture is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles.

Coming to encompass the diverse body of work produced by scholars such as Roland Barthes, Homi Bhabha, Edward Soja, Raymond Williams, Rey Chow, and Arjun Appadurai, cultural
studies can be understood most broadly as an attempt to understand culture as “an arena of consent and resistance [...] where hegemony arises, and where it is secured” (Hall 1981, 239), or as an intellectual drive “to identify and articulate the relations between culture and society” (Nelson et al 1992, 4).

Transnationalism brought these ideas into migration studies, using the tools developed in cultural studies to challenge the assumption that the nation-state, the economy, or indeed any pre-defined and pre-existing structure is the basis of society. Instead, a cultural studies approach to immigration insisted on seeing social processes as ongoing, unstable, and constantly being negotiated in forums like popular culture. Transnationalism emerged as a reaction to migration scholarship which attempts “understanding the experiences of ‘the immigrant’, as an objective analytical category, rather than the experiences of ‘an immigrant’” (Kelly and Lusis 2006, 831). ‘The immigrant’ in this case is theorized as an isolated alien being that enters the space of the nation-state and remains there. This approach is predicated upon methodological nationalism, or “the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences. Scholars who share this intellectual orientation assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 576).

By contrast, transnationalism does not posit a single unit that serves as the foundation of society. In some places, the political state is the most powerful force in terms of impacting daily practice, as well as shaping citizen identity and subject position. In other places, immediate and extended kinship networks, religious community, or linguistic affinity is more important. These outcomes result from local histories, access to technology, geopolitical location, family status, and many other situations. A transnational approach demands attention to the power relations
that gave rise to particular immigration regimes, and forces the acknowledgement that those power relations are not limited to governmental policy debates on immigration quotas. Rather, the politics of cross-border movement emerge from popular representations of foreigners and from economic and cultural cross-border engagements, none of which are stable arrangements. Perhaps most importantly then, transnationalism – showing again its intellectual lineage from cultural studies – rejects the possibility of building grand narratives (Giddens 2013, 2). Migration happens at all scales (the individual, household, and in cases of chain migration or forced movements, also at the community scale and larger); migrants therefore build social structures at a variety of corresponding scales.

Removing the blinders of methodological nationalism is especially important in Yanbian, where multiple conflicting veins of political, cultural, and social history have long co-existed. Since Yanbian is an officially designated minority area within China, the Chinese government actively works to highlight the protection of minority cultural rights in the area, through legislation like requiring the use of Korean language on all public signage and mandating minority language education (Chinese minority policies will be discussed at length in Chapter IV). Teasing out which Korean practices relate to indigenous Korean history and which have arrived recently through migration channels is difficult for someone like myself, who never visited Yanbian in its pre-migration days. The possibility of conflating the influences of ethno-national history, territorial sovereignty, and social, cultural, economic, and physical ties to migrant destination renders traditional migration studies’ methodologies problematic, because they assume migrants are isolated individuals who arrive in destination contexts and undergo slow but inexorable assimilation.
The Korean Chinese believe this assumption, in part because they are undertaking a different kind of migration. They do not remain permanently in their destination. Korean Chinese labor migrants are legally barred from remaining continuously in South Korea, and must return to China every 3 years to renew their visa; even marriage migrants, who gain permanent residency in South Korea, usually return to Yanbian at least once a year. This creates a permanent circuit of mobile bodies; the cumulative daily practices of those bodies have produced a unique social formation spanning the national scales of South Korea and China, yet enacted at the scale of everyday life. Understanding how these mundane actions – applying for a visa in Yanji, taking a boat from Dalian to Incheon, renting a room in Seoul’s Daerim district, calling one’s parents, texting one’s friends, sending money to one’s spouse – give rise to larger social structures implies the need for attention to lay culture that emerges from everyday life. Transnationalism does just that; at its heart, it is a cultural theory of practice that follows work emerging from interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies to address this issue. Cultural theories are those predicated upon:

…explaining and understanding actions by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in corresponding ways. Social order then does not appear as a product of compliance of mutual normative expectations, but embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures, in a ‘shared knowledge’ which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world (Reckwitz 2002, 245-46).

It is this process, of ascribing meaning to the world, that ultimately gives rise to social structures.

As a cultural theory of practice, transnationalism locates the social in human practice. This differs from structuralists like Levi-Strauss, who saw human behavior as an outcome of “symbolic structures in the ‘unconscious’ mind” (Reckwitz 2002, 247) (and thus ultimately leave the mind as the “ghost in the machine”). It also rejects purely textual interpretations, while still drawing elements from post-structuralism and semiotics in terms of discursive analysis (e.g. Geertz 1994). Transnationalism, and practice theory more generally, has some resonance with
intersubjectivity, which locates the social in human interaction. Intersubjectivity, explicated best by Habermas (1984), posits that “agents internalize and use the contents and patterns of the oversubjective, ‘objective’ realm of meanings in their mutual speech-acts. Interaction is thus a process of transference of meanings which have been internalized in the mind” (Reckwitz 2002, 249).

But this leaves the “oversubjective, ‘objective’ realm of meanings” without an origin. Where do new meanings and practices come from? In Yanbian, young people enact Korean identity in ways unseen in South Korea. New slang words, new forms of traditional dance, new standards of bodily adornment – where do they come from? The Korean Chinese were considered the ‘model minority’ of China until the 1980s (Gao 2008); South Korea was a nation of net emigration until roughly the 1990s (Oh et al 2011); how have these positions changed so radically that now the Korean Chinese are a maligned underclass of disposable labor in South Korea? Can we credit the structures of the global economy? The agency of innovative individuals? Where can we locate the engine that drives social change?

II.2.C. Theories of practice: Bourdieu and habitus

In articulating a coherent transnational theory, more nuanced scholarship has followed Bourdieu in seeking to “transcend the divide between structure and agency by exploring a theory of ‘practice’ in which actions are both constrained by, but at the same time constitutive of, a deeper structure” (Kelly and Lusis 2006, 831-32). This approach balances individual experiences and choices with the reality of structural power inequalities arising from specific histories of places and people. In particular, Bourdieu’s conception of habitus traces the origins of those larger structures back to the convergence of individual actions and understandings. Bourdieu (2005, p. 27) defines habitus as “a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners
of being, seeing and thinking, or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action.” But individuals do not freely choose which systems, schemes, or structures to subscribe to. As Fleming (2005) writes, “Habitus is acquired through our acculturation into certain social groups such as social classes, a particular gender, our family, our peer group, or even our nationality. […] There are different habituses associated with each of these groups. Each individual’s habitus is a complex mix of these different habituses together with certain individual peculiarities.”

To Bourdieu, each person has one (or several) specific positions, or social roles that result from one’s personal accumulation of capital. Capital here is not purely economic, but refers to all the various resources (economic, symbolic, social, cultural) that an individual has access to. An individual’s capital defines her or his position in terms of educational status, occupation, hobbies, religion, etc. Different forms of capital will be relatively more or less important in different situations, places, and times. Through practices, “aka position-taking,” people “signal and maintain a position” in relation to others; space, then, emerges as “a field of forces -- the system of relations, alliances, and power struggles” and “a mathematical/spatial metaphor for how people are related to each other with respect to types of capital” (Moody 2011). Social space is literally a measure of the social similarity or difference between people. These spaces emerge and converge in fields, which are the summation of all the possible positions in relation to a particular type of capital – the field of education, or knowledge of vintage wines, or economic resources. As will be discussed below, Bourdieu has been criticized for this relatively uncritical and fundamentally aspatial conception of a “field.” Nonetheless, Bourdieu does highlight the socially constructed nature of space, and attributes the construction to power struggles.
Habitus provides a way to understand how larger social structures emerge from human practice, without assuming total free agency. This is important for Yanbian, where relatively recent changes belie the idea of everlasting or reified superstructures, but strong patterns imply that not everyone just happens to be making the same choices. Habitus is the linkage between practices and positions – the understanding of how particular bodily practices like accent, word choice, hairstyle, dress, mode of transportation, living conditions and home decor, collectively define one person’s status in relation to others. “The habitus is the framework within which the value associated with various forms of capital is established. It is the objective ‘rules of the game’ that establish what will be prized and rewarded in any given context – what things are worth, and what is considered worthy and worthwhile. Although these rules of the game exist beyond individual control, they must also be reproduced by individuals in their social practices” (Kelly and Lusis 2006, 834).

II.2.D. Performativity, subjectivity, and Butler

This unconscious reproduction of unarticulated social norms and expectations bears close resemblance to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Like Butler, Bourdieu suggests the possibility of gradual change in systems of valuation if actors become aware of ways in which their enactment of social norms reproduce inequalities or injustice. However, for Bourdieu, arriving at that initial awareness is difficult because “domination permeates the logic of reason and practice, and thus obscures the rationale of change agency” (Nentwich et al 2015, 238). Nonetheless, Bourdieu still thinks this is possible. With reference to gender inequality, he writes that equality could result from “collective action aimed at a symbolic struggle capable of challenging practically the immediate agreement of embodied and objective structures, that is,
from a symbolic revolution that questions the very foundations of the production and reproduction of symbolic capital and, in particular the dialectic pretention and distinction which is at the root of the production and consumption of cultural goods as signs of distinction” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 174, cited in Nentwich et al 2015, 238). He does not, however, appear to think individuals are capable of structural change through individual choices.

Butler, by contrast, places considerably greater weight on the daily decisions of individuals to enact or subvert their social position (subjectivity). Critically summarizing Bourdieu, Butler (1998, 122) writes “the subject who utters the performative is positioned on a map of social power in a fairly fixed way, and that this performative will or will not work depending on whether the subject who performs the utterance is already authorised to make it work by the position of social power it occupies.” For Bourdieu, an individual’s subjectivity results from her or his constellation of social capital, not from the performance of citational subject positions. Bourdieu fails to account for innovation or refusal, assuming individual action is limited to those roles which are structurally pre-determined – without fully explaining how these structures came to exist in the first place. How does the social position of low-ranking co-ethnic labor worker, or conniving foreign bride taking advantage of uneducated rural bachelors, initially arise? How do new social positions and new meanings attached to them emerge?

Bourdieu does allow for misrecognition of social conditions; misrecognition is comparable to misattribution, as when educational success is attributed to personal talent rather than a host of enabling conditions (family background, etc.), which then “gives the educational certificate the value of a natural right and makes the educational system one of the fundamental agencies of the maintenance of the social order” (Bourdieu 1984 p. 387, cited in James 2014). Bourdieu’s misrecognition implies a certain cognizance of half-true assumptions (and thereby
allowing for a degree of “fudging” the social capital that determines subject positions), but does not imagine anything so radical as Butler’s suggestion that subject positions can intentionally be performed differently (although, as discussed below, she does recognize discursive limitations on individual agency).

Butler is explicit on her divergence from Bourdieu here. She writes that her own work will “borrow and depart from Bourdieu’s view of the speech act as a rite of institution to show that there are invocations of speech that are insurrectionary acts” (Butler 1997, 145, cited in Nentwich et al 2015, 241). Butler shows how discursively-performed subject positions are not only open to reinterpretation, but in their performance they produce and reproduce the social, which is often misconstrued as independent structures limiting society. Butler rejects the possibility that preexisting social structures, independent of human agency, define the possibilities for subject positions: “Bourdieu would assume that only those whose backgrounds are legitimized will have the power to speak and hence have change agency, while Butler focuses instead on how a specific speech act can be potentially tailored in a given situation to mimic the legitimized position and thereby create a copy of it. […] In her perspective, the social and the discursive are co-constitutive, so people create their legitimacy as they speak” (Nentwich et al 2015, 241). Butler’s reformulation of agency will be further discussed below.

Transnational theory benefits directly from this reconceptualization of possible subjectivities. Traditional migration scholarship assumed that migrants could be fitted into a predefined set of identity markers; they could hold loyalties to a predefined set of entities (for god and country, or family, or community). But Korean Chinese research participants in both Yanbian and South Korea expressed their self-perception of being in a new social relationship. Labor and marriage migrants alike cited the new permanence of constant circulation, of rotating
between the low status of Korean Chinese immigrant in South Korea and the high status of wealthy returned sojourner in Yanbian. Officials in Yanbian conceded the reshaping of Yanbian economy to rely on migrant remittances; teachers at a local university stated that their students were primarily interested in gaining vocational skills for use in Seoul. Korean Chinese students in Seoul expressed ambivalence about remaining permanently in South Korea; once they acquired the necessary skills, capital, or certifications, they hoped to be globally mobile, but based in Yanbian. This diversity of means and ends diverges from traditional migration conceptions like the melting pot or the salad bowl, in that they dispense with the “container” implied by pot or bowl. These people saw themselves constrained by language skills, visa qualifications, cultural know-how, but not by national borders per se. And while Yanbian is unique in many ways, this diversity of migration styles and outcomes was clear to many scholars, from the early 1990s at least. This was the driving impetus behind the rise of transnational studies.

II.3. Emergence of Transnational Migration Studies

II.3.A. The Age of Migration

International migration has grown numerically and expanded geographically since the 1960s, increasingly incorporating migrants from Latin and South America, Africa, as well as East, South, and Southwest Asia. As economic globalization brought new labor forces into global markets, and countries found increasingly specialized production niches, former migrant-sending countries (including South Korea) became migrant-receiving countries to fill gaps in their domestic labor forces (Massey et al 1993, 431). These migrant flows have been theorized in many different ways. The most prevalent model in policy work and public discussion has
been that of neoclassical economics, in which migration is a rational economic choice of individuals based on wage differentials and cost/benefit analysis, resulting in labor flows from areas of abundance into areas of scarcity (for discussion and critique, see Teo 2003). Within the social sciences though, this model is usually considered in tandem with more complex analyses. The “new economics of migration” paradigm suggests that migration decisions are undertaken at the household level, in an effort to diversify income sources and spread risk (Stark and Bloom 1985). This model helps explain why migration does not always follow wage differentials, and why not all potential migrants leave. At the national scale, dual labor market theory posits that industrialized countries develop a structural need for immigrant labor, as native populations will be unwilling to perform necessary labor in the secondary sector (Dickens and Lang 1988). And many scholars (especially in political science and international relations) approach migration through world systems theory, which suggests the global economy divides the world into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions, and these semi-peripheral and peripheral regions serve primarily as sources of raw materials (including labor) for use in the industrialized core (Wallerstein 1987).

These primarily economic analyses held sway until the mid-1990s, when scholars from anthropology and sociology interjected ideas of social remittances (Levitt 1998) and transnationalism (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995) into the conversation. Work on social remittances suggests migrants send back not only economic flows, but also ideas, practices, and normative behaviors which impact migrant-sending areas. Transnationalism, which has since become a veritable buzzword in migration scholarship, theorizes migrant networks as the foundation of a complete social formation that transcends political borders. In some ways, transnationalism expands the line of thought that emerged from new economics of migration.
work – migration is not an individual undertaking, but rather part of the larger social systems of which migrants are a part. Uniquely within migration studies, though, transnationalism defines those social systems as bridging and incorporating both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving areas, in a move that explicitly diminished the perceived importance of the nation-state. Transnationalism grants migrants the agency to construct new life-worlds, and new subject positions, through innovative use of new technologies. In important ways then, transnational studies traces its intellectual heritage back to cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Arjun Appadurai.

The term transnationalism was not an original one though; it had earlier usage going back at least to the 1930s. It reemerged forcefully in Nye and Keohane’s 1971 book Transnational Relations and World Politics, which examined new ways that NGOs, social movements, corporations, churches, and other non-state actors were operating beyond the bounds of political nation-states. Picked up again in Rosenau’s 1980 collection The Study Of Global Interdependence: Essays On The Transnationalization Of World Affairs, it was used to suggest a new paradigm for international relations that did not rest on the hard separation of international and domestic, but rather a new state of “global interdependence.” But transnationalism did not become a field of its own until it was redeployed in migration studies in the early 1990s.

II.3.B. Transnationalism and the rejection of methodological nationalism

Since then, transnationalism has expanded the range of possibilities for conceptualizing the object of migration studies. Rather than focusing on immigrants, or immigrant networks, or more-or-less strictly defined groups like diasporas or ethnic minorities – all of which exist in
relation to the *a priori* sovereignty of national political borders – transnationalism fundamentally challenges this, by advancing the possibility of a transnational social formation (Guarnizo 1997, Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). This conceptualization unbinds human society from political borders, recognizing both new and enduring ways the geography of social life diverges from the maps of nation-states. This corrects an over-privileging of the territorial nation-state, which is often taken as the primary unit of social life, “as in both scholarly and popular views, nation-states are thought to normally contain societies (as implied by the concept of “American -- or Mexican or French – society)” (Waldinger 2009, 74-75). Transnationalism, by contrast, highlights how economic, cultural, and even political life occurs at scales both above and below the country. At the same time, this “by no means implies the effacement of place, region, province, or their accompanying identities. Instead, we observe, in tandem with the explosion of translocality in the current era, a revitalization of place-making and place differentiation” (Oakes and Schein 2006, 2).

Among the earliest scholars to take up the term transnationalism to refer to trans-border cultural processes was Ulf Hannerz. His 1996 book *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* argued that humans construct their identities based on diverse “habitats of meaning,” which include cultural, kinship, historical, racial, and socio-economic networks and hierarchies that do not overlay onto territorial country. While his work was not in direct conversation with migration scholars like Nina Glick Schiller, Peggy Levitt, Alejandro Portes, and Steven Vertovec, he theoretically bridges many of the gaps between international migration, transnational theory, and processes of globalization.
II.3.C. Transnationalism and Globalization

Transnationalism is often seen as a process closely related to globalization, in that both describe the increase in type, frequency, and intensity of human ties across national borders. Globalization, in one definition offered by Keohane and Nye (2000), refers to the “thickening” of intensive and extensive economic, military, environmental, social, and cultural linkages that affects many people in diverse places around the world. This has been ongoing in various “thin” and “thick” incarnations for centuries, from early examples like the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean trade beginning in the 3rd century BCE. However, they highlight how technological innovation, especially in communications and transportation, have altered globalization in the modern era (since 1945): “Sheer magnitude, complexity, and speed distinguish contemporary globalization from earlier periods” (111-12). This is summed up as space-time compression, and certainly international migration is one part of that.

Transnationalism, too, has been defined as a “globalization from below” (Portes 2000). In particular, transnational accounts of migration highlight how immigrants have maintained continuous ties with their home countries even for generations after immigration. Transnational immigrants send both social and economic remittances back to their origin communities, maintain continuous contact with friends and relatives at home, create new opportunities in immigrant host communities for potential migrants, and bring social, cultural, and economic elements of their natal societies into their migrant destinations. While these outcomes were first described as “transnational” by scholars working on international migration, similar phenomena characterizes some long-distance migration within countries or across regions, leading to explication of the “translocal,” “transregional,” and “transcultural” (Oakes and Schein 2006; Hoerder 2012). These alternative conceptualizations further critique the “national” in
transnationalism, which can reify and petrify the idea of a “national culture” (Hoerder 2012, 70). Despite important differences, these various interpretations share the intellectual project of parsing how time-space compression has altered the experience of migration for some. All of these practices rest on the same technological innovations that fuel globalization – inexpensive and instantaneous communication, infrastructure for the transfer of financial remittances and material goods, means of human transportation like airplanes, trains, and cars. The main focus of scholarship in transnational migration, though, lies in the socio-cultural outcomes of these processes within migrant networks.

Some scholars, though, taking a narrower definition of globalization as referring to the international movement of capital and regulated by increasingly neoliberal policies, see transnationalism as a grassroots opposition to globalization (e.g. Conway 2012). Globalization, in this reading, has little to do with everyday people and everything to do with powerful figures intent on increasing their wealth at the expense of the many. Yet this narrow understanding of globalization ignores important ways that lay people engage in and promote globalization, through online discussion forums, international travel, and production and consumption practices that rely on global networks. Transnationalism, rather, should be seen as a reciprocal process of globalization, enabled by the cumulative use of the new technologies and supply chains that define economic globalization, but also laying the basis for further cultural and social globalization through people-to-people transfers at the community and individual scales. Indeed, an important distinction between globalization and transnationalism is that of scale – globalization, seemingly by definition, refers to phenomena that affect the entire globe, while transnationalism examines processes that transcend national borders but do not necessarily reach above the community scale. And, as ethnographic data from Yanbian amply illustrates, neither
globalization nor transnationalism can be read as either oppressive or enabling – rather, they produce both of these outcomes in various situations.

II.4. Gaps in Transnationalism: Mobility, materiality, and agency

At the same time, scholarship in transnationalism generally fails to account for non-economic outcomes, exaggerates migrant agency, and undertheorizes the role of non-human actors in mobility. In Yanbian, transnational circuits are enacted by humans – but they are enabled and materially consist of many other things. One friend in Yanji told me how her mother left her fourteen years ago, when she was six. They used to talk on the phone once a week, and she grew up feeling that she didn’t have a mother. But several years ago her mother bought and sent her a smartphone; now they text several times a day, exchanging trivial comments and observations, pictures and gossip and advice. She now feels very close to her mother; she says she understands her mother’s motivations, appreciates the remittances that funded her childhood, and thinks of her mother as one of her closest friends. This relationship is transnational, but it does not rely on the mobility of bodies. How can we account for the importance of non-human mobility? How does agency relate to inanimate yet interactive objects like cellphones and communication networks?

II.4.A. Mobility, Assemblages, and the New Mobilities Paradigm

Here I seek to redress those gaps by examining specific, grounded, material ways that people experience transnational life. I therefore enrich my approach to transnational migration by drawing from academic work on global assemblages, “ensembles of heterogeneous elements – the assemblages – through which [any given subject matter] and its significance are
articulated” (Ong and Collier 2005, 5). This definition builds on Deleuze’s conception of assemblage, summarized by Bryant (2009):

Assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another. These objects are not all of the same type. Thus you have physical objects, happenings, events, and so on, but you also have signs, utterances, and so on. […] Consistency and coherence are not qualities that precede assemblages, rather they are emergent properties that do or do not arise from assemblage. It is noteworthy that the term “consistency” is not being used in the logical sense, but in the sense of solutions and substances. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of consistency is closer to the way we use it when talking about cement, referring to it as “soupy”, “dry”, “lumpy”, “coarse”, “consisting of stone and lime”, etc., than the logical sense of “lacking in contradictions”. An assemblage can be riddled with contradictions as in the case of the economic and ethnic divisions that divide the North and South side of Chicago, while still producing consistency and coherence. Consistency and coherence are thus not about being without logical contradiction, nor about harmony, but rather about how heterogeneous elements or objects hang together.

As Daniel Little (2012) summarizes, the concept of assemblage, though vague, implies a particular way of conceptualizing social systems. He writes “Social entities are composed of components and lesser systems; the components of a social entity are heterogeneous […] include both material factors and meaningful expressions […] have their own characteristics and dynamics […] and […] may have very different temporal and spatial scales.” Regarding outcomes of interactions internal and external to the assemblage, he summarizes “The effects and interactions among components may be indeterminate because of complexity effects and probabilistic causal mechanisms. The behavior of the whole is difficult or impossible to calculate even given extensive knowledge of the dynamics of the components.” This resonates with my research outcomes in Yanbian: while my college-aged friend discussed above had grown closer to her mother through her absence, many others felt distant and disconnected from family in South Korea, and some had lost contact altogether.

The growing use of assemblage as a concept can be linked to the spatial turn in the social sciences. In particular, as a greater overall number and diversity of mobilities can be observed in the globalizing world since the 1990s at least, social scientists have increasingly
come to recognize that space plays an active role in shaping the outcomes of these interactions. But existing conceptions of how material and immaterial elements interact over different ranges and depths of distance was inadequate for understanding the often-unexpected outcomes. However, the formulaic assemblage “is often used to emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation. […] In broad terms, assemblage is, then, part of a more general reconstitution of the social that seeks to blur divisions of social–material, near–far and structure–agency” (Anderson and McFarlane 2011, 124). Work within assemblages examines how global or non-specific discourses and patterns articulate in specific locations, interacting with a spatio-temporally specific set of elements to produce unique outcomes.

The idea of assemblage is taken up and pushed further in John Urry’s 2007 book *Mobilities*. Bringing assemblage into the concrete world, Urry explores how increases in global mobility bring people and things into shared paths of transit, working together “openly, clandestinely, or inadvertently” (4) to create new industries, economies, and normative behaviors through their performances. Mobility has allowed the rise of a new class of jetsetters, people whose mobility grants them enormous privilege, but he notes too that non-mobile peoples are taking advantage of mobile technologies like the internet and shipping to access a new array of global information, materials, and media. In Yanbian, one can see official bilateral development projects undertaken by partnerships with the South Korean (and North Korean) governments; one can see branches and franchises of South Korean shops and restaurants; there are multiple daily flights to Seoul, Busan, and Jeju; and individuals returning on those flights often pack their luggage full of cosmetics and medicine to sell in Yanbian. But Urry cautions against an overly
optimistic assessment, highlighting how slavery and human trafficking, refugees and displaced peoples, terrorism and invasions are all examples of new mobilities. In Yanbian, too, one can also see children whose parents will never come back; migrants who returned with permanent disabilities; housewives who dream of cosmopolitan Seoul, but who will likely never go. Urry’s goal is not to offer a moral assessment of the increase in mobility – it is to cast doubt on whether old analytical paradigms suffice to understand these new phenomena, and to suggest what he calls a “mobility turn” in the social sciences, “a different way of thinking through the character of economic, social, and political relationships [that] emphasizes how all social entities, from a single household to large scale corporations, presuppose many different forms of actual and potential movement” (6). He is calling attention to the mobility that underlies how assemblages operate.

The body of literature surrounding the mobilities paradigm is a necessary complement to transnationalism, because transnationalism itself drastically undertheorizes mobility. Without acknowledging specific ways that transnational social formations arise or operate, they become reified entities that incorrectly appear to exist independent of specific performed acts of transnational mobility. Urry’s mobility paradigm corrects this, first by highlighting specific meanings and ways of becoming mobile. Mobility can imply, first, the property of being able to physically move, as in mobile bodies, goods, telephones, etc. Second, mobile can imply a mob, an unruly group of mobile people outside the control of any specific state. Third, Urry refers to vertical social mobility, hierarchies of people and peoples based on their relative positions (which Bourdieu would trace further back to their stores of various capitals). Fourth, mobility can be used to characterize lifestyles or conditions “of semi-permanent geographical movement”
(8). Sheller and Urry (2006, 208-9) demonstrate how this new conceptualization of the mobile underpinnings of social life exposes weakness in previous “sedentarist” interpretations:

Sedentarism treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness. Sedentarism is often derived loosely from Heidegger, for whom dwelling (or wohnen) means to reside or to stay, to dwell at peace, to be content or at home in a place. It is the manner in which humans should inhabit the earth. He talks of dwelling places (Heidegger, 2002). Such sedentarism locates bounded and authentic places or regions or nations as the fundamental basis of human identity and experience and as the basic units of social research (Cresswell, 2002, pages 12 - 15). It rests on forms of territorial nationalism and their associated technologies of mapping and visualisation which emerged out of the Enlightenment ‘cosmic view’ of the world.

Incorporating this literature, which presents mobility as an inescapable aspect of modern life, redresses many of the oversights of early transnational theory, in particular its exoticization of mobility. By suggesting that mobility as an ongoing condition was the defining feature of transnational life, this problematically obscured ways that mobility underpins all social life, and failed to recognize other unique and defining features that do set transnational migrants apart from others.

At the same time, work in transnationalism, mobilities paradigm, and assemblages all have been accused of gross overgeneralization, to the point where everywhere is transnational, everyone is mobile, and everything is an assemblage (respectively Dahinden 2009, Fitzgerald and Waldinger 2004, Anderson and McFarlane 2011). In fact, the purpose of each of these bodies of work is to suggest and analyze unique, new, and heretofore unrecognized ways that social life is being conducted. Research in mobilities paradigm does indeed say that everyone is implicated in mobility – but not everyone is actually mobilized, or made mobile or immobile in the same ways. Mobilities paradigm work examines different ways that people experience mobility, revealing unforeseen hierarchies and continuums that differentiate human life.
II.4B. Materiality and Actor-Network Theory

In building connections between literature on assemblage and transnationalism, some scholars have connected this work to Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT), arguing that migrants demonstrate an innovative re-embedding into the social networks of host societies without fully de-embedding from social networks at home (Lacroix 2014). However, others have pushed back against the tendency to conceptualize transnational migrants or their places as “nodes” in a network. McFarlane (2009, 6), in particular, argues that an ANT approach is incompatible with the theoretical use of assemblage: “translocal assemblage is an attempt to emphasise that translocal social movements are more than just the connections between sites. Sites in translocal assemblages have more depth than the notion of ‘node’ or ‘point’ suggests (as connoted by network) in terms of their histories, the labour required to produce them, and their inevitable capacity to exceed the connections between other groups or places in the movement.”

This argument insists on the hierarchies and depths that arise as emergent properties from the interactions of diverse components of an assemblage over uneven social space.

This critique, while usefully highlighting problems in a simplistic overlaying of ANT onto transnational networks, ignores the complex reasoning behind many of these ANTish analyses. One of the primary aims of ANT and its successors (non-representational theory, geographies of affect and materiality) is to bring back a focus on lived realities, embodied corporeal experiences, and phenomenology, de-emphasizing discursive and textual analysis.

Sharing many conceptual similarities with assemblage, actor-network theory represents another attempt to incorporate spatiality into materialist social analyses. ANT approaches “treat everything in the natural and social worlds as a continuously generated effect of the web of relations within which they are located” (Law 2009, 141). This work focuses on “how life takes
shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions…” (Lorimer 2005, 84). While it may use the vocabulary of node, connection, etc., these are metaphors for conceptualizing the interconnections between mobility and immobility, and many scholars have elaborated these notions to explore how a critical sense of spatiality emerges from this work (Whatmore 1999, Hitchings 2003). Bingham and Thrift (2002, 289) describe Latour’s call for “a gestalt shift according to which space and time are no longer conceived of as existing ‘independently as an unshakable frame of reference inside which events and places would occur’ (Latour 1987:228, emphasis in original), but, conversely, the result of interaction, ‘consequences of the ways in which bodies relate to one another’ (Latour 1997a:174, emphasis in original).” The goal of this work was explicitly to return attention to the lived realities of the material world.

Yet ANT analyses have been criticized for being excessively vague, for ignoring the differential power held by various elements in a network, for failing to account for unique histories that shape current circumstances, and for relying primarily on descriptive analysis (Alcadipani and Hassard 2010, Bloor 1999). These critiques certainly had merit, and pushed many ANT theorists towards a more performative analysis of socio-spatial phenomena (Law 2010, 151). While I do not explicitly use Latour’s ANT vocabulary or conceptualizations here, I recognize that transnationalism is a successor to this thinking, and the flourishing state of performativity studies today has similarly grown from earlier ANT analyses.
II.4.C. Agency: Bridging the material/discursive divide with performativity

The push for materiality in actor-network theory brought a new approach to debates surrounding the material/discursive divide, but did not settle it. As Rose-Redwood and Glass (2015, 11) write, “the very act of theorizing, or developing a new ‘way to talk,’ about the excesses of pre-cognitive experience paradoxically produces the ‘pre-cognitive’ as a discursive object that can then be spoken of as the constitutive outside of all cognition.” In Yanbian, my informants almost universally condemned South Korean society as materialistic, corrupt, hierarchical, and discriminatory. Yet almost every informant had gone there willingly, living and working there. Ironically, they saw themselves as forced to do this (since there are few such lucrative positions available in Yanbian), but they thought South Koreans enact their society willingly (since they viewed South Koreans as rich enough to have other, non-exploitative options). Which came first, the damning discourse or the lived experience? Without pretending to fully reconcile this chicken-and-egg style debate, I find a productive way forward in the work of Judith Butler. She suggests that scholarship “return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (1993, 9, cited in Rose-Redwood and Glass 2015, 10). Her methodology, as developed in her 1990 book Gender Trouble and expanded in Bodies that Matter (1993), approaches lived reality as co-constituted through the operation of discourse on matter, arguing that “the materiality of sex [and not merely the effect of gender] is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms,” (Butler 1993, ix). She makes this argument by redefining/refining the meaning of a “construct.” Rather than view a “construct” as something false, or as a facade that masks, or as something of “artificial and dispensable character” (1993, x), Butler argues for a reading of constructs as constitutive, fundamental and
necessary to the endurance of intelligible bodies. In this view, material difference is always, everywhere, and necessarily “marked and formed by discursive practices;” this “is not the same as claiming that discourse causes sexual [material] difference” (1) but rather, “what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. […] [Thus] the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (2). Thus the unhappy experiences and low social position of the Korean Chinese in South Korea are lived materially through embodied practices and processes which are constituted as intelligible and given meaning through discourse.

Butler’s performativity, in addition to addressing the textual/material divide, also offers a theory of agency. As Gender Trouble is commonly summarized, if we perform gender then we can perform it differently. But assuming that individuals have complete free choice and ability to enact whatever gender (or other social roles) norms they so desire ignores the reality of power relations, which often limit those choices and abilities. Butler goes back to Foucault here, citing the power to limit discourse as the basis for structural limits on agency. She offers an “understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 1993, 2). In a sense, then, this reiterates the observation of Marx, that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past” (Marx 1852, 595). But the past for Butler exists in the given limits of discourse; agency lies in the ability to regulate, enforce, or alter those limits.
While performativity is now associated most strongly with Butler, in fact Butler is building on a diverse and conflicted field. Performativity was first suggested by J.L. Austin in his 1962 book *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin’s theory of performative speech suggests that the speech act is indeed an action, that speech is not merely a descriptor of an independent material reality, but that the act of speaking in fact has agency in that reality, as when a sovereign asserts “I declare war” (Rose-Redwood and Glass 2015, 6). For Austin, the power of the speech act derives from the speaker’s authority. The speaker’s authority, much like Bourdieu’s social capital, derives from the speaker’s social positioning. Again like Bourdieu, Austin allows very little scope for subversion or “unauthorized” speech acts. Butler’s reconceptualization of this flips it entirely around, approaching authority as legitimized through “continually reasserted, recited, and reenacted” performances (Rose-Redwood and Glass 2015, 7).

Geographers have drawn heavily on concepts of performativity and expanded them into spatial analyses. Yet the use of performativity has revealed deep-seated differences in its understanding, usage, and implication. Geography has long approached space as a socially inscribed with meaning, through diverse analyses ranging from the social implications of built landscapes (Sauer 1925, Mitchell 1996) to the materialization of political economic processes in physical spaces and human imaginaries (Massey 1994, Gibson-Graham 2006). Work which more explicitly draws from theories of performativity addresses issues including the performance of workplace identities such as bankers (McDowell 1997), cruise ship employees (Weaver 2005), and restaurant work (Crang 1994). Performative analysis of the geography of gender has yielded fruitful work such as Bell et al’s 1994 study on dissident sexual identities, Duncan’s 1996 edited volume *BodySpace*, and Mackintosh and Forsberg’s 1999 reading of masculinity in the Masonic
lodge. Performativity has further enriched geographic analysis ethnicity and race, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter III.

Debates surrounding these analyses, like larger debates in the social sciences, pivot on issues of structure and agency, fetishization of culture and reification of economy, and the operation of power through material and discursive practices. Many scholars have incorporated ideas of performativity from the sociologist Erving Goffman, who suggested “the self [is] a performed character... not an organic thing that has specific location ... [the performer and] his body merely provide the peg on which something of a collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time” (1956, pages 252-253, cited in Gregson and Rose 2000, 433), and thereby introduced metaphors of the stage into social analyses. Yet Goffman’s metaphors remain fairly aspatial despite his broad duality between onstage and offstage; further, they leave little room for theorizing agency. Luce Irigaray (1985), in her reformulation of these ideas, argues that subject positions like female are merely masquerades, pre-existing roles that are taken on by pre-existing free agents. In many ways comparable to Austin’s theory of performativity, this work assumes a pre-existing set of social power relations within which individuals, limited by the set range of social capital/roles/masks available to them, may operate.

But by drawing on Butler, geographers have introduced a new theoretical model for how space is constructed through performative practice which includes space for agency and resistance. In a Butlerian analysis, “…performance – what individual subjects do, say, ‘act-out’ – and performativity – the citational practices which reproduce and/or subvert discourse and which enable and discipline subjects and their performances – are intrinsically connected, through the saturation of performers with power” (Gregson and Rose 2000, 434). These citational practices include the enactment of spatiality. Power-laden spatiality emerges through
the encouragement and rewarding of normative behaviors, or the policing and punishment of unsanctioned performances. This is spatialized through debates around the zoning of affordable housing projects and pushback from NIMBYists, in loitering and urban camping prohibitions, in advertisements for localities’ “race-to-the-bottom” tax codes to attract investment, and in explicit and implicit dress codes. In Yanbian this is done through Korean-language-only advertisements for housing (which serves to keep some apartment blocks entirely Korean Chinese), through differential access to South Korean visas, and through official and unofficial language policing (I quickly learned which shops and restaurants expected me to use Korean, and which expected Chinese). All of these attempt to regulate the types of peoples and activities that ‘belong’ in a place or space, defining some bodies and undertakings as desirable and others as aberrant or out-of-place. And all are simultaneously material and discursive: in their spoken or written form, they bring physical force to bear on violations and enact material change. Thus, as Rose-Redwood and Glass (2000, 15, 16) write, “the production of social space is the material-discursive effect of performative practices” yet “this is not to suggest that social spaces can be performatively rearticulated at will, since it is also precisely during moments of performative ‘slippage’ that hegemonic social norms are often reactivated and reasserted all-the-more forcefully.”

The performative construction of space, and hegemonic social forces, are not limited to the mundane scale of everyday life. On the contrary, performativity scholarship shows that “…scale is not necessarily a preordained hierarchical framework for ordering the world – local, regional, national and global. It is instead a contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents” (Marston 2000, 220). In Yanbian, scalar practices varied by ethnicity (Han Chinese cannot get H-2 visas to South Korea), gender (women
were generally more successful in international migration, yet were continuously warned not to walk the streets of Yanji at night), by age (smaller towns around Yanji, such as Longjing, Antu, and Wangjing tended to be full of older people who didn’t have the financial or social capital to move even into Yanji), and other factors. This harkens back to a fundamental tenet of transnationalism discussed above, the de-naturalization of the national scale. Transnationalism however, while challenging the given-ness of nation-state boundaries and calling attention to social forms other than the state, does not offer an alternative conceptualization of state power, nor the rise or remaking of borders. In theorizing the state, then, I turn again to Butler, who states “[t]here is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (1993, 9, cited in Rose-Redwood and Glass 2015, 22). This idea has been further elaborated by Merje Kuus (2009, 87) who writes “state power, and indeed the state itself as a seemingly coherent actor, does not pre-exist policy making. Rather, the state is produced through practices like foreign policy that operate in its name.”

II.4.D. Governmentality and the Performance of the State

This analysis of the state as an effect of practices takes theoretical inspiration from performativity, but both have a lineage leading back to Michel Foucault’s articulation of governmentality and power (1982, 2009). Rather than approaching power as an object to be wielded by a state, or by a ruler, or by coherent entities like classes, Foucault sees power as “a dense net of omnipresent relations – it comes from below and is everywhere” (Nohr 2012, ¶3). To govern, then, is first and foremost to influence and regulate the norms of human relations. Foucault divides this loosely between disciplinary power (practices which “define standards and measurements for behavior, create hierarchies based on competence, and develop tools to exact
compliance with the norm” (Foldy 2002, 101)) and pastoral power (which “require that the inner truths of one’s self be both discovered through self-examination and expressed outwardly through speech so as to affirm and transform oneself” (Covaleski et al 1998, 297)). The goals of disciplinary and pastoral power are to instill new normative behaviors, to ensure that the subjects of power share the same personal and inter-personal goals (on issues like health, desired social status and standards of living, morality, family formation, etc.). These goals are not to be accomplished through compulsion (which Foucault terms sovereign power, and is enforced through violence); people are not to be executed for having low social aspirations. Foucault’s modern powers correct, rather than punish, aberration. He terms this governmentality (2009).

Governmentality is the fostering of a set of calculations through which individuals themselves decide to act in a way conducive to the continuation of the governing power relations. As Foldy (2002, 100) writes, “In this view, power and identity constitute each other: particular historical power relations create particular identities which then serve to maintain those power relations.” The state here is not a power-wielding entity that seeks to maintain its position on top of society, but rather a set of relations. This is articulated clearly in Timothy Mitchell’s work, which has argued that the state is not a “distinct entity, opposed to and set apart from a larger entity called society” (1991, 89); there is not “some political subject, some who, [which] pre-exists and determines those multiple arrangements we call the state” (90, emphasis in original). Rather, disciplinary and pastoral powers work “not from the outside but from within, not at the level of an entire society but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them” (93). Through not overly-coherent technological discipline, the state is “represented and reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of
military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers” (81). The state emerges as an effect of everyday practices, and importantly, these practices are spatial: “[The state] is an effect produced by the organized partitioning of space, the regular distribution of bodies, exact timing, the coordination of movement, the combining of elements, and endless repetition, all of which are particular practices” (93-94). Returning this discussion to Butler’s conception of performativity, the practices that governmentality encourages are the result of individual calculations, and individuals are not rational economic calculators. They always retain the potential to slip, to deviate, or to gravitate to an alternative calculus.

Here, then, I want to explore that idea, of the potential slippages and pushbacks, and contests between hegemonic state power and its others, via performances enacted within discursive limits (but with the potential to push or alter those limits). In Yanbian, we see the (perhaps) unique situation in which multiple groups are working to produce competing state powers. The various and sundry actors who collectively enact the Chinese state by appealing to South Korea’s subalterns (a concept discussed more thoroughly in Chapter IV), attempt to perform Chinese state sovereignty without a clear economic base in the region to legitimize their performance of power. Simultaneously, through a questionable separation between politics, economy, and culture, the officially-sanctioned (but still unstable and potentially suspect) Korean ethno-cultural minority (minzu) attempts to enact a cultural pathos of the traditional, timeless, Confucian model minority, with the ultimate goal of maintaining de facto power in the prefecture. This contest, as outlined in Chapter I, has been delicately negotiated since the 1930s if not earlier. But a new and potentially destabilizing factor is the incipient rise of diverse forces acting on behalf of the South Korean state and society. Without explicitly attempting to enact South Korean state power, these new actors serve as vectors for new trajectories of power,
introducing practices that reproduce the social, economic, racial, and gender inequalities of South Korea. Next I elaborate some of the specific material-discursive pathways through which this power is enacted, examining these (not entirely successful) attempts to build diasporic cultural hegemony through sovereignty claims to cultural control of the Korean transborder nation.

II.5. The Rise of Transnational Practice in Yanbian

Midway through my fieldwork, on the advice of a friend, I visited a Korean shaman to get my fortune told. The shaman was an elderly woman, dressed in normal Korean hanbok, and we met in her apartment. She asked about my background, draped several shawls over herself and tied a small pointy hat to her head. After jotting down some notes about my birthdate and time, she took my pulse and told me to be wary of cars. She brewed us some tea and we chatted; she had a daughter working as a Chinese language teacher in South Korea. How old was her daughter? Twenty-six. Was she married? No. Twenty-six is approaching late marriage age, as my raised eyebrows might have implied, because the shaman defensively told me that her daughter would marry once she returned to China. She had been working in Korea for five years, and had saved a lot of money, and so would be home soon. I asked if the daughter might want to marry a South Korean and stay there. The shaman’s expression suggested I had besmirched the family name. South Korean men, she told me, were essentially barbarians. They beat their wives and did no housework. Her daughter, the shaman emphasized, would be returning to Yanji and marrying a nice Korean Chinese man, in the very near future. I nodded… emphatically.
But will her daughter return? My visit to the shaman coincided with the 2014 Chinese New Year. I write this almost two years later. I am still friends with the shaman on WeChat (she periodically offers advice), and her daughter has not yet come home. Nor has she married. The shaman, it turns out, herself spent almost ten years working in South Korea before her daughter went, and now she travels there frequently to visit her daughter. Will she ever have grandchildren? Will those grandchildren live in China?

II.5.A. Absence

Every single one of my informants had at least one member of their extended family in South Korea. Many told me that they expect their family members to return once they had saved up enough money for a specific goal: to buy an apartment, to pay for school expenses, to fund a child’s marriage. But whether or not these migrants will make a permanent return is still unclear. Doo-Sub Kim and Jung Man Kim (2005) imply otherwise, finding that since China and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1992, the Korean Chinese population has declined rapidly due to out-migration, falling fertility rates, and rapid aging. D.S. Kim and J.M Kim
(2005, 85) also cite the gender imbalance resulting from marriage migration as a significant factor in the fertility decline. Hyejin Kim (2010) further documents that between 1965 and 2007, the Yanbian population has shifted from being 47% ethnic Korean to 33%, with corresponding increases in the percentage of Han Chinese. Thus in sheer numbers, the Korean population in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture appears to be waning.

However, since the implementation of stricter visa regulations in 1997, the flow of Korean Chinese migrants into South Korea has slowed (N.H.J. Kim 2008). This has not necessarily slowed the overall out-flux of people though; Liang and Dohm (2006) document that Korean Chinese migrants show relatively high rates of migration even within China. Hyejin Kim (2010, 28) supports this argument, suggesting that “the gradual development of Korean networks in these [major Chinese] cities since 1992 has underpinned the rapid increase of the population movement of ethnic Koreans to these areas.” She further suggests that this has created a new “urban Korean Chinese culture” in cities like Beijing and Shanghai and a simultaneous “erosion of rural Korean Chinese culture,” characterized by increasing familial separation and juvenile delinquency (33 – 34). I am hesitant to follow Kim here – I do not take culture to be a thing that can erode, like a riverbank. I agree that the rural population is declining, but those people are moving into urban areas and performing their cultural practices differently. This includes innovative practices of family life, sometimes separated by great distance and national borders.

The absence of parents was the most frequently mentioned shift in family patterns. The overall majority of informants who raised this point said that if a father migrated then the mother would raise their children alone, but if the mother migrated (and even if the father did not) then the grandparents would raise the children. The issues of elderly grandparents raising grandchildren came up in a range of settings. The most frequently cited issue was the
grandparents’ inability to properly oversee the grandchildren’s education. One mother said that it causes problems not only in the grandchildren’s education, but also disrupts the school environment:

During parent-teacher meetings teachers find it difficult to talk to grandmothers. It is uncomfortable for them [the grandparents] to understand too, and education is different. So when my child was in middle school, many of his classmates’ moms had [migrant] jobs. There were 3 grandmothers. But then another class had one-third grandmothers and fewer mothers. But then my son’s class had many moms so the atmosphere was different. There is a certain atmosphere that leads students, and the atmosphere of classes that have many grandmothers is kind of down and depressed. So there should be moms. (January 2014).

The problems inherent in having elderly grandparents raise young children are often recognized by parents; in addition, many migrants don’t have stable grandparent homes where their children can reside. This has given rise to alternative arrangements, including private industries and the practice of asking (and paying) teachers to supervise, house, feed, clothe, and nurture the children of migrants. One local teacher discussed this practice:

So there is someone running a childcare system. About 2-3,000 won a month in rural areas. They are all done individually. Moms visit and ask teachers to take care of their children. But I think it is better to leave their children to teachers and faculty members than nannies. It is better for moms to leave their children to be taken care of by those teachers if the moms are not able themselves, because those teachers can raise the children better.

She assumed that the relatively high educational and cultural levels of teachers would leave them well-qualified to essentially run a children’s home. This idea resonates with (and reinforces) the reputation of Korean Chinese as prioritizing education above all else. In pre-reform China, this reputation was enacted through high literacy and college attendance rates; as Gao (2008, 57)
writes, “According to Ma (2003), Korean illiteracy rate is 3.3 per cent of the population, whereas the national average is 9.5 per cent. While attendance in higher education among Koreans is the highest with 8.6 per cent, the national average is 3.8 per cent.” But in the post-reform era, China’s overall literacy and tertiary education rates are increasing while the Korean Chinese minority’s tertiary education rates are declining (D.S. Kim and J.M. Kim 2005). Correctly enacting Korean Chinese ethnic identity in today’s social milieu thus requires more drastic measures, including paying for children to study abroad. The practice of leaving one’s children to pursue wealth abroad can thus be read as an adaptive attempt to properly enact Korean Chinese ethnicity.

Indeed, the ethnic skew of these issues was emphasized by most of my informants, Korean and Han Chinese alike. MingLi, for one, was my waiter and friend. We met at an Italian restaurant in Yanji, a favorite hang-out for the small expat community, where he worked to improve his English. He found my vegetarianism delightful. He excelled at making constant innovations in his recommendations: today I should try the pizza, but ask for tofu pepperoni; next I should ask for the spaghetti, but ask for tofu meatballs. He never knew how the Italian cook would respond to these requests, but he thoroughly enjoyed imagining the culinary possibilities.

MingLi is Han Chinese, but was born in Yanji and grew up there. At 22 years old, he is majoring in English at Yanbian University. When he was a high school student, he made several foreign friends in Yanji, in order to practice his English. Through their influence, he converted to evangelical Christianity. There are many Yanji locals who are Christian; however, the vast majority of them are Korean Chinese. No one in MingLi’s family is Christian. His parents strongly disapprove of his faith. They worry that he has joined a cult. But MingLi is devout. He often blesses my food before he gives it to me, since I do not. Because most local churches
conduct services in the local Korean dialect, and the foreign church (where services are held in English) requires a foreign passport for entry, MingLi now speaks passable Korean. His closest friends are all from his congregation, and they are all Korean Chinese. Despite the warm reception he has found through his church, he admits to me that he still feels some distance between them, since he is Han Chinese. But he also feels himself to be a keen observer of his friends, with his semi-outsider status allowing him to notice many peculiarities of the Korean Chinese that they take for granted. Knowing my research interests, he offers his insights:

“They are very rich, but they don’t know this. They all have family in South Korea that sends them money. But they think everyone has this money. Han Chinese do not. So Korean Chinese are much richer than us. But still, it is not so good [for the Korean Chinese]. Usually their parents are gone. I have many friends who are alone. The parents go away and leave their children, and the children often do bad things. They go to wangba [internet bars] and don’t study. They have no love. In the end, it is because they don’t know about love. They have money, but the children don’t receive love, so they grow up and don’t know how to love.” [Personal communication, in English, Nov. 2013].

Nearly this exact sentiment was expressed to me in Harbin by Professor Cai, a local sociology professor who studies ethnic minority education in China. This woman, in her early 40s, expressed to me time and again how the Korean Chinese had been seduced by South Korean money. She herself had been offered many jobs in South Korea – prestigious jobs, since she was a professor – but she loved her family and her country, and she would not go. She told me the story of her high school classmate, who went to South Korea with her husband and left their 2-year-old son to be raised by his grandparents. As he grew older he often fought at school, and the grandparents felt helpless to intervene. Because the boy’s parents were in South Korea illegally, they could not return home to visit. Finally, at 16, the boy killed someone with a knife. “Then his parents came back, with lots of money, but for what? Their child already grew into a criminal, and he was full of resentment (怨恨) and blamed his parents. The parents had the child but didn’t raise him” (Personal communication, Sept. 2013).
This story may seem extreme, but during my time in Yanbian there were at least 3 murder cases related to South Korean immigration. In one, a young Korean Chinese man whose parents had stopped sending remittances went on a knife rampage in a local mall, killing three people. In another, a couple who had just returned from South Korea were killed in their apartment and robbed of their migrant savings. In the third, a man who had been working in South Korea and sending back wages to his wife for many years returned to find her pregnant by another man; he stabbed her to death on a popular shopping street in broad daylight. Such displays are testaments to the deep psychological and emotional upheavals that accompany rapid socio-economic change – the violent consequences of being thrown into situations where one’s parents, neighbors, or lovers are performing social life differently.

To me, the most disturbing part of these stories was how matter-of-fact my friends and acquaintances discussed them. Public anger was not directed at the young man who knifed local shoppers, but rather at the parents who took away his family, his support network, and finally his sustenance. Few people felt horrified at the couple killed in their apartment, because the couple had (allegedly) made it known that they brought back all their savings in cash – my friend sighed over such ignorance, and explained that they were too ignorant to understand banking (personal communication, March 2014). As for the man who killed his pregnant wife, his story was so sensationalized that most people treated it as a live TV drama, and exchanged pictures of the bloody incident on WeChat:
The absence of so many people has clear repercussions for everyday life among the Korean Chinese. There are no easy substitutes for social roles like parents and wives; nor can other people, such as grandparents and teachers, identically reproduce the conditions of a nuclear family. And yet children are growing up, fed and clothed. While there are some notable cases of sociopathic behavior, it is dubious to attribute this to migration alone. Every society has some level of violence and crime; the rise of a transnational social formation may simply alter the opportunities and expressions of this criminal element. The vast majority of my informants, while not celebrating the absences left by migrants, accepted it as necessary for surviving in a new economic reality.

II.5.B. Presence

These absences, the gaping holes they leave in the structure of society, have a reciprocal though: the resulting presences introduced to Yanbian society through migration channels. One highly visible presence is the alteration of bodies – the rise of obesity and labor-related
disabilities. Less immediately visible, but perhaps more important, is the presence of cash remittances, which have stratified Yanbian society in new ways. In tandem with remittances, migrant connections have introduced new flows of direct foreign investment into the Yanbian area, especially via the proliferation of South Korean businesses opening branches there. In the course of my fieldwork, though, I became convinced that the most important new presence was that of new opportunities, in particular opportunities for chain migration, higher education, and household security through diversification. I end my discussion of presence with a consideration of new connections, interrogating connections as an intangible source of pride, better knowledge of the world, and a reflection of abstract concepts of civility and progress.

The health impact of working “3-D” (dirty, difficult, dangerous) jobs in South Korea is another issue that was frequently raised by interviewees. One college-aged informant, Dong-hoon, recounted to me how his mother worked in restaurants in South Korea from the time when he was 4 years old until he was 18 and graduated from high school. She only returned to Yanbian then because of a stomach cancer diagnosis. While cancer rarely has a single identifiable cause, Dong-hoon was unequivocal: this was because of the high stress, poor living conditions, and unhealthy (Western) food that his mother had endured for years in South Korea. His proof lay in her recovery: she had returned to Yanbian four years ago, and the cancer had retreated since then. He raged at the shameful conditions that he imagined his mother had endured; yet her savings are now paying for him to study abroad in Canada. His goal is to become a doctor, and return to provide healthcare to Yanbian residents.

Studies from other locations (Riosmena et al 2012) have shown that out-migration has significant and detrimental effects on obesity rates and the nutrition transition. It is unclear though how the Korean Chinese are responding to the shift from an agricultural lifestyle to an
industrialized lifestyle, with its attendant processed foods and sedentary economy. Choe and Cho (2012) find that Korean Chinese in Yanbian are significantly more likely to have irregular diets and unhealthy perceptions of ideal weight, but ironically, those unhealthy perceptions tended towards the ultra-thin. Ki et al. (1999, 9) find that “For the Korean-Chinese girls, there is an inverse relationship between the education level and obesity but a direct relationship between the income level of parents and obesity […] Among boys, the higher the SES [socio-economic status], the greater the risk of obese [sic].” Cui, Xiong, and Fang (2007) find that Han Chinese in Yanbian display significantly higher measures of BMI [body mass index, where a higher BMI corresponds to higher overweight and obesity] than do Korean Chinese, and Fang et al. (2005, 759) find that “The prevalence rate of central obesity (WC > 0.8) among Han women was significantly higher than among Korean women” in Yanbian Prefecture. Thus research implies that Korean Chinese transnational family life, which typically leads to higher income, may increase risk of obesity, but that their risk still remains lower than average risk of the Han Chinese.

Other physical costs of labor migration are clear in Yanji. Men without fingers or hands, who walk with limps or humped backs, with scars on their faces, are not infrequent. These kinds of physical tolls are not in any way unique to Yanbian; everyone who does physical labor, be it farming or coal mining or machining, is at much higher risk of injury than anyone working in a tertiary or quaternary industry. One South Korean study showed an enormously high accident rate of over 50% among foreign migrant workers (Korean Times 2002). Industrial accidents might happen anywhere, but the point that my informants all latched onto was the fact that they, the Korean Chinese, were the ones taking these injuries for the sake of South Korea’s economy. This was the outsourcing of bodily risk, and the absence of those fingers and all their abilities
was felt quite keenly by Yanbian society at large. Perhaps the most overt and well-studied presence in Korean Chinese communities has been the remittances sent back by migrants. The income differential between sending and receiving areas is stark; ethnic Korean Chinese in South Korea could “earn in one month a sum equivalent to several years” average income in Yanbian” (Luova 2009, 432). Wang Bae Kim (2004) reports that Korean Chinese migrants in South Korea earn on average 1 million won ($800) per month, which is “six or seven times higher than the average income in Yanbian, which is about $110 per month” (326). In 2001, this resulted in remittances sent to Yanbian of over $300 million, more than total income in Yanbian that year of $208 million (D.S. Kim and J.M. Kim 2005, 95). By 2007, the Yanbian government reported that total remittances had reached one billion U.S. dollars (Luova 2008, 34).

The importance of remittances to marking out Korean Chinese ethnic identity in Yanbian cannot be overstated. Korean Chinese use this wealth to distinguish themselves in many ways. They wear significantly more expensive clothing, mostly South Korean brands. Women wear South Korean makeup, conspicuously pulling out the branded makeup compacts to touch up their lipsticks and powders in public. Plastic surgery is also surprisingly common in Yanbian, especially more minor procedures like “double-eyelid” surgery (Asian blepharoplasty), permanent makeup, and nose jobs; this aesthetic standard is imported from South Korea, and several of the local surgeons claim to be trained in South Korea (Pak 2012).
Spatially, too, remittances are used to mark ethnic and economic difference. New apartment complexes are primarily being built in the northern and western parts of Yanji, and the large Korean lettering is often an indicator of the ethnic character of the residents. Shopping centers, too, tended to divide along ethnic lines (which relates too to the ways that Han and Korean Chinese dressed differently). Certain supermarkets specialized in Korean foods, and I was advised to buy milk only from those who imported it from South Korea (despite the incredible cost difference, with the Korean milk costing at least three to four times as much as Chinese brands). My Korean Chinese friends knew the delivery schedules for the Korean supermarkets, and if someone ran out of milk on a Thursday, they would know where to go to buy the most recently arrived imports.

Thus, as in many other instances globally, remittances are largely spent on consumption. Often though at least part of the remittances were saved for the migrant to use upon return. As Luova (2009) describes, “many returnee migrants operated small businesses such as restaurants, karaoke bars, or hair-dressing salons, since to do so did not necessarily require a large
investment, but very few established a larger business or invested in production” (439). This kind of direct investment, the opening of businesses with South Korean cash, introduces more than just shopping opportunities. The kinds of businesses that come tend not to be the type that creates large-scale job opportunities (South Korean corporations locate their factories in southern China’s special economic zones), but rather consumption-oriented chains and franchises: coffee shops like Caffe Bene and Mango Six, food chains like Lotteria and Paris Baguette, and clothing shops like Black Yak and Kolon Sport. The impact of these shops was rather to increase the cultural and economic polarization between local Korean Chinese and Han Chinese populations. These shops, usually owned by South Koreans, hired Korean Chinese employees and operated primarily using Korean language. Their prices are also a minimum of double that of their local Chinese competitors. Owing to both of these factors, Han Chinese residents of Yanbian do not patronize them. This creates separate spaces of leisure and consumption for Han and Korean Chinese. At the same time, by creating these luxurious spaces in which Korean Chinese can mark their status by spending their remittance money, that money is being channeled back to South Korea, and the consumers remain dependent on wages earned in South Korea.

Figure 20: A Korean shopping center in Yanji, October 2013
This is not to imply that no Korean Chinese rise to ownership or managerial positions, or that all migrant dollars (yuan) are spent frivolously. Nor is it to pass a moral judgement on the proper or improper use of their own money. Rather, I intend to show how migration builds economic connections and interdependencies that expand beyond simple one-time purchases like apartments or tuition fees. Migration remittances lay the foundation for an entire lifestyle, and not just for the migrant. As grandparents become accustomed to chasing their grandchildren around, and those grandchildren become habituated to having lots of spending money and little parental supervision, different familial, educational, and financial expectations emerge. Indeed, in my observations, the most profound changes to Yanbian’s Korean Chinese society lay in expectations and opportunities.

Migration creates debt on two sides of a relationship: one party undertakes hardship by going to South Korea, and the other party endures the hole left by their absence. When Korean Chinese women marry South Korean men, they leave their aging parents bereft of companionship. In exchange they send back money, they bring their parents for visits, they take grandchildren back to visit Yanbian. When Korean Chinese spouses or parents leave to work in South Korea, they take on the burden of being the lonely breadwinner-in-exile. In exchange, their family back home is expected to carry out domestic reproduction properly – children should study hard, spouses should be faithful. At the same time, the absent parent is often perceived as selfishly pursuing money and living out “South Korean dreams,” reneging on their parental obligations. Their offspring, even young adult children, have come to expect something in return for their lonely childhoods – ongoing financial support, funding to travel and study abroad, apartments and packages of South Korean goods. Having a parent working, living, or married in
South Korea was a dubious honor for my Korean Chinese acquaintances. They understood the implications of abandonment and neglect. Perhaps that is why they worked so hard to show me the sacrifices and benefits of these arrangements. People would inform me regularly of what their family members were up to in South Korea, perhaps to signal the enduring closeness of their family bonds.

The opportunities for international travel especially struck me, because they strongly demonstrate the scalar shifts that Korean Chinese society has undergone. Most of my Han Chinese friends in Yanbian were either Yanbian University students from other parts of China, for whom Yanbian was an incredibly distant place, or locals who had never left Jilin province. But for Korean Chinese, international travel was a normative expectation. This caused me enduring difficulty in fieldwork, because at least ten of my closest friends and informants left Yanbian very suddenly when their visas to South Korea or the US were approved. I do not have hard statistics on how many Korean Chinese high school or college students study abroad, but among my acquaintances, it was roughly half. On one occasion, a college-aged Korean Chinese friend invited me to her parents’ house for a meal; I arrived to find a full banquet (including a small delivery pizza) laid out, which we munched while they put me through a three-hour Q&A session about US immigration law (a topic I then knew very little about).

The presence of so many younger people studying abroad, especially in the USA, created a sense of ambivalence among older people. One retiree, a Korean Chinese man aged 72, whose granddaughter was studying in New York State, said this about his younger days:

Back then we never even imagined it. When we were young, not only could we never even imagine this, we never conceptualized working in an office, going to and from a desk job (출근하다, no exact translation). Because the idea of Opening (i.e. Reform and Opening) was entirely absent. But because of Opening, this good of a life has been provided. Back then we thought if you were an American then you were a bad person. (Personal interview, May 2014)
I end my discussion of presence with a consideration of new connections, interrogating connectivity as an intangible source of pride, global knowledge, and a reflection of abstract concepts of civility and progress. I want to frame this around a discussion of the satellite dish. Satellite dishes are illegal in China, except for those which have been modified to only receive official broadcasts. But in Yanbian, with an illegal satellite dish and a small subscription fee, one can access the entire world of South Korean satellite TV. The temptation is great. During one visit to a rural village whose population was mixed Han and Korean Chinese, I asked if there was any way to visually distinguish the Han and Korean houses. Yes, I was told – the Korean houses were the ones with satellite dishes. Local police did sometimes crack down on the dishes, but typically enforcement was perfunctory at best. I arrived home to my own apartment one day to find an official flier taped to the door: next week, it informed me, there would be city-wide inspections for contraband material. The next several days saw all of my friends and neighbors matter-of-factly disassembling their satellite dishes and stowing them in closets and under beds. The police dutifully knocked on doors for several days (although never coming to mine). The following week, the satellite dishes were up again.
The programs beamed in via satellite showed all the glitz and glamour of South Korean life. Just like elsewhere, chit-chat among friends often drew from and discussed recent shows, popular celebrities, and (South Korean) national news. My friends used this as a display of
worldliness and savvy, warning me not to trust Chinese news, because they had heard the truth via South Korean channels. Women and men alike attended closely to the fashions, hairstyles, and even speech patterns emerging from Seoul-based programming [I was horrified to find the cutesy South Korean slang sentence ending “~ng” spread rapidly among young people in Yanbian – as in 사랑해용 (saranghae-yong) rather than Seoul-standard 사랑해요 (saranghae-yo) or the typical Yanbian dialect 사랑합니다 (sarang-hamda)]. Elderly people often used current TV shows as a comparison point during interviews, to show me how far society has come. One 68-year old female interviewee disapprovingly noted: “When I was young, we wore grey or blue pants, not those flashy party dresses you see on TV now” as she points to a drama episode currently on the TV behind her (September 2014).

The lax enforcement of the satellite dish ban was surprising to me. Korean Chinese can watch uncensored South Korean news, talk shows, and entertainment programs. But with reflection, I see several reasons why the Chinese government might allow that. The Chinese government encourages lucrative temporary migration to South Korea, but requires ultimate patriotic loyalty to China. South Korea is hip in Yanbian, but actually traveling there is difficult and expensive. The life of Korean Chinese in South Korea (which will be explored more in the next chapter) is a far cry from the carefree imaginary on TV. Through their satellite dishes, then, non-migrant Korean Chinese can symbolically participate in South Korean society without enduring the humiliation or indignities of living as an immigrant laborer in a frankly racist society. They can perform urbane sophistication without any material commitment or struggle. Through the mobility of media images and their cosmopolitan connotations, individuals are excused from mobility. To return to the critique of transnationalism discussed earlier, that it might be used to falsely read everything, everyone, and everywhere as transnational, this
II.5.C. Mobility

This brings me to my last point, the reciprocity of mobility and immobility in Yanbian. Mobility and immobility are caught up in complex discourses of morality, alternatively valorized and demonized. One day when I was visiting Li Feng Hua’s home in Tumen, her mother asked Feng Hua how I would go back to Yanji. I would take the bus, Feng Hua said. Her mother shook her head. “The train is better,” she said, “only 10 kuai.” The bus, as mentioned above, costs 15 kuai and 20 minutes. The train, an old green behemoth that runs just four or five times a day, takes over an hour, winding through the mountains and stopping at multiple villages between Tumen and Yanji. Feng Hua’s mother had already formed an opinion of me as a flighty foreigner, living fast and wasting money, so she had probably already assumed I would take the bus.

The correlation between speed, money, and movement came out in many interviews, especially with older people. One 68-year-old Korean Chinese woman described the relationship thusly:

Longjing and Yanji are very close, you know. Now it takes half an hour [to travel between them]. Longjing and Yanji, even though they are very close, [in the past] to go by car was very anxious and going just once was really difficult, you know. We didn’t have much money so we had no car fare, and our parents and siblings would have to work really hard for several months to gather the car fee, so wasting money just one time coming and going was really a shame. We felt regretful. (June 2014).

[逢정하고 연길이 아주 가깝죠. 지금 반시간이면 가죠. 逢정하고 연길이 가까운 거리도 하나는 차가 긴장하고 한번 오자면 힘들죠 돈이 얼마 안되지만 을 차비도 없고 정말 여기 부모나 형제가 있다하여도 보러 오는것도 몇달 고민고민 하다 준비하고 차비를 모아서 한번 갔다오면 또 돈이 떨어져서 갔다오기가 아깝죠.]
Mobility, at first glance, is a privilege. People enjoy travel, seeing new places, consuming exotic things. But mobility in Yanbian is a complex issue: it introduces new forms of value and oppression, both materially and symbolically. When immigration became possible in the early 1990s, it was embraced and celebrated, and people was desperate to leave (see Freeman 2012). Mobility then was a means to wealth in an otherwise dead-end region. Marriage migration especially was imagined as a Cinderella story, with rich men sweeping poor girls off to glamorous South Korea. But a 2009 South Korean government survey shows that “over half of foreign spouses married to [South] Korean citizens were divorced or widowed within five years” (Kwaak 2014), linked to very damning issues of violence, abuse, and cultural clashes (Schubert 2011). Labor migration, too, was initially considered a guaranteed path to upward social mobility, until stories of abuse, dangerous working conditions, and withheld wages became commonplace (Lim 2003). The shift in the Korean Chinese imagining of South Korea changed it from a place of opportunity where their co-ethnic bonds were treasured into a place of capitalist exploitation and abuse of the weak. Mobility no longer meant privilege: it meant exposure and risk.

This was doubly true for women. As Noh (2011) contends, women who migrated were left open for criticism, accused of shirking their feminine duties (to husband, children, and society) in pursuit of selfish personal wealth. Beyond the social criticism they endured in Yanbian, discourses of Korean Chinese women within South Korea slandered them on many fronts (see Chapter III). These critiques smacked of offended patriarchy, attempting to reign in the subversive behavior of a previously submissive segment of the population. Kyung-suk was one of my key informants, a 42-year old Korean Chinese woman married to a local Christian pastor and mother of two daughters. She described mobile women as “totally failing their
families… not caring about anyone except themselves” (November 2013). But just a few months later, as the expenses of school fees and Chinese New Year celebrations was weighing on her, she told me she wished desperately to go work in South Korea. “If I could work there, we would have no money problems” (February 2014). When I asked her why she didn’t go, she told me her husband wouldn’t allow it.

Kyung-suk was not alone in facing her husband’s displeasure – what made this unique was that (unlike any of my other informants) she was cowed by her husband’s position. The vast majority of Korean Chinese women I spoke with over the course of fieldwork had already been to South Korea, and most intended to go back. By the time my fieldwork began, in 2012, none of them had any grand delusions about reuniting the diasporic Korean nation. Some still hoped to marry South Korean men. But most were interested in making money and coming home.

Korean Chinese aspirations to join the South Korean nation were thus abandoned. But back in Yanbian, the consumption and display of South Korean cultural images and materiality appears to be only growing. What, then, can be concluded about the ‘transnationalization’ of Korean Chinese life? How is daily life being performed differently? Parents increasingly fulfill their family duties by leaving their families to seek work in South Korea, and sending back money in their stead. Grandparents and teachers are increasingly called upon to shoulder the reproduction of family life. Young people have both increased burdens and increased expectations for their futures. Symbolic and material exchange with South Korea is encountered daily in Yanbian, through commercial products and services, ambient K-pop music, stories in the news. Membership in the Korean ethnic nation is bodily performed through clothing, hairstyles, and speech patterns. At the same time, none of this is celebrated as a pure good. The transnational connections that bring wealth and worldliness into Yanbian also draw the Korean
Chinese into the rigid gender, class, and ethno-racial hierarchies that so harshly polarize South Korean society today. The next chapter will explore how these complex issues of rights and entitlements map onto the territorial homeland and its diasporic bodies.
Chapter III: The Korean Chinese among the diaspora

Reflection II: Holidays in Yanji, Holidays in Seoul

Chinese New Year (설날, 春节), 2014: Yanji City, China: When I arrived at Yanbian University in fall 2013, on a Senior Scholar visa with a China Government Scholarship, the Foreign Students Office packed me over to the Geography Department with no delay. The chair of the Geography Department, whom I had met the previous summer in Yanbian, red-stamped my paperwork and gave me a copy of his own dissertation (“Applications of World System Theory in Yanbian, China”). I was given an office on the third floor of the building and left to my devices.
I began every day at my office; I arrived around 9 am and wrote, transcribed, or translated whatever I had done the previous day. At 11:40 there would come a knock on the door – one of the junior faculty coming to get me for lunch. We ate together in the staff cafeteria five days a week, five kuai ($0.76) per meal. Geography as a discipline is heavily quantitative in China, and these meals hosted some of the most frustrating discussions I had in the field. But they also formed some of the most dependable relationships I made in Yanji, and provided the most honest windows into daily Korean Chinese life.

Professor Kim in particular became my friend – in part, I suspect, because she wanted an English tutor for her young son. But whatever the cause, I frequented her house for meals and remain deeply grateful for my informal adoption into her family. Professor Kim’s own parents live about six hours’ drive southwest of Yanji City. She moved to Yanji in the early 1990s to attend the high school here, living with her aunt and uncle. After high school she attended Yanbian University, then married and had a son. They lived with her husband’s parents. When her son was two, she left Yanbian to enroll in a graduate program at a prestigious university in Seoul, South Korea. From 2006 until 2012, she came back to Yanbian once a year during the Lunar New Year holiday, while her husband and parents-in-law raised her son. Finally graduating and returning permanently to Yanji in 2012, she moved back in with her husband’s parents and found a job at Yanbian University. In 2013, they bought the apartment one floor below her parents-in-law’s, and now Professor Kim and her husband and son have their own home.

Professor Kim’s parents-in-law came to Yanbian from North Korea, in the brief window between WWII and the Korean War. Even now they speak only minimal Chinese, and their northern-style Korean is so different from my Seoul-dialect that Professor Kim often translated
between us. Nonetheless, they have a satellite dish and watch South Korean television continuously. Her father-in-law told me “We left because there was no food there, and I had an uncle here. We thought we would stay a short time, and we could go back when we wanted. We used to write letters, but we stopped that a long time ago” (personal communication, in Korean, March 2014).

Professor Kim invited me to join her family for the Lunar New Year meal. I arrived with wine, juice, and a fruit basket, and was ushered in to sit on the couch next to her parents-in-law. We watched two soap opera episodes, then when the news came on, we sat down for a meal of dumplings and crab. Cross-legged on the floor, crowded around the table (Korean Chinese typically eat at a low table, sitting on the floor), Professor Kim’s mother-in-law carefully sliced open the crab’s legs and picked out the meat, placing it gently on my rice bowl. The entertainment during the meal came from Professor Kim’s son, who was forced to recite a poem in English for me. At the end of the meal, we bundled up and walked out to the courtyard at the center of the apartment complex. Local boys were setting off strings of firecrackers, which echoed off the tall apartment buildings like a canyon. We could only endure the cold for about ten minutes, before we hustled back inside, and I went home for the night.
Mid-Autumn Festival (추석, 中秋节), 2014: Seoul, South Korea

While the Lunar New Year is the most important national holiday in China, the Mid-Autumn Festival (held on the first full moon of the 8th lunar month, which usually falls in September) is the most important holiday for Koreans. In Korean it is called Chuseok. Culturally it is very comparable to American Thanksgiving, with a huge importance attached to being with family for a large meal, which is the focus of the holiday. When I first lived in a South Korean homestay from 2007-08, the Chuseok holiday was paramount; my host ‘mother’ took me along for two solid days of shopping, as we bought food, clothes, and gifts for the entire extended family and most acquaintances. The days leading up to the holiday were full of short meals with old friends; people often had two or three lunches, in order to meet everyone they needed to see. The day before the holiday, we drove to my host ‘grandparents’’ house in a village outside of Nonsan City, and commenced cooking. The holiday meal began the next day
at 11:00 am, and included ceremonial bowing to elders and gifts of money to the children. The adults drank until late that night, and neighbors came by continuously to give good wishes and exchange gifts. At the time I was shell-shocked by the marathon-like quality of festivities.

Seven years later, in 2014, I again found myself spending the Chuseok holiday in a homestay in South Korea. I lived with a Korean Chinese woman named Sun Hui, her South Korean husband, and their ten-year-old son Dong Yul (who was forced to practice English with me). The husband was a manager at a South Korean company’s factory in the Philippines, and was rarely home. This holiday was no exception. Sun Hui worked as a translator for a major corporation, and in the spirit of South Korean capitalism, often stayed at the office until 9:00 or 10:00 pm. For this holiday, the company had executives visiting from China and she accompanied them on a trip to Jeju Island, leaving me alone with Dong Yul. Dong Yul’s father called, upset because his elderly parents were alone in Busan for the holiday, and Sun Hui hadn’t been able to take Dong Yul down to visit them. We ordered delivery chicken and played Wii ping-pong. I asked Dong Yul if he had ever done the traditional Chuseok bows to his paternal grandparents in Busan or his maternal grandparents in Yanji. “No,” he said – “that’s just ancient, traditional stuff.”

Having now passed major Korean holidays in the homes of a South Korean family, a Korean Chinese family, and a mixed South Korean/Korean Chinese family, I find these experiences to be pithy metaphors for their overall sense of membership in the global Korean diaspora. Rejecting Tolstoy’s blanket assessment of happy families, I recognize that each family is unique. Nonetheless, these experiences illustrate how each of these groups also functions in a patterned way. South Koreans place a huge emphasis on returning to one’s ancestral hometown for holidays (hence the massive traffic jams to leave Seoul just before the holidays). Korean
Chinese, denied access to their ancestral homelands because of the China-DPRK divide, nonetheless gather generations in one home. But in the melding of Korean Chinese and South Korean families, something is lost and something new emerges. Sun Hui would rather work than celebrate the holiday with her in-laws. Her husband is abroad for his job, but still angry that Sun Hui isn’t following South Korean tradition by driving 5 hours down to Busan. Dong Yul dismisses both the South Korean and Korean Chinese traditions as irrelevant to himself, as he articulated his vision of an unbridgeable gap between modernity and tradition.

What does it mean, then, to characterize South Koreans and Korean Chinese alike as “ethnic Korean”? What exactly do they share? What rights and obligations do they owe each other, which are not owed on the basis of shared humanity? I begin this chapter with an overview of contact between the Korean Chinese and the South Korean state. This leads to a discussion of power, framed through the ideas of states, citizenship, and rights, sovereignty, and ethnicity. The crux of my dissertation’s argument emerges here, as I conclude that South Korean discourses (in particular, those about normative gender practices) have become a proxy for control of the Korean Chinese population, in lieu of actual territorial control of Yanbian. But I also note the instability of this discursive hegemony, by offering alternative perspectives from different places within the Korean diaspora.

III.1. Introduction: State, Nation, and Diaspora

In planning and preparing for this dissertation, I had anticipated finding large-scale marriage migration to be the single largest driver of change in Korean Chinese family patterns. What I actually found, though, was that marriage migration especially in the 1990s lay the foundation for significant levels of social integration between Korean Chinese and South
Koreans. At this point, during fieldwork from 2012-2015, this integration had already progressed to the point where marriage migration was no longer a key driver. In many ways, this appears now to be a case of ‘cumulative causation,’ whereby the snowballing feedbacks of early causes lead to amplified and emergent results (Massey 1990). During my fieldwork, then, I did not find that Yanbian citizens had simply reshaped their society around the absence of marriage migrants. Rather, all aspects of Yanbian society were permeated by South Korean cultural, political, and economic influence, due in part to new and permanent cross-border kinship ties, but also to the constant circulation of women, young men, ideas, symbols, money, and material products.

South Korea, on the other hand, does not seem radically altered by the Korean Chinese. South Korean society is, of course, always changing in response to new conditions and stimuli, but by no means are the Korean Chinese impacting South Korea to the extent that it is happening in the other direction. This is a selective and one-way permeation of Korean culture within the diaspora. This chapter interrogates that permeability.

In this chapter, I examine the idealized and actual relationship between the ethnic homeland of South Korea and the diasporic bodies that live elsewhere. I begin with an overview of South Korean migration policy, focusing on how structures of inequality within South Korea create ripple effects among Korean Chinese immigrants and migrant-sending communities. Through a discussion of citizenship, rights, sovereignty, and nationhood, I query the obligations that shared ethnicity is purported to entail, and contrast that with the lived relations between Korean Chinese and South Koreans. I contrast this relationship with that of the Chinese state and its diaspora, offering a comparative case with important variations. Ultimately this chapter
shows how the construct of co-ethnicity is implicated in the expansion of regimes of gender, class, and racial inequality.

III.1.A. History of Korean Chinese immigration to South Korea

The Korean Chinese are one of several Korean diasporic groups. Their history was reviewed in detail in Chapter I; here I will broaden that context by positioning them in relation to other Korean groups and governments. Since China and South Korea established diplomatic ties in 1992, up to one-half of the Korean Chinese population has traveled to South Korea (Yang and Wang, 2011). While initial waves of Korean Chinese movement to South Korea were primarily motivated by the search for spouses and opportunities for wage labor, the Korean Chinese today interact with South Koreans at every level of South Korean society. Reasons for border-crossing today include study and academic exchange, sightseeing, visiting relatives,
short-term or long-term work, business trips, or marriage. For almost 25 years now, the Korean Chinese have close contact with South Korean social norms in terms of daily interaction, media representation and discourse, the types of jobs and opportunities made available to them, and their legal regulation by the government. These exchanges have ultimately drawn the Korean Chinese into South Korean society’s power structures, deterritorializing and spatially expanding those structures to regulate the Korean Chinese population in China, as well.

In the early 1990s, South Korea was facing a domestic labor crisis as its native workforce became highly-educated and over-qualified to embrace low-wage and low-prestige work. As a result, from 1987 South Korea became a migrant destination country (N.H.J. Kim 2012, 583). South Korea at that time was an ethnically homogenous nation-state with only a few thousand foreigners; according to Lim (2002, 19) immigration therefore provoked a... general fear of the damage that the large-scale inflow of ‘outsiders’ would do to the cohesion and harmony of Korean society. This ‘fear of foreigners’ was first manifested in the effort to limit worker immigration to Chinese of Korean ancestry, the so-called Choson-jok [Korean Chinese]. The thinking was that, as ethnic Koreans, these workers would pose less of a threat to South Korea’s tight-knit, homogenous society.

The South Korean government therefore began offering “industrial trainee” visas to the Korean Chinese, which guaranteed low-wage labor in a specified job for a period of two to three years. The Chinese government actively encouraged Korean Chinese to emigrate and send remittances back as a local development strategy (Luova 2009). This can be read as the local manifestation of China’s post-socialist turn towards neoliberalism, essentially divesting local governments of responsibility for the economic wellbeing of their populations. Prior to this, the “iron rice bowl” policies of the Chinese government had provided guaranteed employment and a minimum standard of living. As state socialism has receded in the Deng Xiaoping era, men have been especially impacted by job loss (Hurst 2009) and subsequent social stigmatization (Greenhalgh
2013). The opening of the South Korean labor market, therefore, came at an opportune time for the Korean Chinese.

At the same time, the industrial trainee system was far from perfect. Since immigrants were classified as “trainees,” rather than workers, they were paid a fraction of what domestic workers received, they were barred from changing jobs, and they received no legal protection for worker’s rights. Employers grossly abused this system, confiscating workers’ passports and beating workers frequently, while having no legal obligation to pay compensation for injuries (N.H.J. Kim 2008). Perhaps unsurprisingly, up to 60% of industrial trainees left their “trainee” positions to work illegally in South Korea (Lim 2002, 17). This, too, was an imperfect situation, as illegal immigrants had even fewer rights and protections afforded them than did industrial trainees. As Timothy Lim (2002, 19) writes, “Initially, Chinese-Koreans were portrayed as long lost brethren, who should be magnanimously and warmly received by South Koreans. Few people in South Korea, however, recognized the inherent conflict of the situation: on the one hand, they sought to welcome Chinese-Koreans as equals, while, on the other hand, they not only expected them to do the jobs that most South Koreans utterly disdained, but for less pay and under worse conditions (that is, without the benefit of basic legal protection or labor rights).”

An alternative to the industrial trainee program, available mainly to women, was marriage to a South Korean national. As discussed in Chapter I, marriage migration emerged from the confluence of South Korea’s skewed demographic profile (declining marriage and fertility rates, high ratio of males to females) with the Korean Chinese population’s interest in migration into South Korea. Until 1997, marriage to a South Korean national provided immediate access to citizenship, with full legal rights (including the right to work, and legal
After 1997 though, a number of factors led to a backlash against immigrants. Perhaps most influentially, the Asian Financial Crisis sent the South Korean economy into a tailspin. Accepting a bailout from the IMF forced the restructuring of the South Korean labor markets, which had previously been built on a welfare model, with features like lifetime employment and full benefits. The changes required by the IMF resulted in a decrease in lifetime employment, and the rise of contract-based labor, which did not provide benefits (Rowley and Bae 2004, 69). This forced large numbers of South Koreans to take on more blue-collar work, which had previously been the domain of immigrant labor. With “a larger share of workers in nonstandard jobs, falling employment in large manufacturing, and a developing mismatch between the ‘non-regular’ or ‘non-standard’ [contract] jobs on offer in the service sector and the increasingly university-educated younger entrants to the job market with skills beyond those used in traditional services” (Cho et al 2012, 2), demand for immigrant labor declined and hostility towards immigrants increased.

This crisis was a turning point for the South Korean economy, which then began to shift away from manufacturing and towards high-tech tertiary industries. It also reshaped the immigration landscape, especially for diasporic Koreans. Nora H.J. Kim (2008, 587-88) summarizes:

“To boost the hard-hit Korean economy, the Korean government enacted the Overseas Koreans Act and created a new visa category (F-4) for overseas Koreans to attract foreign investment and foreign talent. With this new visa, overseas Koreans now had the same freedoms as Korean citizens in terms of economic activities. In this sense, this Act granted previously unheard of preferential treatment to a specific group of people based on their ethnicity. However, defining "Korean ethnicity" became politically controversial. The original version of the Overseas Koreans Act limited F-4 visa eligibility to those who had at one point been Korean citizens and their descendants. The Republic of Korea was founded in 1948 after WWII; the history of Korean citizenship covers only 80 years. Therefore, those
Koreans who emigrated during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) – more than half of the entire overseas Korean population – because they emigrated before the Republic of Korea was established, were not eligible for F-4 visas under the Act (Lee, 2003). Those emigrants generally lived in less-developed parts of the world (China and the CIS states) and were low-skilled workers.

Ethnic Korean Chinese therefore faced both social and legal discrimination from 1997. The Overseas Koreans Act was ruled unconstitutional in 2003, but remains in effect; the legal issues were skirted by introducing special work permits (now known as the H-2 visa) for ethnic Koreans excluded by the Overseas Koreans Act. This crack-down on labor migrants was paralleled by new restrictions on marriage migrants, via the 1997 Nationality Law. A series of marriage-fraud scandals building through the 1990s prompted this new legislation, which placed a heavy burden of legal proof on potential foreign brides before they were allowed to register a marriage to a South Korean (H.K. Lee 2008). This led to a decrease in marriage migration until 2003, when the Nationality Law was revised again to provide more protection to foreign wives (Schubert 2011). The immigration system was overhauled again in 2006, with the abolishing of the industrial trainee program and the introduction of the Employee Permit Program (EPP) for Foreigners, which de-linked working visas from specific employers and thereby gave immigrant workers a great deal more freedom and flexibility (while still limiting which economic sectors they could work in). At the same time, the EPP system requires that migrant workers leave the country every three years to renew their visa, thus denying them the possibility of ever applying for citizenship, since naturalization requires seven years of continuous residence in the country. Nonetheless, the introduction of the EPP system was accompanied by a raft of policies focused on protecting immigrants from labor or domestic abuse, including the 2007 Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea, the 2008 Marriage Brokerage Business Management Act, and the 2008 Support for Multicultural Families Act. Collectively, these represent the government’s attempt to reformulate the immigration system based on ideas of liberal egalitarianism (N.K. Kim 2009).
III.1.B. South Korea’s structural inequalities

While South Korea is thus making strides towards egalitarianism, it has not yet fully succeeded. In particular, widely-acknowledged and semi-legal discrimination continues to exist, especially discrimination by gender. This begins with basic labor laws; in South Korea, despite laws on the books that require gender equality in employment, female labor force participation rates are strikingly low. The overall female labor force participation rate has hovered at 50% since 1995; this can be further broken down to see that “the rate drops sharply from 71% to 57% among women in their 30’s, as inflexible working environments and a lack of affordable childcare undermine their ability to continue investing in their careers” (Lee 2014). Lee further notes the tendency of women in South Korea to follow traditional gender roles in their career choices, shying away from careers in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields. These tend to be higher-paying jobs, which is one contributing factor to the large wage gap between women and men in South Korea; however, it is not enough to explain why South Korea reports the largest gender wage gap among OECD countries, with an average difference of 34% (Yonhap News, 2014).
The gender structure of employment has further repercussions in terms of access to public benefits. Women make up over 60% of the part-time labor force (World Bank 2015), which is largely excluded from benefits under South Korea’s pension and unemployment plan (National Health Insurance Corporation of Korea 2015). While the current president has included gender inequality in a “Three Year Economic Innovation Plan,” this plan aims to increase female labor force participation to 62% without radically altering many of the underlying factors (Lee 2014). Thus there is no mention of increasing government investment in family benefits (such as child allowances, childcare support, or parental leave), which, at less than 0.5% of GDP, is the second-lowest in the OECD (OECD Gender Brief, 2010). The structural disadvantaging of women in the labor force is not unique to South Korea, of course, but rather I call attention to the ways that South Korea’s specific regime of gender inequality is tacitly enabled and encouraged by the state.
III.1.C. Age, ethnicity, and gender inequalities faced by the Korean Chinese

This gendered labor regime impacts different Korean Chinese immigrants in different ways, but has a huge cumulative effect on the Yanbian area’s population. As a result of the myriad cultural, political, and economic factors keeping South Korean women out of the workforce, there remains a huge demand for female labor. By means of an immigration system that gives preference to co-ethnics, South Korea gives legal priority to the Korean Chinese to obtain H-2 working visas, while the self-regulating labor market selects Korean Chinese women over men for most jobs in the service sector (C. Lee 2012). These jobs are not lucrative by South Korean standards, falling in the ‘under-paid and over-worked’ category for most South Koreans. But in comparison to the remuneration available in the Chinese labor market, these jobs are highly desirable. In addition, they are not as high-risk or labor-intensive as immigrant men’s work, so women of all ages can do them, and can physically withstand doing these jobs for much longer than men (Kwon 2013). This contrasts sharply with the opportunities given to men. The job prospects for immigrant men in South Korea are mostly limited to construction and manual labor (Noh 2011). While these jobs are still lucrative by Chinese standards, they differ from women’s service-sector jobs in that they are physically grueling, and often beyond the capabilities of older men. Even younger men find themselves burnt out of the South Korean labor market after a few years; women, too, eventually face the reality of being unable to withstand years of on-their-feet, low-security work, but can usually work (and save) for ten years or more (Kwon 2013, 216). Thus for the Korean Chinese, earning potential deviates sharply by gender after about age 30, leaving men at a huge structural disadvantage.
Beyond the actual employment opportunities, Korean Chinese men and women encounter different social contexts of reception. The socio-economic status of Korean Chinese immigrants in South Korea is low across the board, in part a result of their lower levels of education and professional qualification. But among low-status Korean Chinese immigrants, males have reported higher rates of discrimination (Seol and Skrentny 2009). This gendered context of reception is encouraged by legal and media categories that discuss immigrant women as potential wives and future mothers for South Koreans, but portray foreign men as violent predators or rootless vagrants. These discourses have their roots in specific, highly-publicized incidents. The most well-known case was that of Wu Yuanchun, a 42-year-old Korean Chinese immigrant laborer who kidnapped, raped, and dismembered a 28-year-old South Korean woman in Suwon City, South Korea, in 2012 (Na 2012). This incident was cited without prompt by five South Korean informants and one Korean Chinese friend, in explaining the roots of their mutual mistrust. When I raised the issue with several Korean Chinese informants, they were indignant. In their view, this was an issue of the media manipulating public opinion. While none denied the horror of this murder, they suggested that every year Korean Chinese immigrants die or experience abuse at the hands of South Korean employers, husbands or in-laws, and police, with no public outcry or media coverage (group interview, April 2014).

Yet, despite the rise of anti-Korean Chinese sentiment and the push towards ‘multiculturalism’ as a way to bring in non-ethnic Korean immigrants, (Han 2007, H.S. Kim 2008, J.K. Kim 2011, J. Kim et al 2014, Schubert 2015), numerically speaking immigration into South Korea remains dominated by ethnic Koreans. The total legal foreign resident population of South Korea in May 2015 was 1.373 million (Statistics Korea: 2015 Foreigner Labour Force
Survey. 180,000 of these were ‘overseas Koreans,’ that is, ethnic Koreans from the U.S., Canada, or Europe (Statistics Korea 2015). Another 690,000 were ethnic Koreans from China (Eum 2015). This speaks to an issue that Nora H.J. Kim highlighted in her 2008 article: the ideological conflict between liberalism (which assumes all humans are equal, thereby forbidding an ethnicity-based migration system) and ethnic nationhood (which privileges co-ethnic or diasporic Koreans), and raises the fundamental issue of defining the proper relationship between an ethnic homeland and its diasporic population.

III.2. Structuring Power: State, Nation, Territory, Diaspora

In this section, I address that relationship through an examination of fundamental structures of power. I review and assess central questions of how to define a state, and the relationship between states, citizenship, and rights. I question the theoretical and lived experience of sovereignty and reveal the unique ways that sovereignty is deployed through
discourses of the ethnic nation. While I find that sovereignty is usually enacted through territorial control, the Korean case provides an alternative, in which the territorial state of South Korea deploys cultural hegemony to claim the loyalty of its diasporic population. In a show of deterritorialized discipline, South Korea valorizes membership in the Korean ethnic nation but imposes socio-cultural criteria on membership, forcing the Korean Chinese to adapt to South Korean normative behavior in order to access the benefits of co-nationhood. South Korea is able to do this because China has designated Yanbian as a Korean “autonomous minority area,” a spatial semi-exception to direct Chinese rule. This creates a gap that allows South Korean sovereignty to enter, laying the territorial foundation for cultural disciplining of the population.

III.2.A. States and Citizenship

In addressing the definition of a state, I return to the argument presented in Chapter II, and draw again from Timothy Mitchell (1999, 89-90, quoted in Kaiser 2014, 121):

The precise specification of space and function that characterize modern institutions, the coordination of these functions into hierarchical arrangements, the organization of supervision and surveillance, the marking out of time into schedules and programs, all contribute to constructing a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert ‘structure’ that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives… We must analyze the state as such a structural effect. That is to say, we should examine it not as an actual structure, as the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist… the nation state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern technical era.

Approaching the state as an effect of power, what then does it mean to be a citizen of a state? If a state is the felt outcome of many people acting as if the state existed, through repetitious actions like voluntarily paying taxes, applying for official permissions like driver’s licenses and marriage licenses, and submitting to (and enforcing) border controls or zoning regulations, then citizenship must be located in these behaviors. This points back to Foucauldian
ideas of governmentality, in which “…citizenship is thought of in terms of repertoires of attributes which are actualized only in relation to various technologies and practices: ‘Rights and responsibilities cease to be metaphysical attributes of the person, and appear instead as socially conferred capacities and capabilities: governmental techniques produce the individual as citizen. […]’ (Donald 1992: 135)” (Barnett 2003, 105). Thus governance consists of the ‘conduct of conduct,’ and citizenship is a form of categorizing who will be conducted in which ways. To follow Foucault’s thinking down lines of governmentality, a citizen is one who internalizes the behaviors that benefit the propagation of the state effect, through behaviors like paying taxes. This proper citizen behavior is rewarded by a raft of benefits, from material incentives like access to healthcare and education to abstract rights like mobility, free expression, and private ownership. While these benefits and rights are often perceived as coming ‘from the state,’ in fact these are outcomes of a huge collaboration of individual bureaucrats, technocrats, officials, police and military, as well as fellow citizens who diligently pay taxes and abide by laws.

At the same time, lived citizenship is rarely a category that an individual can choose freely or even voluntarily. In the modern world divided territorially into nation states, citizenship is fundamentally defined by national laws. Divisions between jus soli (territorial) and jus sanguinis (ethnic/descent) create ambiguity, as in cases where one is born in a jus sanguinis country to non-citizen parents who hold citizenship in a jus soli country, or are themselves stateless. Thus, although citizenship is usually taken for granted as an individual characteristic, in fact individuals can neither choose their citizenship nor opt out of the system entirely. Some states, like Latvia and Estonia, grant citizenship to anyone of one ethnic lineage (Latvian and Estonian in these cases, respectively), but deny full citizenship to persons of other ethnicities (primarily ethnic Russians) even if they and their parents were born in those states. South
Korea’s citizenship laws align more closely with these last cases, reflecting a complicated and rapidly changing constellation of inclusion and exclusion. In South Korea, prior to 1998, citizenship was passed only through descent on the paternal line. Thus the child of a South Korean mother and foreign father would be a non-citizen in South Korea. This was changed in 1998 to follow both maternal and paternal descent. However, as will be discussed more below, South Korea retains an ethnic hierarchy in determining citizenship, making it very easy for ethnic Korean Americans to obtain citizenship and almost impossible for ethnic Korean Chinese.

Citizenship can therefore be approached on several levels. Traditional political citizenship in a democratic setting includes official, state-sanctioned, equitable membership in the body politic. But enduring inequalities between and within states reveal the complex and tiered reality of legal citizenship regimes, and the equally complex hierarchy of costs and benefits attached to different kinds of citizenship. Aihwa Ong, in her 1999 book *Flexible Citizenship*, explores how privileged individuals (in her case study, wealthy businessmen from Southeast Asia) can react to this international inequality by obtaining citizenship for themselves and their families in multiple countries. She further explores how this is spatialized through the division of the internal territory of the state into ‘graduated sovereignty zones,’ or “a series of zones that are subjected to different kinds of governmentality and that vary in terms of the mix of disciplinary and civilizing regimes” (7). While this analysis applies most obviously to the relationship between the Korean Chinese and the other ethnic groups within China (especially those living within officially-designated minority ‘autonomous’ zones, as will be discussed in Chapter IV), it is equally apt for understanding the position of the Korean Chinese vis-à-vis the Korean diaspora. Demonstrated through the discussion of South Korea’s legal hierarchy of diasporic Koreans (which grants more political and civil rights to Korean Americans and Korean
Canadians than Korean Chinese or Koreans of the former Soviet states), ethnic Koreans within South Korea are subject to different regimes of power and offered differential citizenship in the Korean ethnic nation depending on their space of origin. The willingness of diasporic Koreans to participate in this intra-national hierarchy by continuing to ‘return’ to South Korea testifies to the intractable inequalities in the international system. Subordinate citizenship in South Korea at least offers some of the ‘flexibility’ that Ong describes.

Individual manipulation of citizenship regimes demonstrates one way that individual performances can ‘do citizenship differently.’ When individuals fail to abide by governmental notions of patriotism or nationalism, but rather acting (in this case) according to the imperatives of global capitalism, they threaten to disrupt the chain of citational practices that give rise to the state effect, creating “gaps, fissures, and misfirings [which] destabilize political signifiers such as sex, gender, race, nation, and state” (Kaiser 2014, 123). Deviance that threatens to undermine the effect of the state, then, is often punished by revocation of citizenship benefits and rights. This can be done through imprisonment or other spatial limits (e.g. sex offenders in the U.S. cannot live near schools), fines or deprivation of property, execution/deprivation of life, revocation of specific rights (e.g. felons in some U.S. states cannot vote or own guns), and revocation of citizenship. In this dissertation then, I use citizenship to refer to the state of holding both status (that of being a full member of the national polity) and rights (afforded particular and inherent protections by the government) (Joppke 2007). And yet, the linkage of rights to citizenship befuddles the very notion of rights as fundamental entitlements, attached to the condition (human, citizen) that gave rise to the rights in the first place. This raises the question of the origin and source of rights.
III.2.B. Rights

Rights are often divided into legal/civil rights, which are contingent upon the particular legal system under which an individual lives and are therefore alienable, and natural/human rights, which theoretically apply unalienably to every human, regardless of location or citizenship status. The split is traced back to the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose social contract theory presumes that individuals voluntarily consent to live under particular legal regimes, and can freely change political community if they wish. This division is the basis, for example, of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which hypothetically applies to every human and excludes political and economic rights, and the 1791 U.S. Bill of Rights, which enshrines certain political rights as separate and unique to (some) U.S. citizens.

More recent work has questioned this division. Hannah Arendt, in particular, in her 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* argues that all rights ultimately stem from one fundamental right: the right to belong to a political community that recognizes and protects an individual’s other rights; this confers upon a human the status of citizen, granting her or him participation in public life (*bios politikos*). Arendt argues that any concept of natural or human rights is ultimately founded on a metaphysical claim of human divinity or sacredness, which cannot be proven or sustained in practice. Reflecting on the treatment of refugees in Europe during the 1930s and 40s, Arendt noted that human rights were blatantly disregarded by all states, not only those who expelled or oppressed their own people but also by neighboring countries that failed to protect the human rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Without a larger community to recognize and protect an individual’s rights, Arendt argues that a human is left as mere animal life (*zoë*). In that case, she writes “a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship,
without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify himself – and different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance” (1951, 302). Only if a larger group of people, presumably acting as a state, choose to recognize other rights, will those other rights be protected. Thus the assumption underlying her argument is that only a right receiving recognition and protection can truly be considered a right.

In Arendt’s analysis, then, the right to membership in the political community is the only source of rights. Those who are expelled from the community do not bear any rights, because there is no one to recognize or respect their rights. As she writes, “…man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity” (Arendt 1951, 297). This is the point at which a human is left as bare life, zoë, entirely deprived of her or his ability to participate in politics. This argument is highly problematic on two counts. First, the possibility of rights appears to rest entirely on the question of membership or exclusion from the political community. How is this decided? For Arendt, membership in the political community “can exist only through mutual agreement and guarantee” (Michelman 1996, 37). And yet, this argument circles back to the practical problem faced by Rousseau’s social contract – it assumes voluntary and free choice in membership. Second, the distinction between bare life and public life (zoë/bios politikos, human/citizen) assumes that a human can be divorced from politics, thus that politics can only emerge from a group and never from an individual. “From an Arendtian perspective, the struggle to claim the right to have rights must be understood as a struggle for liberation. Such a struggle aims to win civil rights as the condition of possibility for an authentic
politics oriented to the actualization of freedom. However, it could not in itself amount to political action proper” (Schaap 2011, 24).

Arendt here is drawing from an Aristotelian assumption that humans differ from animals only insofar as we can use language to communicate with each other, and it is through this speech (which requires a listener) that humans can be constituted as political subjects. The refugee, the stateless person, bare life, is essentially a speaker with no listener, no one to recognize her or his language and thereby constitute her or him as a political being. This argument harkens back to the argument between Austin and Butler discussed in Chapter II – Austin assumes that a speaker must inhabit a pre-constituted and pre-authorized social position in order for the speaker’s words to have meaning or power. Butler disagrees, and sees the possibility for ‘unauthorized’ speech acts to become legitimized through “continually reasserted, recited, and reenacted” performances (Rose-Redwood and Glass 2015, 7).

III.2.C. Sovereignty

This returns us to the question of legitimation, and what constitutes the power to legitimize speech acts, subject positions, and their attendant rights – that is, sovereignty. For my working definition here, I borrow from Colin Flint, writing in The Dictionary of Human Geography (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, and Whatmore 2009), sovereignty is:

A claim to final and ultimate authority over a political community. […] The term implies that no external political entity has the authority to exact laws or exercise authority within a sovereign territory (Taylor, 1994c, 1995b). In reality, such a condition of sovereignty has never existed and has been particularly challenged by contemporary processes of globalization. […] The inter-state, or even trans-state, character of globalization has weakened the ability of states to manage their own economic affairs. Currency values and interest rates within particular countries are partially set by the decisions made by international markets rather than through domestic policy, for example. In other words, external influence is felt within sovereign territory. The outcome is a geography of ‘graduated sovereignty’, is which state sovereignty is spatially differentiated within a sovereign territory (Park, 2005). […]
Although states have ceded sovereignty over economic processes, others, reacting to public pressure, have focused upon social sovereignty (Rudolph, 2005), defined as the states’ ability to define and control access to a political community. Political citizenship has been understood as a feature of territorial sovereignty; citizenship was attached to a particular territorially-defined community, and citizens gained rights and received duties from the sovereign state. However, processes of globalization have led to increased calls for non-territorial forms of citizenship, in effect granting sovereignty to institutions that transcend states (Russell, 2005). […] Sovereignty is in a state of flux, as society becomes increasingly organized around networks rather than territories (Castells, 1996b). Consideration of graduated sovereignty is coupled to overlapping forms of sovereignty, akin to pre-modern times, whereby a territory may be subject to a number of sovereign claims.

This quote highlights several issues relevant to my discussion of sovereignty. Complete sovereignty implies a level of authority and control that does not exist in the real world; originally conceptualized as a territorial form of control, sovereignty is increasingly fragmented through space, following economic, political, and social networks; and because these networks may overlap territorially, any one space may play host to multiple conflicting (or simply co-existing) claims to sovereignty. So, what kinds of sovereignty are at work in the territory of Yanbian, and among the human networks of the Korean Chinese? Korean Chinese are citizens of China, but also hold a specific (if subordinate) legal, social, and economic position in South Korea. Yanbian is unquestionably China, but administered as a minority autonomous area, with extensive ties to both South and North Korea. South Korea’s immigration laws, employment laws, tax laws, investment and trade regulations, all have direct and immediate impacts in Yanbian and among the Korean Chinese. In many ways Korean Chinese are directly regulated by South Korean law, yet since they are not legal citizens, they cannot vote in South Korean elections and have no representation in the South Korean government. Does this leave them as bare life, zoë, humans divorced from politics because they are excluded from membership in the political community? The answer to this is an unequivocal no; the Korean Chinese have found myriad other ways to actively participate in South Korean society, including political life.
Beyond mere inclusion in South Korean society, the Korean Chinese together with other diasporic Koreans (Korean Japanese, Korean Americans, Korean Canadians, and Koreans from former Soviet states) demonstrate the existence of political life beyond the purview of the state. As others have credibly shown (Jaeeun Kim 2009, Chong Jin Oh 2006, Noh 2012, Kwon 2015), the enduring strong bonds between ethnic Koreans in diverse places makes the Korean diaspora an ethno-national social formation that overlays the political borders of the territorial state system. This is not to imply that ethnic Koreans anywhere are exempted from the sovereignty regimes of territorial states; rather, it reveals the simultaneous operation of power via claims to sovereign authority over the ethno-national network of the diaspora.

III.2.D. The Ethnic Nation

To examine the operation of sovereignty through ethno-national diasporic networks, I explore how an ethno-national diasporic network emerges, is defined and regulated, and how it articulates with other spatialized forms of power like the state. First, what is an ethnic nation? Walker Connor (1978, 302) suggests that the nation rests on the (never objectively true) belief in common descent and consanguinity, an extended kinship grouping. While the term nation has come to be applied loosely to all kinds of state-based activities (nation-state, civic nation, national weather service, nationwide car rentals), in fact it should be reserved for self-perceived descent-based groups. But, of course, nationality is not the only type of self-perceived descent-based group; here the concepts of nation, race, and ethnicity overlap significantly. As Hiebert (2011, 2014) writes, “The first instance of the word ethnicity used as a noun occurred in the early 1940s, when researchers sought to find a replacement for the word ‘race’ once it had become associated with the genocidal policies of the Nazi party […] Members of ethnic groups believe
that their specific ancestry and culture mark them as different from others.” Ethnicity thus tends to invoke ideas of shared culture and language, while race is often used as “an innate physiological or genetic means of differentiating individuals and populations” (Kosek 2011, 615). Sparke (2011, 487) argues that *nation* includes a sense of territoriality – unlike potentially small or nomadic ethnic groups or continent-spanning races, nations are rooted in “ethno-linguistic homelands.” Ultimately, since all three concepts (nation, race, ethnicity) rely on unsustainable claims to pure and isolated lines of descent, there is little if any factual basis on which to distinguish them.

However, as Anthony Smith (1988) emphasizes, neither is it useful to simply discard the idea of shared identity groups. Indeed, the Koreans are one of the few groups that do share many elements of an ethnic nation, including a fairly well-defined cultural heritage, a well-documented and shared history, and a bounded traditional territory. Thus I use ethnic nation to draw on the most important connotations of ethnicity and nation as they apply to Koreans and the Korean peninsula – ideas of common culture, common descent, and common homeland.

According to legend, the Korean nation began in 2333 B.C. when Hwanung (환웅/桓雄), the son of the Lord of Heaven, descended to Earth on the peak of Mt. Baekdu (백두산, also called 长白山, Changbaishan, in Chinese). There he met a bear and a tiger who wished to become human; Hwanung gave them both a challenge, but only the bear persevered and was changed into a woman named Ungnyeo (웅녀, 熊女). Hwangung married her and she gave birth to Dangun Wanggeom (단군왕검, 檀君王俭), the first Korean and founder of the nation (Grayson 1997). In my experiences, no Koreans have claimed to believe this as factual truth; yet as Shin (2006, 2) reports, a 2000 survey in South Korea showed that “Ninety-three percent of the respondents reported, ‘Our nation has a single bloodline’; 95 percent agreed that ‘North Korean
people are of the same Korean ethnic-nation.’ In addition, 83 percent felt that Koreans living abroad, whether they had emigrated and attained citizenship elsewhere or were born outside Korea and were considered legal citizens of a foreign country, still belonged to the han [Korean, 한/韩] race because of shared ancestry.”

Sixteen years later, the national discourse in South Korea has changed remarkably. Since the mid-2000s, a government-led campaign for ‘multiculturalism’ has led to a decline in racism and xenophobia. South Korea has seen rapid increases in foreigners living in South Korea (now roughly 3.4% of the total population; Kang Han Kim 2015), international marriages (13.6% of total marriages in 2006; Iglauer 2015), and ‘multicultural,’ ‘mixed-race,’ or migrant children in South Korean schools (exact figures are unknown; see Kang 2010). And yet, South Korea remains in many ways deeply invested in the endurance of the ethnic nation. This is enshrined in South Korea’s constitution, which claims sovereignty over the entire Korean peninsula; in the application of mandatory military service to the (foreign-born) children of Korean immigrants; and in the hierarchical immigration policy, which grants preferential status to ethnic Koreans. At times South Korea’s policies have created tensions and conflicts with other states, as when South Korea attempted to offer dual citizenship to Korean Chinese (prompting protest by China; see Gomà 2006) or when Chinese police entered a South Korean embassy office in Beijing to drag away a North Korean defector (McDonald 2002). While the state of South Korea emerged from Japanese imperialism as an ethno-national entity, it is now bound to operate in the modern order of territorial politics.

Following a classical liberal approach then, the territorialized political state effect called South Korea should theoretically have no relationship with the ethnic Korean minority in northeastern China, or anywhere beyond their state borders. The ethnic racial nation has
presumably been foresworn by modern states, who regard all citizens equally and do not discriminate by gender, race, or other individual characteristics (Nora H.J. Kim 2008). These ideals are enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as discussed above. And yet, in reality, a relationship undeniably exists, and fundamentally shapes the everyday lives of Korean Chinese. This relationship rests on the idea of diaspora.

![Seoul-based Korean Chinese travel agency](image)

*Figure 27: Seoul-based Korean Chinese travel agency, advertising permanent resident paperwork, marriage introductions, tourism visas, rectification of visa status, extension of visa, and notarization service, June 2012*
Figure 28: Seoul-based Korean Chinese travel agency, advertising family invitation, genetic testing, divorce, marriage, citizenship and naturalization, and free consultations with lawyers, June 2012

Figure 29: Yanji men’s clothing store, advertising “South Korean casual style,” May 2014
III.2.E. Diaspora

Diaspora is a messy word; it has prompted articles like “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” (Brubaker 2005), to describe an increasingly far-flung variety of usages in and beyond academia. The original use of the term diaspora referred specifically to Jews; it was gradually broadened to include any ethnic group that was forced out of its homeland, and now is used even to characterize any miscellaneous group of “labour migrants who maintain (to some degree) emotional and social ties with a homeland” (Brubaker 2005, 2). Brubaker surely has a point; “The problem with this latitudinarian, ‘let-a-thousand-diasporas bloom’ approach is that the category becomes stretched to the point of uselessness […] If everyone is diasporic, then no one
is distinctively so” (3). Other academics have taken alternative approaches. Takeyuki Tsuda, in the introduction to his 2009 edited volume *Diasporic Homecomings*, offers among the broadest definitions, which “encompasses not only the migratory dispersal of ethnic groups to various countries because of ethnopolitical persecution (victim diasporas), but also dispersals resulting from economic opportunity (economic diasporas) and past colonization and imperial expansion (colonial diasporas)” (9). He notes that this can blur the line between diasporas and ethnic minorities, but qualifies diasporas as retaining strong affective, material, or imaginative ties to an ethnic homeland to which they cannot (or previously *could* not) return.

In my analysis, I find the term *diaspora* to be laden with the privilege of pathos, much like *refugee* (I am thinking especially of North Korean *defectors/refugees/economic migrants* in China, and similar cases with contests over naming rights). Those who can prove themselves authentically diasporic are seen to have legitimately suffered, and therefore earned a truer right to sympathy, rather than lowly materialistic groups like labor migrants. Again as with the case of refugees, I do not think most academics have the depth of knowledge of specific circumstances to authorize or forbid a diasporic identity for a group; if that group perceives itself to be diasporic, academics should respect the knowledge and understanding of that group to recognize their own identity. I use diaspora to refer to the permanent mass movement of a self-perceived cohesive group of people who retain an identity based on a shared homeland.

Koreans have left the Korean peninsula in large numbers in response to specific events and circumstances, with specific, shared destinations, at several key points in modern history. The Korean Chinese, Korean Japanese, former Soviet Koreans (*Koryo-saram*), and Sakhalin Koreans all migrated north of the Korean peninsula during the Japanese colonial era, from 1910-1945. Of them, the former Soviet Koreans were considered Soviet citizens, but as a minority
they were forcibly relocated to southwest Asia (present-day Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) by Stalin in 1937 (G. N. Kim 2003, 25). The Korean Chinese gained Chinese citizenship in 1952. The Korean Japanese were stripped of Japanese citizenship in 1947; even today, most hold “special permanent resident” status, but no legal citizenship anywhere in the world (R. Moon 2010). Sakhalin Koreans, most of whom were forced by the Japanese to resettle on Sakhalin Island in the 1920s, were stripped of Japanese citizenship in 1952; most remained stateless until the 1980s, when they took Soviet citizenship (Lankov 2014). These groups of Koreans are those who left before 1948 (and thereby excluded by the Overseas Koreans Act).

With the defeat of the Japanese empire, the Korean peninsula entered a period of massive discord. Divided, governed separately by the USSR and U.S. until 1948, embroiled in civil war from 1950-53, and facing economic and infrastructural devastation after the war, emigration was quite low until 1965. Notable exceptions for the period 1950-64 were up to 6,000 South Korean women who came to the U.S. as wives of U.S. military personnel, and 5,000 South Korean children adopted by U.S. parents (Yoon 2012, 415). Few other forms of immigration were available to Koreans during this time.

But in 1965, the U.S. passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed the tiny blanket quota on Asian immigration. Canada in 1966 revised its immigration laws too, allowing Koreans to immigrate more easily. At that time, South Korea remained a very poor country, governed by the military ruler/president Park Chung-hee (ruled 1961-79). Large numbers of educated, middle-class South Koreans immigrated to the U.S. between 1965 and 1988 (Yoon 2012, 415), seeking political freedom and opportunities for economic advancement. While other groups of diasporic Koreans have been quite successful within their respective political milieus, Korean Americans and Korean Canadians (perhaps in keeping with the U.S.
and Canadian economies) have become the wealthiest among all these groups (Seoul and Skrentny 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Names in Korean</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROK Koreans</td>
<td>한국사람</td>
<td>49,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPRK Koreans</td>
<td>조선사람</td>
<td>25,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Chinese</td>
<td>조선족, 중국 동포</td>
<td>2,586,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Americans</td>
<td>재미교포</td>
<td>2,239,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Japanese (Zainichi Koreans)</td>
<td>재일동포, 재일교포</td>
<td>856,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koreans in former Soviet states (Koryo-saram)</td>
<td>고려사람, 고려인</td>
<td>500,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Canadians</td>
<td>한국계 캐나다인</td>
<td>224,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakhalin Koreans</td>
<td>사할린 한국인</td>
<td>35,000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 31: Population distribution of the Korean diaspora; data from South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016; *Source: German N. Kim 2003

The different ways in which diasporic groups left the peninsula plays an outsized role in debates about authenticity and entitlement within the diaspora today. In Korean Chinese narratives, the Korean Chinese and former Soviet Koreans (Koryo-saram) were forcibly dispersed by the Japanese, thereby enduring the most historical suffering and having the most entitlements. The Korean Chinese’ acceptance into and relatively high status within Chinese society is a point of great pride. The Korean Japanese are pitied as slaves taken to Japan during the Japanese occupation, but their failure to either find a respectable place within Japanese society or return to the peninsula confounds the Korean Chinese. Korean Americans are viewed sympathetically, since they left to escape dire poverty in the 1960s, suffered as immigrants in the U.S., but eventually made good. Several Korean Chinese friends also commented on the laid-back attitude of Korean Americans, in contrast to rigid and high-strung South Koreans. On more than three occasions Korean Chinese acquaintances told me that South Koreans had actively collaborated with the Japanese, and that much of the South Korean government remains
unchanged since colonial times (nor are these accusations entirely limited to the Korean Chinese – an editorial ran in the left-leaning South Korean newspaper The Hankyoreh on Feb. 20, 2016 under the headline “A Country Still Run by Japanese Collaborators”)

Most South Koreans, unsurprisingly, have different views. Their views are informed by their own history of suffering during the Japanese occupation, the anti-leftist purges that followed, the devastation of the Korean war, the crushing poverty of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, all decades of sacrifice (enforced by a brutal US-backed military dictatorship) that finally led to South Korea’s current prosperity. As one 62-year-old South Korean man told me, today’s South Koreans are the people who stayed behind and endured the hardships that befell the Korean peninsula. Global Koreans [교포/동포] consist of the people who fled that hardship. He disagrees with me that Korean Chinese, Korean Japanese, and former Soviet Koreans can be called diasporic – he thinks they could have stayed or returned if they had wanted to. However divergent, both views reinforce the association between suffering and authenticity.

III.2.F. Cultural Hegemony

Despite their differences in historical consciousness, all of these various groups of global Koreans still share an awareness of this common identity. Furthermore, despite heated disagreements about how to correctly ‘do’ Korean culture, it is South Korean discourses that tend to dominate these discussions. If not direct political territorial sovereignty then, what is the glue binding the ethnic Korean diaspora in China with ethnic Koreans in South Korea, producing these particular power asymmetries and hegemonic cultural understandings? Limited in its ability to directly regulate ethnic Koreans elsewhere, South Korea has sought engagement

through alternative means, enacting sovereignty over its diasporic bodies through claims to cultural authenticity. Shying away from race- and blood-based claims to nationhood, South Korea has built upon the popularity of “Korean wave” (Hallyu/한류/韩流) cultural media (including popular music called “K-pop”, manufactured bands, TV dramas, reality shows, movies, and spin-off products in the fashion industry) to create a single, top-down, formally regulated narrative of ‘Korea.’

This can be seen in the official brand of Korea, created in 2014 by the South Korean national government. The brand website is offered in Korea, English, Japanese, and Chinese. The authorized “Brand Book” lays claim to individuals like “UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, figure skater Kim Yuna, and K-pop star Psy” and “representative Korean companies such as Samsung Electronics, LG Electronics, Hyundai Motors, and Kia Motors” (7). This essentially credits the ethnic nation for the achievements of certain individuals and corporations. The Brand Book further offers a section on “Core Values,” which are Diverse, Vibrant, Creative, and Intriguing, which resulted from an “analysis of the characteristics of the Korean people, its culture, history, environment, products and services, as well as the direction of its national policy, customer needs and trends, and the status of competing countries” (10).

---

4 Available at http://kr.imagineyourkorea.com/kr/; language choice at top left of homepage.
5 Available at http://www.imagineyourkorea.com/downloads/ImagineyourKorea_Brandbook_English.pdf
Figure 32: South Korea’s Brand Book, Core Values

Figure 33: South Korea’s Brand Book, explanation of logo
The official brand, and the Brand Book in particular, are obviously specific images and artifacts created by the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), with the specific goal of increasing revenues for the South Korean tourism industry. But the KTO is a branch of the South Korean government; it is run, regulated, and funded by the ROK’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism. While the KTO and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism have clear and immediate vested interests in promoting a certain global place-imaginary for South Korea, these vested interests are irrevocably fused with the larger goals of the South Korean government. For South Korea to hold the global position of an economic powerhouse, a regional political leader, the cradle of East Asian cultural innovation, a place defined as “Diverse, Vibrant, Creative, and Intriguing,” then the people who enact South Korea as a unified state effect must coordinate their performances, through conscious and concerted undertakings like this Brand Book. Perhaps most importantly, the KTO is not claiming to represent the Republic of Korea (the formal name of the country) but rather Korea. Without any reference to Koreans who exist elsewhere in the world, the KTO presents images and imaginaries of Korea as “A world in which the latest trends, advanced culture, and vibrant history coexist” (20), “where scenes from movies and soap operas come to life” (27), full of “K-spirit,” which is the “infinite creativity and passion that defines Korea and Koreans” (39). The South Korean government, here and elsewhere, is attempting to establish a hegemonic discourse defining Korea.

I use hegemony here in the Gramscian sense of class leadership, “class or group leadership and domination [which] are sustained by specific forms of social consciousness that embody the social values and perspectives of the hegemonic group and are also accepted to varying degrees by other classes and groups. This may lead them to view the leadership of the hegemonic group and the social and political order with which it is identified as natural,
necessary, and desirable. Forms of social consciousness that contribute to hegemony in this sense constitute ideology, but may come to be accepted as ‘culture’” (Turner 2003, 40-41). Hegemony thus differs from sovereignty in that there is no explicit claim to or justification for power or authority. Some authors especially in international relations (e.g. Dahbour 2006, Kivimäki 2012) approach these concepts as oppositional, juxtaposing sovereignty as legitimate territorialized state power (and the basis for the global system of nation-states) against hegemony as extralegal overreach which undermines the territorial integrity of the nation-state system. This interpretation however displays many of the major fallacies of international relations theory, most notably that they treat states as independent actors and they see power operating only through inter-state relations in the self-delimited reified realm of “politics.” In reality, hegemony and sovereignty often overlap, and each can both reinforce and subvert the other. In this case, South Korea’s sovereign status as an internationally recognized territorial state bolsters its attempts to assert hegemony.

The benefits of monopolizing representations of Korea are manifold. From 1964, South Korea adopted an explicit policy of export-oriented industrialization. Resource-poor and with a small domestic market, South Korea’s military president Park Chung-Hee drew on the cheap labor of his impoverished countrymen to build a manufacturing base for the economy. The basis for this development lay in public-private partnerships supporting large family-owned conglomerates called chaebol (which include Samsung, Hyundai, LG, Kia, SK, Daewoo, Kumho/Asiana, Korean Air, Lotte, CJ, and many others). By 1987, “manufacturing industries accounted for approximately 30 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 25 percent of the work force” (Savada and Shaw 1990). This began to shift in the 1990s; wages were increasing, labor unions were becoming well-organized, and new automation technologies began
offering attractive alternatives to labor-intensive manufacturing. In addition, political
democratization forced a shift away from government-directed development. Instead most
*chaebol* undertook an intentional pivot towards the emerging IT and biotech industries; as a
result “Koreans have become intense users of electronic media, with broadband computer
connectivity and cell phone service achieving nearly universal penetration” (Cambell 2012).

But the rise of information technology – televisions, computers, cellphones, networking
capabilities – has simultaneously given rise to demand for content. South Korean industry was
quick to seize on this, and since the early 1990s has fed an ever-growing global appetite for
South Korean television dramas, movies, online games, and pop music. This has proven
massively profitable; as Kwon and Kim (2014, 422-23) report,

Korea’s cultural industries have been exporting to Asian markets from the late 1990s and beyond
Asia in the 2000s. The total export revenue of the Korean cultural industries recorded a 553% growth, from USD 658 million to USD 4.3 billion between 2001 and 2011 (MCT 2002a, MCST 2012). Since the late 1990s, Korean television dramas have occupied prime airing times on major broadcasting stations in Asian countries (Lin and Tong 2008, KOCCA 2010). The total export revenue of the Korean broadcasting industry grew substantially, rising from USD 5.5 million in 1995 to USD 222.3 million in 2011 (MCT 2002a, MCST 2012). Korean films have also maintained a market share of above 50% in the domestic market throughout the 2000s, demonstrating their competitiveness against Hollywood films (Korea Film Commission [KOFIC] 2010, MCST 2010a). The export revenue of Korean films increased almost 65 times between 1995 and 2010 (Shin and Stringer 2005, KOFIC 2010). The Korean gaming industry has been the dominant player in the global online games market since its inception in the late 1990s. The export revenue of the gaming industry increased from USD 130 million in 2001 to USD 204 million in 2011 (MCST 2012). With the rapidly growing popularity of Korean pop music (K-Pop) in global music markets, the export revenue of the Korean music industry increased more than twentyfold from USD 8 million in 2000 to USD 196 million in 2011 (MCST 2012).

In terms of the ROK’s engagement with the global economy then, the uptake of a particular
hegemonic imagining of South Korea materially benefits a wide range of industries and
individuals, from the airlines to the tour operators to the TV drama producers and song writers
and game designers.
But South Korea’s cultural imaginings do more work than merely selling bouncy K-pop paraphernalia. They also sell South Korean society, including normative behaviors and hierarchical social relationships. When Professor Kim returned from six years in South Korea, she told me she had an enormously difficult time ‘reentering’ Yanbian society. Her speech patterns had changed, and she had integrated many English words into her everyday language. I asked if it was difficult to return to family life. She surprised me by saying no, actually the family life was the easiest part. Growing up in China, she had never cooked or cleaned much, even after her marriage. But in Seoul she had rented a room in a student boarding house run by an elderly South Korean couple (a common practice called hasukchip, 하숙집) and eventually came to help them with cooking and cleaning. When she returned to Yanji, she automatically continued caring for the family apartment and cooking alongside her mother-in-law. Her husband and parents-in-law were delighted.

These values are passed not only through the actual lived experience of being in South Korean society, but in the perceptions of values that pass through media and colloquial knowledges. These ideas and norms include unrealistic body images, the ruthless pursuit of wealth, and patriarchal family behaviors. Female and male K-pop singers alike set the standard for South Korean beauty as dangerously thin, highly sexualized, and surgically-perfected facial features. As a result, South Koreans have the highest rates of plastic surgery on the planet (“Competitive Culture” 2015) and skyrocketing prevalence of anorexia (Kim et al 2010). As Yumeng Wang recently reported in an analysis for HSBC, the popularity of South Korean entertainment media in China is now fueling a boom in domestic plastic surgery and Korea-bound medical tourism, with 60,000 Chinese citizens undergoing plastic surgery in South Korea in 2015 (Wang 2016). China has also reported a dramatic rise in eating disorders, which has
shown a strong correspondence with television and internet use in female adolescents (Peat et al 2015). South Korean television dramas normalize extreme competition for wealth and status, through repetitive portrayals of wealthy chaebol lifestyles, cutthroat corporate environments, and an equation of success with moral superiority (Kwak et al 2002). Family and gender norms appear equally skewed. In romance, comedy, and crime dramas alike, abusive and controlling relationships are romanticized, women appear submissive and weak, men bear total responsibility for financial and social success while also holding disproportionate amounts of power in family relationships (Chan and Wang 2011, Yang 2008). As studies among Chinese viewers of Korean dramas have shown, viewing these shows results in a stronger valuation of female sexual virtue and “traditional family virtues” (Lin and Tong 2008, 98) and increased stigmatization of single women (Jiang and Gong 2016). South Korea is essentially exporting its sexist patriarchal social values along with its cultural content.

I saw this myself during fieldwork in Yanbian. One evening, after visiting Yanji’s riverside night market, a co-ed group of college-aged Korean Chinese friends were debating what to do next. Several suggested going to a bar. The oldest male in the group vetoed this, on the basis that “In South Korea, women cannot go to a bar [한국엔 여자들이 술집에 가지 못해].” While not everyone in the company agreed that South Korean social norms apply to Korean Chinese in Yanji, the ultimate conclusion was to go to a karaoke center, where they sold alcohol and food, and women were presumably allowed. To me, the most interesting part of this interaction was the fact that the young man who proclaimed the South Korean social regulations had himself never visited South Korea. And yet, he still felt empowered to represent South Korean social practices, and to actively apply them to his peers in a show of savoir faire. Furthermore, although there was some grousing, in the end the group did follow his judgement.
Thus, the Korean Chinese who engage with South Korea are not just looking to take advantage of global wage differentials – they are responding to the exhortation to “imagine your Korea,” trying to live out the fantasies portrayed in the dramas and movies, expecting to claim a legitimate place in South Korean society as ethnic Korean brethren. These fantasies were partly dispelled in the aftermath of large-scale immigration, especially in the late 1990s as the reality of hierarchical nationhood set in (Schubert 2015, Kwon 2013, Freeman 2012, Seol and Skrentny 2009). But even now, the dream of the “local boy makes good” by going abroad and finding success persists. The theme is global, captured in place-imaginaries like Los Angeles, New York, and London. For many Korean Chinese, a visa and plane ticket to other foreign countries is beyond reach, while a visa to South Korea and a plane to Seoul or boat to Incheon will cost under $500 (about 500 RMB for a visa, and 2,500 RMB for a plane ticket). South Korean employers take advantage of this, knowing that Korean Chinese are willing to come work for pitifully low wages and scant legal protection, precisely because they’ve bought into this larger narrative of South Korea as the epicenter of the Korean diaspora – which they identify as part of.
III.2.G. Deterritorializing Discipline

These kinds of transfers, of lifestyle norms and social values, do not emerge among all consumers of South Korean products and media. What is it that convinces ethnic Koreans in China to adopt, to buy into, South Korean normative behaviors? It is the strategic deployment of ethnicity that allows South Korea to target its diaspora for differential incorporation into the nation – leaving diasporic Koreans subject not only to South Korean cultural hegemony but also to a form of deterritorialized sovereignty. By controlling the definition of Korean ethnicity, marking it out as specific forms of gender performance, work ethic, household power relations, etc., and simultaneously glamourizing membership in the Korean ethnic nation, South Koreans convince diasporic Koreans to adopt self-disciplining behaviors that superficially grant them membership in the ethnic nation, but in reality incorporate them as a permanent underclass. Precisely because the South Korean territorial state continues to rest upon the idea of the ethnic nation, ethnic Koreans from other political states can still ideally claim membership. South Korean immigration policy encourages this, creating a special category of visas to legally identify the ethnic nation; but because of the conditions imposed on Korean Chinese co-ethnic visas, they are barred from true, full, or permanent membership (that is, citizenship) and only granted partial and temporary membership in exchange for the extraction of their productive or reproductive labor.

Sovereignty in this case does not grow from a territorial claim, but rather a claim to represent ethnic identity. Furthermore, it carefully avoids explicit race-based definitions, instead grounding itself in authentic cultural practice. Here too, this sovereignty differs from the early Foucauldian divide between sovereignty and discipline; rather, it draws theoretically from later
conceptions of sovereignty as a spatial ordering, which may occur in conjunction with disciplining of the body (Foucault 2009). This type of sovereign claim echoes Prasenjit Duara’s analysis of the Japanese colonial-era Manchukuo government that ruled this same area from 1932-45: “Claims to sovereignty derived in large part from claims to represent the authentic culture of the lands and peoples. […] Nationalism too had to adapt to the territorial imperative that historically drove the competitive and expansionist modern state by devising new political forms. Among these were forms embodying the promise of emancipation and development, of identity representation and supranational brotherhood” (Duara 2003, 1-2). It was thus the principle that Korean Chinese *ethnic identity* was legitimate and separate from their political identity that South Korean claims could latch onto. Furthermore, as China has taken great pains since the mid-1980s to celebrate the diverse cultural identities of its ethnic minorities (identities that were explicitly divorced from political loyalties), these South Korean claims overlay smoothly onto domestic discourses heard by the Korean Chinese.

The logic of exerting sovereign power through deterritorialized networks is not unique to South Korea, nor is it an entirely new model; however, it has become increasingly common and visible in recent decades. Further, it is only recently that scholarship has noted or attended to these ambiguous geographies of power. Among the earliest academics to take this seriously was John Agnew (2005, 442), who notes that “‘states’ of one type or another can continue to serve as loci of political authority even as their power is deployed by networked flows rather than by territorial control penetrating other nominally sovereign states.” The power at stake in the Korean diaspora is divorced from territorialized legitimacy and therefore without the traditional means to compel (such as prison, fines, loss of political rights). But since this power is exerted through ethno-national human networks, it nonetheless has myriad ways to act directly on
people. This is “diffused power [which] refers to power that is not centered or directly commanded but that results from patterns of social association and interaction in groups and movements (as, for example, in NGOs and global social movements) or through market exchange” (Agnew 2005, 442). This is power that does not coerce, but rather disciplines its subjects.

Discipline, in the Foucauldian sense, renders bodies docile for their own improvement; “Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (Foucault 1995, 138). Disciplined bodies are made useful, through adherence to minute physical regulations and standards, through spatial ordering and ranking, through scheduling, repetition, and economy. For the Korean Chinese, they enter into global Korean society by internalizing South Korean disciplinary gender norms. They sort themselves spatially by forbidding women to enter bars but demanding that they dutifully clean their in-laws’ kitchens, while ensuring that men repetitiously punch in and out at South Korean factory, construction, and service-sector jobs. They regulate their physical appearance to accord with South Korean beauty norms, wearing South Korean clothing brands and using South Korean cosmetics. They do this not only to gain access to South Korea’s lucrative labor markets, but also back in Yanbian, as a way of signifying their membership in the Korean diaspora. Thus it is South Korean discursive representations of Korean ethnicity that define Korean subjectivity, and South Korean economic and cultural industries that have made that Korean subjectivity so desirable. This powers an interdependent cycle whereby membership in the Korean ethnic nation is made desirable and achievable through internalization of South Korean gender norms (which are inextricably linked to economic and domestic behaviors),
which ultimately produces a population of docile productive and reproductive workers for members of the South Korean political state.

III.3. Reuniting the Diaspora? Impacts of ethno-national ‘reunification’

I returned to Yanji in the 2015 summer, ten months after concluding my extended fieldwork there. While some friends had graduated or moved away, most were still in Yanbian. One of my largest circles of acquaintances was a group of local hip-hop dancers. Among them, a young man named Jun-seo had just returned from several months in South Korea. When I first met him in early 2014, Jun-seo was a cook at a local Korean restaurant. He was 24, had only begun to learn hip-hop, and was among the quietest, shyest, most clean-cut young men I knew in China. His mother had been working in Seoul for three years in 2014; she brought him there in early 2015. He worked in South Korea for five months; he said he spent every single evening at the hip-hop clubs in Seoul’s Hongdae district. When he returned to Yanji, he was transformed. He was pierced and tattooed. He proudly remarked that his clothes were all modeled after G-Dragon (a popular South Korean hip-hop singer). He was now teaching his own “South Korean style” hip-hop dance classes. And his new status in this friend-group was clear – Jun-seo had gone from peripheral hanger-on to being a central figure. He deployed his new South Korean cultural capital with great flair. The benefits to performing South Korean cultural knowledge gave him new economic opportunities, new social influence, and (as he recently announced on WeiXin) he now has a girlfriend as well.
Jun-seo’s story is a success for many reasons. He was able to go to South Korea because his mother was already there and could pay for his visa, passage, lodging, and upkeep while abroad. He was able to find work in South Korea because he speaks Korean fluently. He was able to return “rich” because of differences in the cost of living between South Korea and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. He was able to find work in Yanji after his return because young people there will pay a lot of money for “authentic” South Korean know-how (like dance moves). And he was able to find social (and romantic) acceptance because the cultural currency of South Korean icons like G-Dragon is understood and accepted in Yanji. His meticulous mimicry of South Korean young urban masculinity allowed him a new subject position in Yanji. All of these conditions rest on the particular, hierarchical, inequitable, geographic distribution of the Korean diaspora, as well as the conditions that are enabling a partial reunification.
III.3.A. Korean Chinese marriage and family patterns

The most apparent impact of this ‘diasporic reunification’ on Korean Chinese marriage and family patterns is the conscious re-enactment of perceived South Korean norms. The examples above, of Jun-seo, of the young man who didn’t think women belong in bars, and of Prof. Kim undertaking new household duties, are not isolated incidents. I had several meals with Dong-hoon (a college-aged interviewee) and his mother, who had spent almost 14 years in South Korea. At every meal, she would ask me if I liked her cooking. Of course, I always said yes, and she always said it was because she cooked in a South Korean style (and then usually gave me pointers for how to do this; most frequently it involved using a particular South Korean brand of sesame oil or dried seaweed or soy sauce). Like Dong-hoon, almost all Korean Chinese families I met had only one child, although Chinese law allows them to have two. Parents frequently cited the high cost of raising children – a common refrain in South Korea (*The Economist* 2013). This is a fairly recent development, emerging between the 1989 and 1999 censuses (Kim and Kim 2005, 84).

Seul-Ki, a good friend and fellow student whom I had first met in Seoul in 2011, had graduated college and returned to her hometown of Yanji in 2013. She was planning to get married in 2014 to her long-time Korean Chinese boyfriend. Both came from comfortably middle-class families, and both had one parent working in South Korea. The couple made a special trip to Seoul to have their wedding pictures taken. I asked why they couldn’t just take the pictures here in Yanji, and Seul-Ki replied that in some pictures they wear the traditional Korean *hanbok* clothing, and only South Korea has quality material for the *hanbok*. “In Yanji, it is all cheap, like a fake costume” (January 2014, interview).
Figure 36: Korean Chinese engagement pictures, taken in South Korea in late 2013

Figure 37: Korean Chinese wedding stage, featuring a traditional Korean ceremonial food table, January 2014
Seul-Ki’s discourse of *quality* (품질/质量), as it refers to high-quality or low-quality manufactured goods, was often used by my informants to approvingly describe South Korean products. Most Korean Chinese households I visited use South Korean laundry soap, dish soap, shampoo and body soap, drink South Korean powdered coffee (usually the brand Maxim Mocha Gold) – never because things from South Korea were *innately* better, but only because the quality of these items could not be trusted in China. My Korean Chinese interlocutors did not see this as a moral issue (they were not discussing issues of *suzhi*/素质, quality that reflects levels of personal cultivation or civilization); nonetheless, because of the unspoken assumptions of trust in production quality and ingredients, these South Korean products physically permeate their lives and bodies.
In terms of the marriage market in Yanbian, there are declining marriage rates and increasing sex ratio skew (Kim and Kim 2005). But people have responded to this in diverse, creative, and unexpected ways. Korean Chinese marriage migrants in South Korea, through their informal social networks, now often act as marriage brokers. While I lived in Seoul with Sun Hui and her family, we had three young Korean Chinese women from Yanbian come stay with us for two weeks. They were ostensibly just visiting for a holiday, but they brought Sun Hui expensive gifts and their parents had all asked Sun Hui to introduce them to nice South Korean men. Sun Hui, while obliging, told me privately that she would introduce the women to Korean hua-qiao (화교/华侨) men – ethnic Chinese who had lived in Korea for centuries, but maintained

---

Figure 39: Yanbian Population, 2000. Source: Kim and Kim 2005, 87

a Chinese ethnic identity. The Korean hua-qiao population was estimated at 26,700 in 2006 (Hankyoreh 2006). Like a mirror-image of the Korean Chinese, these Chinese Koreans (in Sun Hui’s view) would be better able to understand and appreciate the Korean Chinese. I asked if her own husband didn’t understand or appreciate her, and Sun Hui shrugged. “He’s not usually here [보통 없어]” she said.

Korean Chinese in Yanbian were understandably sensitive about the issue of local women leaving to marry wealthier South Koreans. Everyone seemed to know someone married to a South Korean and living in Seoul or Busan; but no one has too many good things to say about those situations. ‘Sure, they were wealthy,’ the refrain would go. ‘But you should see how they are treated by their in-laws!’ On the other hand, everyone in Yanbian seemed hyper-aware of the relatively few cases of South Koreans (or other foreigners) who had married locals and come to live in Yanbian. I was eagerly introduced to these families, whose foreign spouses were held up as local trophies for Yanbian. One of these men, a 42-year-old cafe owner named Jin-ho, related his story to me in June, 2014:

I lived in Gwangju. I used to work as engineer in telecommunication industry, but I left all that behind and came to China as you can see. When I was younger I travelled a lot around China and saw what potential China had for me. That’s why I came back here. My wife did not really want to come back to China. She was born in Yanbian in China so she wanted to live in a big city in other countries but I persuaded her to come back with me. [After we got married,] we lived in Korea for three years. I was introduced to her by other people. She was a Korean Chinese but couldn’t speak Korean. She speaks Chinese so much better because she attended a Han Chinese school. [When we first met,] I spoke Korean, and she spoke in Chinese. We had an interpreter. So when I talked in Korean he would translate it into Chinese in the middle.

[After we got married] we lived with my mother for a year, then moved out [to our own place in South Korea] for two years. Because my father has passed away, I lived with my mother, but we consistently had conflicts. We also have cultural differences, because we were brought up differently; my wife went to a Han Chinese school so she has a lot of that culture and lifestyle in her. I think we do have differences among one another because we are foreigners. There are many South Korean men here [in Yanji] who married Korean Chinese women, and I am sure all of these family have cultural differences. I think that it is important to understand and recognize them, although it is sometimes hard.
So we were happy to move back to China. Compared to South Korea, there is still stress here, but it’s much more comfortable/relaxed, and really an alright place. We have many relatives here. My wife is the youngest of 7 brothers and siblings. They are all older than her. They all live in Yanji. Most of them are in downtown, so my wife does not have many friends to hang out with. So she is closer to her relatives and spends more time with them.

In response to a question about familial cultural differences between Korean Chinese and South Koreans: They are very different, although some parts are similar. Among the Korean Chinese there is greater family influences. Korean Chinese families are in more contact with each other. It is similar for South Koreans, but among Korean Chinese, couples will even end up breaking up or being separated because of oppositions from family members who are against their relationships or marriage. I guess that can sometimes happen in South Korea. Also, people here watch many South Korean TV programs, but the way they think and the education they received are all Chinese, so they all follow the Chinese way. But at the same time, they are also trying to follow and [unsuccessfully] imitate South Koreans, and this is why they have many conflicts and troubles with South Koreans.

Jin-ho’s narrative reveals several tensions. His wife and his mother didn’t get along, leading them to separate households. Despite this, he sees Korean Chinese family pressures as...
more intense than South Korean. Language barriers were a problem (and still are – although Jin-
ho’s wife now speaks Korean quite fluently, Jin-ho has not learned Chinese, so he cannot
communicate with his wife’s brothers and sisters, all of whom speak primarily Chinese). He
sees the Korean Chinese in Yanbian offering imperfect mimicries of what they see on South
Korean TV; he thus refuses to grant them authority over their own performances. In his view,
the Korean Chinese are blinded by their Chinese education and can’t see the flaws in their
attempts at South Korean-ness. For Jin-ho, the Korean Chinese have no culture of their own, but
are merely picking and choosing from the mainstream Chinese and South Korean. He sees no
legitimate Korean culture except South Korean.

III.3.B. Alternative perspectives on the ethnic diaspora

III.3.B.i. North Korean perspectives

But Jin-ho is still a South Korean; his social circle in Yanji is a small one, limited by his
language abilities and also his Christian faith. Jin-ho has lived in Yanji for eight years; he once
told me in hushed tones that, although he had never met one, he heard that there are North
Koreans in the area. In the 13 months I spent in Yanbian, I met over a dozen North Koreans.
Most were in China legally, as students, workers, officials, or businessmen. Two were willing to
go on record, anonymously, to answer my questions. One was a 38-year-old woman had come
undocumented to Yanbian and married a local Korean Chinese farmer. In her words:

When I came here from North Korea I thought Chinese men would be different but they are all same.
Korean Chinese customs are similar here. Too much gender discrimination. They think man is the
sky and woman is the land. It is the same everywhere, but I am okay with it. (January 2014).
난 그래도 북한에서 옴때 중국남자들이 다름줄알았는데 다 같은 조선족이지 풍습은 여기하고 똑같아.
남녀차별이 많겠구만….남자는 하늘이고 여자는 땅이고 이런 사고방식이 있다는… 다 그렇지만 근데
괜찮아요.
Another man, a middle-aged businessman, told me that the main difference between North Koreans and Korean Chinese is their trustworthiness; Korean Chinese can’t be trusted, and will swindle North Koreans given the chance. He attributed this to the Chinese influence, also citing their use of Chinese loanwords and the greasiness and saltiness of Korean Chinese food (which he considered a Chinese, not Korean, characteristic). At the same time, he acknowledged that there is a friendliness between Korean Chinese and North Koreans, born of the Cultural Revolution.

III.3.B.ii. Korean Chinese opinions of South Koreans

Further, the view on the diaspora is quite different when a Korean Chinese describes a South Korean, rather than South Koreans speaking for Korean Chinese. My Korean Chinese informants had many thoughts to share about South Koreans. Very little was flattering. One 32-year old Korean Chinese man told me:

I say that South Korea, not South Koreans, are good. Because South Korea can give us a good opportunity to make money, right? I mean, although I’ve heard lots of young people say that they don’t like South Koreans, they think that this kind of person [South Koreans] are arrogant, they will have that kind of feeling, because South Korean people, do you know how they see Yanbian people? They [South Koreans] think you [Yanbian people] came from the countryside, came from a farm, so they will think you [Yanbian people] are very backwards. So they mutually despise each other, there is a bit of this kind of feeling. (February 2014).

Another woman, a 40-year old Korean Chinese shop assistant, answered my question thusly:

What influences do they [Yanbian Korean Chinese] get from South Korean culture? They receive a lot of influence. Really a lot. They are influenced by bad things more than good ones. Many of them divorce, too. It happens very often. And they also pursue money a lot. Money is not everything, but
because of South Korean money, families get destroyed as some women abandon their husbands and children. (May 2014).

One issue that consistently polarizes debates between South Koreans and Korean Chinese is that of voice phishing, a form of telephone fraud in which a caller pretends to be contacting the victim in some official capacity (from their bank, or their credit card company) to convince the victim to reveal personal financial information. There have been many documented cases of Korean Chinese voice phishing scams targeting South Koreans (Lee Hyo-sik 2011, Choi and Lee 2012, Jung Min-ho 2016). For South Koreans, this has moved from urban myth to foundational discourse about the Korean Chinese. Korean Chinese know they are universally suspect to South Koreans, and they resent this. One interviewee, a 26-year old Korean Chinese man, told me that the voice phishing firms are actually owned and operated by South Koreans, but they hire Korean Chinese to make the phone calls and take the fall legally; he claimed to know this because his high school classmate worked at one such place (July 2014).

My purpose in sharing these excerpts is to return to the idea raised in Chapter II, “of the potential slippages and pushbacks, and contests between hegemonic state power and its others” (p.37). The Korean Chinese have not entirely bought into the hegemonic ethno-national ideal that the South Koreans promote. While many aspects of South Korean cultural hegemony permeate Korean Chinese society, the Korean Chinese have not taken the underlying assumption that South Koreans are better/purer/truer, hook, line, and sinker. The discipline of the Korean Chinese, which does appear through their mundane daily actions as well as larger life trajectories (especially the decision to migrate), is nonetheless imperfect. Korean Chinese discipline
themselves; but their consent to hegemonic norms appears incomplete. Their performance of (South Korean-defined) Korean ethnicity goes just far enough to meet the discursive limits set by South Koreans, granting Korean Chinese access to labor and marriage markets, and the resulting wealth to fund hegemonically established lifestyle ideals.


III.3.B.iii. Perceptions and engagement with Korean Americans:

A third issue, which I will discuss only briefly, is the role and perception of Korean Americans. There is a strong Korean American presence in Yanbian. They come primarily through Christian Protestant churches. These Christian missionaries have undertaken works such as building large churches, assisting North Korean refugees, and even founding the Yanbian University of Science and Technology.6 Their presence in Yanji is significant, but as it is beyond the scope of this study, I spent very little time with Korean Americans in Yanji.

My primary source for interpreting the relationship between Korean Chinese and Korean Americans comes from my Fulbright predecessor in Yanji. This Korean American woman spent ten months living in Yanji, enrolled as a guest auditor at Yanbian University. In her words:

I was expected to know/adhere to cultural things (like being very deferential to male elders), but I could also get away with being a little "less" than the standard because I was American. Someone once told me that I was an American xiaoshuminzu [sic] (ethnic minority, 少数民族/소설민족), much like them being Chinese xiaoshuminzu [sic]. I think in that sense we connected better as co-ethnics than Chaozu [Korean Chinese] and South Koreans do. I think in the grand hierarchy of things, Chaozu "prefer" Korean-Americans to South Koreans, mostly because South Koreans are pretty awful in their treatment of Chaoxianzu and have weird prejudices against them. (Email correspondence, in English, Feb. 2016).

---

6 See http://www.yustpust.org/ for an example.
III.3.B.iv: Contesting ethnic authenticity

Hyun-woo is my dong-gap (동갑, 同年), which means we share the same birth year, and therefore can treat each other as social equals. Born and raised in Yanji, attending Korean-language schools until college, he was the privileged son of a government-employed Ph.D. who worked in medical research. Hyun-woo went to college in Changchun, capital of Jilin Province, outside of Yanbian. He credits his excellent Mandarin language skills to this. Otherwise (in his own description) he would be just like all the other ethnic Korean Chinese, with awkward accents and fumbling grammar. Hyun-woo majored in computer science, which was the wish of his father, and this is now Hyun-woo’s greatest regret. He says that he should have followed his heart and majored in English. Despite this, Hyun-woo speaks the most fluent English of perhaps any Korean or Chinese person that I met outside of the US. He has a California accent. His smooth fluency at both Mandarin and English imply a good ear. This makes sense, because he is a musician as well – a hip-hop DJ. He taught himself English in the course of pursuing his music. Hip-hop is largely in English, so he learned English. End of story. But his grammar and written English are weak, and he’s self-conscious that he has no official certification.

After he graduated from his college, he found a job in a computer-software agency in Changchun, as his father wished. He worked there for about 2 years. He hated it. He hated getting paid 3,000 RMB per month, when performing at nightclubs could earn him seven times that. He hated showing up every day in a suit and tie. But his father wished this for him, and so he did it. Until, quite unexpectedly, his father was diagnosed with a serious blood disease and died within months. According to Korean tradition, the mourning period for the dead lasts three years. During that time the family does very little. Sons should not work, the household should remain undisturbed, nothing should be done to upset the calm passing of the spirit of the dead.
So Hyun-woo quit his job. He did not work for one year. After one year he decided he would never return to his software-engineering job. He started DJing full-time. His mother, eager to see her son settled, sold the family’s apartment and bought a new place for Hyun-woo in one of Yanji’s new housing developments. She took all of her life-savings, and the life-insurance policy, and the proceeds from the apartment, and all of Hyun-woo’s savings, and put them into Hyun-woo’s apartment. All against his will. Hyun-woo didn’t want a stone like that around his neck. But there it was. His mother bought it, arranged for the decorating, and then packed her bags and moved to South Korea. She lives there with her sister, works at a restaurant, and doesn’t plan to return to Yanji.

Hyun-woo despises the fact that his mother works in South Korea. Much like Dong-hoon, he imagines his mother is some kind of servant to the upper echelons of the global Korean people. At the same time, he feels hopeless about the future of the Korean Chinese. In an emailed response to several follow-up questions, he explained his feelings thusly:

Korean Chinese are in a quite embarrassing situation. In fact, both Northerners and Southerners are looking down upon us. I can feel that from the years I'm growing and the ppl I met and it's not cynical. All Korean people (three of them) tend to emphasize "Originality" or "Legitimacy" on everything. I mean EVERYTHING. Even if it comes with the so called "pure blood". Nationally, they think we are kinda poor group of ppl under the protection of Chinese majority and the views from Northern is even worse (I had many verbal clashes with North Korean on Weibo. we even insulted each other. I know Koreans are comparatively conceited but Northerners are the most radical ones among us. [...] we just think we are one of Chinese and that's all. Main point is that the ppl from Korean peninsula don't think we are original 😈.I think education influences ideology a lot (Forget about the North Korean education 😈, if that's education I'm a White then 😈). Korean Chinese are more submissive than those "Original" countries cause we are raised under the authoritarian politics and our concepts about the national originality are fading away and not that strong as Northern and Southern. Most of us don't even have any idea of citizenship. [...] Southern succeeded about that but we......there's one more aspect I have to mention is culture. Sadly I can feel that the Han culture is engulfing us and Korean populations are decreasing. Southern and northern are doing well on preserving the originality. (Email correspondence, in English, October 2015).
III.3.C. The Chinese Diaspora: A Case for Comparison

The South Korean state, of course, is not the only one with a complex social, cultural, ethno-national, and economic relationship with its diaspora. The Chinese diaspora shares many important similarities with the Korean experience. Both are internally variegated, with separate ‘waves’ that left the homeland in response to specific historical circumstances. The Chinese diaspora, unsurprisingly, numerically dwarfs the Korean diaspora, with an estimated global population of over 40 million in 2010 (Liu 2016). This massive population includes Hokkien traders who settled in Manila in the 1500s, Nagasaki in the 1600s, and Singapore in the 1800s (Cohen 2008, 84-85); Hakka Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong provinces who left after the Taiping Rebellion in 1850 (Lozada 2005, 94); Hong Kongers who migrated to the UK prior to Hong Kong’s 1997 return to China; mostly Han Chinese currently moving to various African countries to oversee investment and development projects there (Laribee 2008); and the “massive exodus of post-1989 political dissidents, humanitarian refugees, and economic opportunists [having now] given way to a steady stream of full-fee-paying tertiary and secondary students” (Sun 2010, 127).

What unites these people? To speak of them all as equally “diasporic Chinese” is to obscure their diverse origins and their histories up to and after leaving China. The idea that all these various people – Hakka, Hokkien, Fujian-ers, Hong Kongers – all fundamentally belong to the category of “Chinese” is simplistic and reductionist. While many speak Chinese (although this, too, obscures the many contested dialects of Chinese that may be represented here), most have never been citizens of the PRC, and they may not recognize themselves, their families, or their heritage as having any direct connection with mainland China today. That is exactly the reason why the PRC government sees a need to ‘reach out.’ As Nonini and Ong (1997, 3-4)
write, “Chineseness is no longer, if it ever was, a property or essence of a person calculated by that person’s having more or fewer ‘Chinese’ values or norms, but instead can be understood only in terms of the multiplicity of ways in which ‘being Chinese’ in an inscribed relation of persons and groups to forces and processes associated with global capitalism and its modernities.”

Lacking effective sovereignty or material claims, the Chinese government (as the South Korean government did) is attempting to build affective bonds based on a malleable sense of historical ethno-national identity. This requires both the ordering of sovereign space and the disciplining of subject bodies. As Chun (1996) highlights, China was an empire until 1911, and the subjects of empire are not necessarily the same as the citizens of the People’s Republic. Classifying them all as equally and homogenously Chinese is to make them “conform to a new kind of boundedness in order to create bonds of horizontal solidarity between equal, autonomous individuals constitutive of the empty, homogeneous social space of the nation in ways that could not have existed in a hierarchical, cosmological past” (Chun 1996, 114).

What benefit could be found by creating such “equal, autonomous individuals” in such “empty, homogenous social space”? This maneuver bears striking similarity to the creation of the “overseas Korean” in South Korean law. Both of these exercises in categorization appeal to a sense of shared history, common origin, and ancestral loyalty. China in particular, since the early 2000s, has begun explicitly targeting ethnic Chinese and their descendants in other countries, using Chinese-language media to spread an image of China as a modern world-leader and an equal member in the world of nation-states (Sun 2010). The spread of CCTV (China Central Television, China’s state-sponsored broadcaster), the growth in Confucian Institutes (which provide Chinese-language classes in foreign countries, funded entirely by the Chinese
central government), the touring of Chinese art exhibits, and the increasing crackdown on international media outlets that criticize China (especially by blocking access to Chinese consumers, and by denying visas to foreign reporters), all demonstrate the PRC government’s growing resolve to control the global discourses of Chinese state power. South Korea too, attempting to continue its rise from the global periphery even as it faces growing internal criticism (H.J. Lee 2015) for having consistently embraced neoliberal economic policies and bowed to U.S. political pressure on issues from bi-lateral trade pacts (Lee, Kim, and Wainwright 2010) to missile defense systems (Kim and Cha 2016), deploys soft power to manufacture the popular consent necessary to sustain its legitimacy.

These attempts appear largely successful in both cases. While the PRC and the ROK deploy soft power discourses to diffuse what they see as their own national issues (the Park Chung-hee legacy in South Korea; the Tibet issue in China), both strategically rely on essentializing discourses of shared ancestral descent to depoliticize these issues. Supporting their (ancestral) national governments is not framed as a matter of choice for diasporic Koreans or Chinese; rather, it becomes an issue of filial piety. Since the project of shoring up diasporic hegemony goes beyond short-term policy goals, national governments can afford to avoid confrontation on immediate issues but rather seek to ‘build consensus’ around ostensibly apolitical cultural markers of ethno-national identity. As Clayton (2009, 33) writes, “It is in this sense that history is often seen as that which defines the very ‘Chineseness of China’: not simply because China has a long and complex history that all Chinese people share, but because Chinese people have a consciousness of the continuity and inescapable moral force of that history.”
III.4. Conclusion: Ethnicity and the diaspora

The Korean Chinese face a complex calculus in negotiating claims of ethnicity, authenticity, and legitimacy. The largest and most powerful organization to regulate these claims in the South Korean state. Therefore, in order to claim material membership in the Korean diaspora, they must essentially submit to South Korean authority. This is not to imply that Korean Chinese consciously decide to substitute their own norms and behaviors for South Korean – they are not “wearing a mask” to disguise their true ethnic identities. Rather, often unconsciously, they have taken South Korean standards into their own calculations and incorporated South Korean ethnic markers into their own performance of identity. Those South Korean markers come laden with assumptions about the operation of power. By working within these South Korean structures for years on end, in both China and South Korea, the Korean Chinese come to selectively internalize those operations of power.
Chapter IV: Gender and Development among the minzu

Reflection III: Hongqi Village

This tablet, the introduction to the Hongqi Village Museum, reads:

Hongqi Village is located in the south-east of Jilin Province in China, in the south-west of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, and in the center area in Antu County. The village is 71 kilometers away from Mingyue Town of the Antu County, which is the number one county in Changbai Mountain Area, and only 103 kilometers away from Changbai Mountain Scenic Spot. The Gutong River runs through the village from the east to west. The official population of the village is 86 households, and 326 people, all of whom are Korean Chinese.

The founders of Hongqi village, known as the “Number Two Tribe”, who first settled in the village’s original location, came from Korean’s Hamgyeongbuk-do in 1939 as an immigrant group who were forced out by the Japanese bandits (日寇). The Japanese army stayed at the village until 1945, the time of China’s victory in the Anti-Japanese War. As one of the Korean groups liberated by the Chinese Army, Hongqi Village was put under Wanbao district in Antu County, and was named “Hongqi (Red-flag) Brigade” in 1958. The village was officially established as “Hongqi Village” in 1980.

In the past few years, the village has invested more than 11 million (RMB) in the development of infrastructure and reconstruction of rural housing, which highlights the folk style of the Korean Chinese. The village has won many honors such as the “Advanced Unit in the Development of Civilized Villages/Towns in China”, the “National Ecological Village”, the “National Civilized Village”, and the “Provincial Tourism Village”. In 2008, the village was recognized as a triple-A (AAA) tourism scenic
spot by the National Tourism Administration of China. In 2013, the village was honored as a unit with the highest level of village tourism operation by the Provincial Tourism Bureau. In 1995, Dejiang Zhang, the secretary of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture at that time, titled the village “Hongqi Korean Chinese Folk Culture Village”. Ten years later, in 2005, the director of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission Dezhu Li titled the village “China’s Number One Village of Korean Chinese”.

Since 2006, Hongqi Village has held five “China’s Number One Village of Korean Chinese” Folk Culture Tourism Festivals. The village also assisted CCTV (China Central Television) in making several feature films such as <My promise to Arirang>, and assisted the local government in celebrating Antu’s centenary. Hongqi Village’s visibility has been enhanced by these activities.

In 2010, a devastating flood on July 28th ruined the village’s whole infrastructure and caused a tremendous amount of economic losses. Led by the Party Committee as well as the government, and with the help from every community nationwide, Hongqi Village managed to rebuild. Guided by “Classic, Exquisite, Excellent, and Extraordinary” principle, the village improved and upgraded its infrastructure as well as the development of Korean Chinese traditional folk culture. Today, the village has created a comprehensive system to manage and operate its Korean Chinese culture tourism with a wide range of activities, facilities, and programs, including folk culture performances/shows, culture experience facilities, folk theme park, culture museum, centennial houses, rice garden, and local food. The residents, community, village history, and folk culture in Hongqi Village attract people from all around the world.

(Translation by Zhang Ke).

In the course of my fieldwork, I visited Hongqi Village twice. The first time, in October 2013, I went with a Korean-American friend and found the village almost deserted. Knocking on random doors, we found only one person home, an elderly woman who told us that everyone else was out in the fields, but would be back at 3:00 pm, when the tour buses were scheduled to arrive. We opted not to join the official tour, but asked for an introduction to an authentic Korean Chinese homestay (an advertised feature of Hongqi). The elderly woman explained that just two people couldn't do a homestay, because the “homestay” was actually a large hotel-style building that had to be rented out by a group. Nonetheless, she knew somebody we could stay with overnight, and for a small fee she introduced us.
The homeowner kindly allowed us to stay at his home for 200 RMB per night, while he slept at his parents’. He also handled lighting the ondol heating system, a fire pit beneath the house which radiates heat up through the floors, since the nights were already below freezing, and neither I nor my friend had any experience with indoor fire-pits (and the homeowner seemed nervous that we might burn his house down). We were largely left to our devices. We wandered around the town, spoke with the few locals we could find in Korean, ate at local restaurants, and generally came to appreciate why so many young people leave their villages for the cities. After two days we gave up on the idyllic rural life and went back to Yanji.
Figure 42: The ondol when lit, which heats the house, October 2013.

Figure 43: Small houses in Hongqi Village, October 2013
I returned to Hongqi Village a second time in July 2015, on a tour coming back from Changbai Mountain. This time the whole village turned out to greet us as we piled off the tour bus. They were dressed in colorful Korean *hanbok* (draped over their usual jeans and t-shirts). An official tour guide, with headset and wireless speaker to amplify her voice, ushered us around town on a walking tour. We were taken on a “home visit,” where we had the option of purchasing the home-grown ginseng. The evening concluded with a dinner and ‘traditional dance’ performance in a large tourist restaurant. Everything was done in Mandarin Chinese, except a few songs performed during dinner.

*Figure 44: Ginseng-sellers in Yanbian*
Figure 45: The author engaging with an exhibit in the Hongqi Village Museum, July 2015. Photo credit: Zhang Ke

Figure 46: The author with a Hongqi Village tour guide, July 2015. Photo credit: Zhang Ke
In some sense, Hongqi Village is an atypical place. There are very few tourist villages in Yanbian, and the Korean Chinese by and large do not profit from trade in ethnic tropes. It’s frankly a bit puzzling that Hongqi can survive as a tourist village. But I read Hongqi as an archetypal example of what Yanbian as a whole has become in the reform era – depopulated, as the workers go in search of brighter lights elsewhere; fixated on South Korea, whose tourists and imported goods symbolize modernity to Hongqi residents; yet still the recipient of Chinese development dollars, as the central government rebuilt Hongqi after the devastating 2010 flood.
Since the early 1990s, villages like Hongqi have hollowed out and been left to an aging generation of farmers. Why would the central government directly intervene to rebuild a tiny agricultural village of 86 homes on the country’s remote northeastern border? What here is so valuable to officials in Beijing that they would attend to Hongqi’s situations? What kind of bargain is being offered to Hongqi’s residents? In this chapter I explore the different dreams available to Korean Chinese men and women – women able to buy into the “Korean dream” offered by the South Korean state and the global economy of mobility (Noh 2012), while men, in danger of being left behind entirely, are offered a masculine dream of membership in a regionally powerful China.
IV.1. Economic change in northeast China

In this chapter I address gender and development in northeast China, particularly in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. I argue that the Chinese central government has undertaken “big-D” development interventions in the region as a kind of counter-hegemonic discourse, offering prestige to the economically emasculated and disenfranchised Korean Chinese men who would otherwise inhabit a subaltern position in South Korean-dominated social hierarchies. I trace China’s socio-economic changes in the post-Mao reform era, especially the highlighting how the northeastern three provinces of China (Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning) have become China’s own rust belt. This opens up the possibility of development initiatives as one way to bring prosperity to the region. Shifting then to a larger review of development, I argue that traditional development initiatives are broadly intended to shore up patriarchal economic systems, while separate “gender and development” work is often tagged on as a tangential supplement to the larger (gendered masculine) development work. China has not generally followed this model though, since gender equality was such an important component of the Mao era. One of the least progressive aspects of China’s reform era has thus been the government’s attempts to create more jobs for men by returning women to the home.

Turning then to the particular situation in Yanbian, I trace a short history of the prefecture’s reform-era development initiatives. In large part because many of these attempts were predicated on international cooperation with Russia and the DPRK, they have almost uniformly failed. But unlike most of the northeastern rust belt, Yanbian Prefecture is still an economically prosperous place – because so many Korean Chinese women so reliably send remittances from South Korea. Yanbian’s female-led economic development might be cause for celebration. However, it still leaves the Chinese authorities with a large population of
unemployed, unmarried (or separated), and potentially discontent men sitting on a sensitive, unstable international border with a risky neighbor (that is, the DPRK) in a minority autonomous zone. This could build into a risky situation for China. As a result, Yanbian continues to receive massive inflows of development dollars, mostly in the form of large-scale infrastructure building, most of which are targeted at men.

In the third section of this chapter, I reflect on the purpose and outcomes of those masculine development dollars. Could this be a bald-faced attempt to buy the loyalty of a marginalized borderland group? While poverty certainly does exist in Yanbian, it is not a huge issue, and the majority of men I know who are (or stand to be) involved in these infrastructure projects are not hurting for money. Rather I suggest that they are hurting for a sense of pride and a sense of membership. This is what China is offering them, which South Korea has not. While Korean Chinese women have found a place in South Korea’s deterritorialized society, Korean Chinese men have been excluded from the benefits of this engagement. Korean Chinese femininity has increasingly been defined by its adherence to South Korean norms. But if Korean Chinese men accept South Korea’s subject position for them, they accept the stigmas of being lazy, mooching, and even dangerous people. By offering the promise of development, and a prominent place in that development for local men, the Chinese government moves to ensure that Korean Chinese men imagine their own best selves as part of China – not as diasporic Koreans. China is offering them an alternative way of enacting masculinity, and it looks pretty good by comparison.

IV.1.A. China’s neoliberal shift in the reform era
As recounted in Chapter I, the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 brought an end to the Cultural Revolution and ushered in China’s reform era. The scale of change is remarkable. Cai, Park, and Zhao (2008, 167) write that “From 1978 to 2005, the share of labor employed primarily in agriculture fell from 71 to 45 percent, the share of labor working in urban areas increased from 24 to 36 percent, and the share of urban labor working in the state-owned or government sectors fell from 78 to 24 percent.” This last statistic especially shows an important structural shift, as the Chinese economy has moved away from a socialist model towards a hybrid model of government-directed market economy. This has brought economic boom to the southern and eastern Chinese provinces, home to major cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Tianjin, and Shenzhen. These cities are well-suited for development as manufacturing and shipping hubs in a global economy, as they access ports on the Pacific Ocean. These cities are also dominated by Han Chinese, and all have been designated as special economic zones or ‘open economic zones’ (open to foreign investment) (Yeung, Lee, and Ki 2009; Cheng and Kwan 2000).

The opening of the eastern seaboard to foreign investment and greater integration into the world economy created a huge demand for labor in the newly-developing areas. Simultaneously, de-collectivization in rural areas led to rapid improvement in agricultural productivity, and created a large supply of rural surplus labor. As a result, as many as 232 million Chinese have left rural areas and moved to cities since 1980 (Ebenstein and Zhao 2015, 338). This is driven by significant wage differences between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, but also by an overall decline in government support for services like education and health care (Blumenthal and Hsiao 2015), which forces households to seek out supplemental income.
The geographically unequal wealth distribution that resulted has benefitted China’s south-eastern coastal provinces at the expense of its vast interior, southern, western, and northern provinces. This appeared to follow the logic of the official slogan “some areas will lead, others will follow” (Rozelle 1996), which anticipated and allowed for the emergence of regional inequality. But the scale and intractability of the inequality that emerged may have dismayed the central leadership. This problem was apparent by the mid-1990s, and led to increasing attention to rural economic policies. As discussed again below, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, in power from 2002 – 2012, explicitly staked their legacies on rural reform and decreasing rural-urban inequality. Their reforms were based on reducing agricultural taxes, eliminating fees for government-provided health and educational services, and guaranteeing farmers the right to transfer or lease their land (Li 2009). While the success of these measures in terms of their long-term impact on social equity may be questioned, the populist impact is undeniable. Even in my interviews, people in rural Yanbian mentioned Hu’s name with reverence. One 42-year-old Korean Chinese woman told me:

Hu Jintao gave the farmers a lot of money. Deng Xiaoping, encouraging reform (改革开放), didn’t give money to farmers, but Hu did. He gave farmers all the money they needed. Now the farmers have more money than the city folk, this should encourage them to return home to their families. Now they can earn 6,000 RMB per year, this is more than a professor. They can also work on the side. They are minority minzu, some of them. In rural Korean Chinese areas, farmers buy 2-storey houses, they have cars and the first floor is a garage, 2nd floor is a kitchen, 3rd floor is bedrooms (personal interview, October 2013).

But the Hu-Wen reforms cannot be separated from their larger goal, which was explicitly to create a “harmonious society (和谐社会)” of “moderate prosperity (小康社会).” To be moderately prosperous, society would have to embrace harmony – that is, economic liberalization would only proceed with political continuity, under the guidance and control of the CCP (Delury 2008). Thus these inequality issues, while concerning to the central government,
have not inspired them to embrace public debate or invite grassroots solutions to these problems. Rather, the central government has sought grandiose and centrally-planned forms of redress – that is, given the failure of “little-d” development, they will impose “big-D Development” by force of will.

IV.1.B. Development Theory

Big-D Development, understood as “a post-second world war project of intervention in the ‘third world’ that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war, [as opposed to] ‘little d’ development or the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes” (Hart 2001, 650) is the attempt to impose economic prosperity when it has not emerged from local conditions. It is thus by definition an intrusion, a practice, an imposition. Its practitioners, moreover, play the role of the “trustee” (Cowen and Shenton 1996) insofar as they must assume that their intervention will do something positive that the people targeted for development are unable to do for themselves.

This practice of trustee-like development interventions has thus been critiqued for its fundamentally patronizing approach to development targets. Deepak Lal (1983) describes this as the ‘dirigiste dogma,’ which encourages heavy-handed (and often misguided) state interventions and actually prevents the progression of a locally-driven “little-d” development process. Scott (1998) takes this further, noting how big-D Development practices assume that there is only one desirable outcome and that the practitioners of development (rather than the targets of development) know what it is and how it is to be achieved. Since the practitioners rarely have a full grasp of the complex on-the-ground situations in which they attempt to intervene, their
schemes most often fail. Scott notes that “If I were asked to condense the reasons behind these failures into a single sentence, I would say that the progenitors of such plans regarded themselves as far smarter and farseeing than they really were and, at the same time, regarded their subjects as far more stupid and incompetent than they really were” (299, emphasis in original).

While these critiques are damning, they nonetheless attribute good intentions to the practitioners of development. Other scholars do not see such innocence. Ferguson and Lohmann (1994) argue that government-led development interventions are not merely destined to fail due to bureaucratic ineptitude, but rather they are intended to fail, and that this failure itself is a success for the state. By framing certain areas as needing a development initiative, the reasons behind the original problem (which frequently implicate broader socio-political processes, linked to the government) are obscured and de-politicized. The government’s intervention then becomes an act of benevolent generosity: “The state is seen as an impartial instrument for implementing plans and the government as a machine for providing social services and engineering growth” (178). Simultaneously, the failure of the stated goals of the project are not necessarily a failure for the government; “a ‘development’ project can effectively squash political challenges to the system not only through enhancing administrative power, but also by casting political questions of land, resources, jobs or wages as technical ‘problems’ responsive to the technical ‘development’ intervention” (180). Ferguson and Lohmann conclude:

[T]he ‘development’ apparatus […] is not a machine for eliminating poverty that is incidentally involved with the state bureaucracy. Rather, it is a machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power, which incidentally takes ‘poverty’ as its point of entry and justification – launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty but does have other concrete effects… [which are that] …more power relations are referred through state channels and bureaucratic circuits (180).
IV.1.C. China’s (big-D) Development Push: Different approaches to geographic and social inequalities

Within China, “little-d” development is usually dated to the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978. In that year, “China was one of the poorest countries in the world. The real per capita GDP in China was only one-fortieth of the U.S. level and one-tenth the Brazilian level” (Zhu 2012, 103). But reforms in agriculture, the reduction of the state sector of the economy, and an increased reliance on market mechanisms led to rapid growth in productivity. This productivity generated profits and social benefits, neither of which was evenly distributed throughout the population. Indeed, the new forms of geographic inequality that have resulted from the “little-d” development process are the primary targets of China’s current “big-D” Development push.

From the early 2000s, then, a new CCP leadership regime sought to offer new solutions to bring explicitly geographically balanced development and rural-urban inequality. Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao attempted to reinvigorate the rural economy through the “New Socialist Countryside” movement, which included “free education for many rural students, increased subsidy payments for farmers, new government financing for medical care and further government investment in rural public works” (Yardley 2006). Despite these reforms, which began in 2004, there is little evidence that inequality is decreasing; “state-run media acknowledged in March [2010] that rural per capita net income, $758 a year, was less than a third of its urban equivalent—the worst showing since China's market reforms began in 1978” (Liu 2010). Furthermore, when Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao left office in 2012, they were replaced by President Xi Jinping, who is “linked to the Shanghai-faction officials who reflect fast-growth, export-oriented, urban priorities—a sharp contrast to the Hu-Wen focus on social justice” (Liu 2010). Premier Li Keqiang has played only a minor role in determining policy since 2012.
Thus, since Xi came to power there has been increasingly scant public attention given to rural development. This is not to say Xi has ignored rural issues; his trademark anti-corruption campaign has targeted rural and urban officials alike, whose complicity in land seizures were a major source of rural complaints. But the central government under Xi has largely ended public grassroots discussion of inequality and rural disadvantage, focusing instead on measures to increase equality of opportunity in broad structural terms. These are laid out in Xi’s “Four Comprehensive Goals,” which are to (1) build a moderately prosperous society; (2) deepen reforms; (3) implement the rule of law; and (4) strictly govern the ruling Communist Party. In practical terms, these are being implemented through accounting for and reducing public debt, clarification of land contract and use rights (theoretically establishing a uniform national system of land property rights, although the degree of local enforcement is unclear), and signaling a broader embrace of free trade (Naughton 2016). But as Naughton (2016) is keen to note, these ‘reforms’ are characterized by top-down, internally-mandated, institutional shifts at the national scale. Xi’s leadership has actively sought to stifle grassroots activism, and to “repress those individuals, groups and systems [which] are overwhelmingly involved in dealing with the problems created by absence or failure of systems which ought to deliver procedural fairness […] such as] Labor unions, labor and human rights lawyers, NGOs, public interest and lawyers” (Groot 2016).

One important continuity between successive administrations has been their enduring commitment to developmental interventions in China’s borderlands. In 2000, the Chinese central government announced a new developmental intervention in the northern and western provinces, the “Open Up the West” campaign (西部大開發). This campaign, purportedly
designed to spread the benefits of the reform era throughout China’s western interior, was also notable for focusing on predominantly-minority borderland areas. David Goodman notes that “statements by CCP leaders […] have often placed the emphasis on developing state capacity and nation-building, especially as it relates to the integration of those non-Han Chinese found in many (though by no means all) parts of the interior and western provinces…” (Goodman 2004, 5). The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture was also included in the ‘Open Up the West’ plan, despite its location on the eastern border of the country. This imaginative stretch of the ‘west’ demonstrates that party leaders in Beijing considered Yanbian, as a minority-designated borderland autonomous region, as quite comparable to areas like Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. This reaffirms the argument of Heike Holbig (2004, 22) as she writes “the Open Up the West policy is best described as ‘soft’ – an amorphous set of diverse policy agendas and instruments not designed to form a complete and coherent programme, but rather to appeal to as many interests as possible simultaneously.”

In 2003 the northeast area again received targeted funding under the Revitalize Northeast China Program (振興東北老工業基地). In chronicling this effort, Miller (2005, online) describes the northeast as “a ‘rust belt’ populated by moribund state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and legions of laid-off workers;” of the Revitalize the Northeast program, he writes:

Economically and socially, the strategy is a central government attempt to pull a failing region up by the scruff of its neck. Once the bastion of China's planned economy, the northeast has slipped behind the surging economies of the coast, especially the greater Shanghai region and the Pearl River Delta area around Hong Kong. The region was the worst casualty of the decay of state industry in the 1980s and 1990s, and suffered tremendously under the drastic restructuring of state-owned enterprises initiated by Zhu Rongji in 1997.

What has been the outcome of these developmental pushes? Despite these efforts in Yanbian and other areas far from the southeastern coast, regional inequities persist. As Fan et al (2011, 48) note, “in 2007, per capita GDP in the inland regions averaged 13,513 Yuan, or less
than half of that in the coastal regions. At the provincial level, the difference is even larger. Per capita GDP in Shanghai is 10 times as large as in Guizhou.” As recently as April 26, 2016, China’s Xinhua News (2016) announced yet another plan to “rejuvenate its northeast rustbelt region through more reforms and economic restructuring,” in which “State-owned enterprises (SOEs) will be restructured, private firms will receive more support and regional cooperation will drive development.”

At the same time, the number of spontaneous public protests and demonstrations (euphemistically termed “mass incidents” in China) appears to have skyrocketed. Yu Jianrong (2007, 5) notes that:

Under the banner of development, China has witnessed an unprecedented growth of its economy at the cost of social justice. This contradiction has ushered in a new stage of social resistance whereby the increasingly marginalized workers and peasants are standing up for their rights. The frequency of social conflicts is testimony to this growing trend, with the number of incidents of peasant/worker unrest rapidly increasing since 1999. China experienced 8,709 such incidents in 1993 but by 1999, they had exploded to over 32,000. The figure for 2005 was in excess of 87,000.

Since 2005, that number has only grown. Göbel and Ong (2012, 8) write that “estimates for the number of public protests in 2010 range between 180,000 and 230,000.” Many of these protests are related to land expropriation, which has been primarily an issue in the rapidly-urbanizing southeastern corridor. In light of this rapid increase in political challenges, could China’s push for development initiatives since the early 2000s be linked to the increase in “mass incidents”? Following the critique emerging from development studies described above, could the Chinese central government intentionally be using big-D Development as an excuse for ever-deeper penetration of its minority-dominated borderland areas? Within Yanbian, the evidence for this is ambivalent. In the northeast overall, minority issues have not been highly politicized since the reform era began. Furthermore, the northeast has a much lower population density and
a much lower demand for land to be urbanized (hence less land expropriation, which has been a primary driver of protests elsewhere). As a result, protests in the northeast have been less common, and more often related to issues like unpaid pensions and wages from state-owned enterprises (SINA English 2006, Zhou 2016) and exploitative working conditions especially in the coal mining and oil industry (China Labor Bulletin 2004). While in Yanbian, there have been recorded incidents of conflict over water rights and private garden plots (Cathcart 2015b), I am aware of few other local conflicts.

This is not to imply that Yanbian locals are content with their economically disadvantaged position in China. Huge numbers of emigrants are one testament to their dissatisfaction. But the situation in Yanbian is unique because locals do not look to (or blame) the Chinese central government for socio-economic security (or lack thereof). Yanbian’s economic situation is linked much more closely to South Korea than to China (Luova 2009). In one sense, this is what the central government appears to have wanted when they began the economic liberalization in the 1980s – as the state withdrew, local people were expected to find ways to fend for themselves. But they were supposed to do so within the larger framework of the Chinese state’s “harmonious society.” Yanbian residents, by reaching beyond this and instead drawing on ethno-national connections on the Korean peninsula, risk exposing the limits of China’s reform era.

But in fudging these rules, Yanbian has also bucked the regional trend of economic stagnation. The rest of Jilin Province, and its neighbors Liaoning and especially Heilongjiang, have neither developed non-state economic sectors nor attracted foreign investment. Zhou (2016) offers a timely portrait of life in a coal town in Heilongjiang, suffering not only from the decline in the boom-and-bust coal market, but also from the lack of a safety net. This area is
landlocked, remote from China’s largest cities, with good agricultural land but a short growing season punctuated by incredibly harsh winters. With few emerging prospects then, the Chinese central government has increasingly resorted to direct interventions like those described above. But does the government really expect these initiatives to meet their stated goals? Those goals are so vague that ‘success’ would be unknown even if it was achieved. But neither is this area at risk of revolt, or “ethnic splittism.” Rather, I suggest that these projects allow the state to make promises whose failures can be blamed on external factors (in particular, on political conflicts with North Korea and Russia), thus shoring up nationalist support for the government’s thwarted efforts and exacting a kind of strategic patience. The Chinese state is merely doing enough to maintain the status quo, while making it seem that they would do more if they could.

Perhaps most significantly though, while these projects explicitly engage the Chinese population through geographically targeted programs, they rest on an unarticulated subtext of patriarchal economic restructuring, appealing to an increasing and politically vulnerable demographic – unemployed and under-employed men. The Chinese government’s developmental efforts hail these men as victims of a global system that should have given them economic prosperity, and offering them a place in the newly patriarchal and Sinocentric vision of the developed future. The Chinese government is knowingly propagating an economic development plan that is based on a return to the patriarchal model of men engaging in productive paid labor and women confined to reproductive unpaid domestic labor.

IV.1.D. Gender and Development

Little-d development, emerging in a global system of patriarchy, reproduces gender inequalities through social valuing systems that cheapen women’s productive labor. Big-D
development frequently reenacts these same processes, except when explicit “gender and
development” riders are added to larger development packages. The Chinese model of offering
big-D development specifically to men is only unique insofar as it avoids token gestures to
women. Literature in development studies, as reviewed above, has not taken gender as a
fundamental category of analysis. The field of gender and development attests to this: the only
reason that ‘development studies’ are considered separately from ‘gender and development’ is
that traditional economic development is undertaken by and for men – since after all, men are the
heads of household, and men are the people who need jobs to support their families, etc.

Alternatively, gender and development work seeks to understand the myriad ways that
economic change differently shifts the opportunities, burdens, resources, and risks for differently
gendered people. This scholarship has explored, for example, the feminization of poverty,
whereby “the modern sector takes over many of the economic activities, such as food processing
and making of clothes, which had long been the means by which women supported themselves
and their families. […] Yet a majority of the better-paid jobs involving new technology go to
men, but male income is less likely to be spent on the family” (Momson 2004, 2). At the same
time, this work notes that “in each cultural context, the ways in which masculinity is associated
with power varies” and “attributes that are associated with masculinity are not always associated
with men: women too can possess some of these attributes. Not all men, then, have power; and
not all of those who have power are men” (Cornwall 1997, 11). Furthermore, “everywhere,
gender is crosscut by differences in class, race, ethnicity, religion, and age” (Momson 2004, 2).

Gender and development scholarship has evolved dramatically over the last 50 years.
Beginning in the 1970s, first-world feminism began to insist that international development
programs (mostly launched at the end of WWII) attend to women in developing countries, and
noted that traditional development programs often privileged the advancement of men at the expense of women (Boserup 1970). This resulted in “women in development” (WID) initiatives, which in practice were basically small income-generating side projects for women, attached as an add-on to existing (male-centered) development (Goetz 1988, Razavi and Miller 1995). The WID push was problematic on several accounts, but primarily because its arguments for gender equality and equity were based on treating women as an untapped source of potential profit (rather than basing its arguments on fundamental human rights), and it assumed that women had time and desire to devote to small crafty industrial side-projects, above and beyond the burden of productive and reproductive work they already bore (Momson 2004, 13).

The WID approach was then supplanted by “gender and development” (GAD) approach in the early 1980s. Emerging from a critique of white, first-world feminism, the GAD framework rests on the idea that “it is the experiences lived by poor women throughout the Third World in their struggles to ensure the basic survival of their families and themselves that provide the clearest lens for an understanding of development processes” (Sen and Grown 1988, 9-10). Highlighting the intersectional and emergent properties of inequality, GAD-driven projects tried to devolve power to the grassroots level. By the 1990s though, and especially in association with the 1995 United Nations’ 4th World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, a new discourse of “gender mainstreaming” sought to break down the barriers that kept gender issues as a side conversation in development (Kabeer 2003, Walby 2005, Moser and Moser 2005). Rather than carry on with development-as-usual and maintain a separate cottage industry of gender projects, the goal was to move gender equity into mainstream development debates and projects and make gender parity a fundamental assumption in all goal-setting.
Gender mainstreaming has been largely successful at an institutional level. Most measures of development now include social indices such as both male and female literacy, male and female educational attainment, male and female life expectancy, and access to health services (for examples and discussion see Kubiszewski et al 2013). In addition, major components of the GAD agenda have been incorporated into the gender mainstreaming movement, under the term ‘gender empowerment’ (which implies that local women are empowered to speak for themselves, rather than having wealthy white donors or administrators speak for them) (Moser and Moser 2005, 12). However, it is unclear whether all of these initiatives and movements have brought significant improvement to women’s living conditions.

Scholarship on China during the Xi era suggests that increasing polarization of wealth has disproportionately harmed already-disadvantaged groups like ethnic minorities and women throughout the country. Emily Hannum (2005) examines one such mechanism of inequality, shifts in schooling patterns in the 1980s. She finds that initially after the reforms, girls’ enrollment declined sharply in relation to boys’, with this trend only reversing with an uptick in local economic activity. She concludes that marketization increased household vulnerability, and that “girls appear more vulnerable to family financial difficulty or opportunity costs than boys do” (292). She summarizes the reasoning behind this:

For rural areas, agricultural decollectivization and the return to family farming provided new economic opportunities but also heightened uncertainties that were associated with the lack of a safety net. Although growth in rural incomes allowed families to devote more resources to the education of children, the implementation of the rural responsibility system returned the productive function to the household and thereby increased the economic value of child labor (Summerfield 1994). Thus, starting in the 1980s, educating a child required the forfeiture of revenues from his or her economic contribution to the household (World Bank 1992). Furthermore] Patrilocal marriage traditions meant that long-term returns on investments in daughters were more likely to be realized by marital, rather than natal, families, while the reverse was true for sons. [Thus] To some degree, market transition ”feminized” agriculture because men had greater access to rural industrial jobs (Summerfield 1994:722). Because wage work was better paid and was more likely than agricultural labor to reward educational credentials directly,
perceptions that sons would be more likely to get wage work would reinforce incentives to make their education a priority (278-279).

Yu and Sarri (1997), examining female mortality rates since 1950, find wide health disparities linked to regional wealth inequality. Wealthy urban centers like Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin showed much better (and more equitable) health outcomes than poorer areas like Xinjiang. They note that “China’s economic reform has had mixed impacts on women’s health. On one hand, women benefit from improved health services and living conditions. On the other hand, China is encountering new health issues during the process of modernization” (1894). These new issues include mental health, occupational and environmental health, tobacco-related disease (especially pronounced among women only in the Northeast), a general lack of health insurance, and gender equality in socioeconomic opportunities. They conclude that “the overall level of physical well-being of Chinese women has increased in recent decades, but far less has been achieved with respect to gender equality overall” (1885).

Similar results have been found with regards to income levels. Gustafsson and Li (2000), examining the gender wage gap in urban-classified areas of ten Chinese counties. Comparing statistics from 1988 and 1995, they find “a modest increase in the gender earnings gap as female earnings as a percent of the male earnings changed from 84.4 to 82.5%. Although those numbers indicate a deteriorating relative position of urban Chinese women, by international standards the gender wage gap appears to be rather small” (316). They conclude, like Hannum, that “The shorter average education of Chinese women has tended to increase the average gender earnings gap but the fact that women workers on average are younger than male workers has worked in the other direction. Nevertheless the results show that a substantial and increasing part of the average earnings-gap cannot be explained by differences in variables between women and men” (327).
Leta Hong Fincher (2014) provides extensive evidence that women are being systematically and increasingly excluded from the emerging Chinese economy. In particular, as China has a large sex ratio imbalance and a vast surplus of single men approaching reproductive age, there has been a state-sanctioned campaign to vilify single women (who are disparaged as “leftover women/剩女/sheng nv”). But Chinese marriage and family traditions usually pass property to male children, and as a result the property going into a marriage (typically a home or apartment) is registered in the husband’s name. Even if a woman does contribute to purchasing joint property, traditionally it will be registered only in the man’s name at marriage. But unlike in places like the United States, in China if a couple divorces then their shared property is not divided equally, but rather entails to the party who brought it into the marriage. If joint property is registered only in the husband’s name, women are left entirely at the mercy of their husbands in case of divorce. And as divorce rates have risen dramatically in recent decades (estimated about 33%; Otis 2015), this has created a fairly common path to poverty for women.

The overwhelming focus of development projects on geographically remote borderland areas suggests that the government is willing to address explicitly geographic issues like regional inequality and the rural-urban divide, which are seen as linked to apolitical issues like access to ports and waterways. But the government has been reluctant to acknowledge a rise in social inequalities linked to politicized identity categories like class and gender. Despite this, the relationship between gender and development in China is becoming increasingly apparent – not only due to adverse outcomes for women, but also due to the increasingly visible instability surrounding proper performances of both masculinity and femininity.

Indeed, a rich scholarship on Chinese masculinity and development has emerged in recent years. Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002) review shifts in Chinese masculinities, arguing
that Chinese tradition has long held “the notion of the primacy of social role over anatomical sex” (26) and that men were defined primarily by their socio-economic role from early imperial times. Hinsch (2013) offers a chronological overview of how ideas of Chinese masculinities have changed throughout history, noting that in the reform era there has been a resurgence of media valorizations of economically emasculated men, bad guys, “low-class hooligans (liumang) and punks (pizi)” (158). He sees this as an attempt to reconcile the traditional masculine role of bread-winner with the reality of sharply limited opportunity:

Despite the opportunities offered by economic opening, most men lacked specialized skills or connections, condemning them to a life of endless struggle. Those who failed to thrive in this new environment could not possibly emulate the hegemonic images of masculinity such as the prosperous businessman or happy consumer. Instead they embraced alternative forms of manhood that were readily accessible… (158).

Yang (2010) interrogates the structural changes in Chinese society that have made the means by which to enact a proper masculine subjectivity inaccessible to most. She writes that state-owned enterprises, which have laid off hundreds of thousands of workers in China since the reform era began, fully recognize the gendered implications of this. She writes:

Management, rather than seeing labor unrest in formal political or class terms, interpreted male violence and protest, which had increased since the mid-1990s, as a crisis of masculinity. […] Male laid-off workers were also known to become very violent, causing social instability. Indeed, since the mid-1990s, such instability in China has become embodied in the image of the unemployed male. The result has been a recognition from China’s governing administration that an implicit principle of sustaining stability is to govern men and masculinity (551).

To govern men and masculinity, then, the Chinese state has taken a retrenchment of patriarchal gender roles as its main tool.

**IV.1.E. Returning women to reproductive work**

The Chinese state recognizes that Chinese men are facing growing difficulties in performing the socio-economic roles linked to masculinity. In response, the government has
‘rediscovered’ virtue in Confucian social structures which emphasize obedience of subject to state, and women to men (Bell 2010, Yu 2008). But while this maneuver may be cloaked in Confucian discourse, it reflects a broad trend in the global economy. Connell (1998) offers an insightful analysis of how neoliberal economic agendas around the world cite the prerogative of global competitiveness as an excuse for cutting gender-equitable services like childcare, healthcare, affirmative action programs, and the welfare state more broadly. These structural changes place an increasing burden on families, who must make hard choices about the household division of labor. Given that most national economies continue to show a large gender wage gap (Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund 2013), men can typically expect to earn more than women, making it more profitable for the household if women stay home and manage domestic reproduction.

These trends are abundantly clear in China, where the state’s simultaneous withdrawal from managing productive and reproductive work, in the form of child- and elder-care, as well as health services, has (re)created a huge demand for unpaid domestic care. As Cook et al (2011, 950) write:

The declining influence of socialist ideology also led to a re-emergence of traditional patriarchal values and increasing pressures on women to return to the home. A widely held view in China is that women’s labour force participation in China is too high to be justified by market forces. Hence their withdrawal from the labour force, permanently or periodically, would be a solution to rising unemployment in the cities (Yee, 2001). This sexist attitude is clearly revealed by China’s gender-differentiated retirement policy and the government’s support for creating flexible forms of employment for women (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008). Indeed, in policy circles, rising urban unemployment in the late 1990s has led to arguments in favour of less secure, ‘flexible’ forms of employment as re-employment measures, especially in sectors where women predominate (Cook, 2010).

This has led to significant negative impacts on women’s participation in paid productive work, with married women especially showing higher rates of unemployment than men (Du and Dong 2009) and women in general more likely to face lay-offs, since their duties and loyalties
were seen as primarily owed to their families (Appleton et al 2002). While this is also true in the Yanbian area, the Korean Chinese face a unique calculus compared with other Chinese. Korean Chinese men are unable to fill the jobs that women now do, making women’s “return to the home” entirely impractical. South Koreans are not going to hire Korean Chinese men as nannies. But Korean Chinese women’s long-term absence from their Yanbian households accentuates the crisis caused by the state’s withdraw from reproductive care work. In other parts of China, women are called upon to stay home, raise children, and care for the elderly. Korean Chinese communities do not have that option. Instead, as discussed in Chapter II, other responsible figures like grandparents and teachers are being tasked with raising children. The elderly are increasingly relying on peer-groups, in the form of elderly social clubs, to ensure their safety and security. As in other parts of China, there has also been a remarkable increase in elderly re-marriage, as older widowers in particular find themselves unprepared to live alone, and incapable of caring for themselves (Huang 2012).

This leaves open the question of men’s role in the reform-era economy of Yanbian. And indeed, it appears to be a question as-yet unanswered. Men are rarely tasked with raising their own children, even when their wives are abroad. Since so many young women have left Yanbian, significant numbers of Korean Chinese men cannot find wives among their co-ethnic peers (leading to an increase in inter-ethnic marriage, discussed below). Excluded from the domestic realm, men are neither embraced in the new economy. Jilin’s previous economic status as the industrial heartland of China offered myriad forms of production that simultaneously generated profit and performed masculinity. But the new economy has not yet found a place for men.
My interviewees frequently raised issues about the reform-era changes and ongoing instability around men and women’s roles in the household and in the economy. Most of my female acquaintances complained about men. They framed their complaints as comparisons with Han Chinese men, with South Korean men, and with men of other generations. Myeong-Ji, a 38-year-old mother of a 6-year-old boy, told me:

I was living in South Korea for 5 years. In South Korea I have a lot of family, so I had a lot of personal experience in the home, and I could compare South Korean men with our Korean Chinese men. South Korean men in terms of the home and family have an amazing amount of responsibility. The man is the pillar of the home and is constantly trying to improve his abilities, and if he has a job/enterprise then he is always networking, and trying to improve his qualifications (certifications) of what he can do. Usually a man has four or five certifications. But our Korean Chinese men have nothing except a school graduation diploma. Just the diploma from their major, nothing else. Korean Chinese men, if they fall down, they don’t get back up. They don’t do any self-development. Until they grow old and die, if something goes wrong with their work, they just lose hope and live [in a state of hopelessness] for 5, 6 years. In this sort of thing, for our Korean Chinese men, the idea that they will protect the home or be the head of the household, we have weak ideas about this [it’s not a common notion]. (Personal interview, April 2014).

For some women, this was not a negative characteristic, but rather indicative of greater gender equality. Qin Mei, a 27-year-old high school teacher in Antu Township, told me:

Korean Chinese family life has become dual-income. In South Korea there is the phenomena in which men work outside of the home and the housewife handles the housework. But in Yanbian the dual-income model has become universal. There are very few women who stay and home and rely on men to earn money. This is a difference between South Korea and here. Rather, men participate in housework and because both men and women are earning an income they are also responsible for
doing the housework together. This is different from South Korea. (Personal interview, December 2013).

[朝鮮族家庭生活, 지금 맞벌이입니다. 한국에는 남자가 밖에서 일하고 아내가 집에서 가정일을 하는 현상이 많지만 연변은 맞벌이가 보편적입니다 여자가 집에 있고 남자가 돈 버는 현상이 적습니다. 이것은 한국과 특별히 다른 점입니다. 그다음 남자들이 가사일에 참여하는것 맞벌이기 때문에 가사일을 남녀가 함께 도맡아하는것이 한국과 다르기도요.]

The reform-era cultural and economic roles of men and women at the household level have therefore evolved differently among the Korean Chinese than other Chinese ethnic groups. The local economy in Yanbian continues to rest on agriculture and migrant remittances. Agriculture is increasingly rejected as an endless cycle of poverty, and as discussed in Chapter III, benefits of migration disproportionately accrue to women. The Yanbian government is left with a large population of unskilled men, many of whom were left destitute at the end of the “iron rice bowl” policy. To address this, the government since 1990 has relied on promises of infrastructure development in the border region. While these promises have yet to fully materialize, they do seem to have taken hold in Yanbian Korean Chinese men’s imaginations as the path to future prosperity. Next I explore the emergence of those infrastructure dreams, and explicate how they have become foundational to discourses of masculinity in Yanbian.
IV. 2. Development in Yanbian

Jilin Province, as recounted in Chapter I, is landlocked and has become increasingly disadvantaged in the reform era. Jilin has an area of 187,400 square kilometers, and a population of 27.5 million in 2014; GDP per capita in 2014 averaged just over 50,000 RMB (Deutsche Bank 2016). Almost 50% of Jilin’s GDP is produced through secondary economic sectors, including “automobile and rail vehicle production, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, metallurgy, equipment manufacturing, textiles, and agriculture,” (http://shenyang.usembassy-china.org.cn/jilin.html). Public expenditures have increased exponentially in recent years, from less than 40 billion RMB in 2002 to over 300 billion RMB in 2015; the vast majority of this comes as subsidies from the central government.
Jilin’s stagnant economy in the reform era has been blamed on its lack of sea access, which bars it from direct participation in export activities (Cotton 1996). But the borders of Jilin, Russia, and North Korea meet just 15 km from the Sea of Japan. Several attempts have been made to extend Jilin’s access to the sea. In 1990 the governments of China, North Korea, Russia, Mongolia, Japan, and South Korea attempted to create a kind of treaty port that would form the basis of regional economic and political cooperation, and also provide Jilin with access to a port. Initially called the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP), it was to be administered and funded by the United Nations Development Programme with the Asian Development Bank included as an observer (E. Kim 1992, 38). The UN came up with initial financial pledges of US$30 billion for the twenty-year project, of which Chinese government itself committed almost $2 billion (Miller 2005; Blanchard 2000, 279; Hughes 2000, 19). But at the end of five years of planning, little of that money had materialized and few actual infrastructure projects had begun. With the USSR reemerging as the Russian Federation in 1991 and Kim Il Sung’s 1994 death, both Russia and the DPRK refused to honor initial land-lease
agreements due to questions of sovereignty. The original TRADP master plan was abandoned late in 1994 (Hughes 2000, 20).

Yet China continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to the project, with Premier Li Peng personally raising the issue with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1995 and in 1996 agreeing to reorganize central administration of the TRADP as the Tumen River Secretariat, located in Beijing, and coordinated but not operationalized by the UNDP (Blanchard 2000, 280). China further demonstrated its commitment to the Tumen region by increasing funding to the area in 1998 via the Program to Revitalize Border Areas (興邊富民行動) and next by including the area in the “Open Up the West” campaign. In 2003 the area again received targeted funding under the Revitalize Northeast China Program (振興東北老工業基地) (Miller 2005). In 2004, the seemingly dormant TRADP was itself resurrected and in a new Strategic Action Plan the member countries proclaimed that “the Tumen Programme has reached an important stage of development and the member Governments have decided to revitalize and re-brand it as the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) in order to serve better the common goals” (Greater Tumen Initiative 2004).

These more recent efforts appear to have had much greater impact, when measured in economic terms. While investment in the Tumen area until 2000 had totaled only US$460 million (Zhou 2002), this increased sharply through the 2000s. In 2001 alone, the central government invested US$66 million in Yanbian’s infrastructure (Zhao 2002). The Hong Kong Trade Development Council, in a 2009 market analysis of Jilin Province overall, reports that “In 2006, contracted foreign direct investment grew by 79% to US$1,686 million, and the utilized FDI amounted to US$760 million (+15%).” Further, the key goal of providing an international
shipping port may have finally been realized; in 2012, China was reported to have finally secured a 50-year lease on 2 piers (which China will pay to construct) in the DPRK’s Rason Special Economic Zone (Yonhap 2012).

But China’s interests in the area continue to be undercut by North Korean political instability and nuclear aspirations. This was most pronounced by the 2014 purge of the North Korean official Jang Song-thaek, who had worked to develop the Rason Special Economic Zone on the Yanbian border through his extensive ties in China (Choe 2016). Before his execution, Jang was accused (among other things) of the “act of treachery in May last as selling off the land of the Rason economic and trade zone to a foreign country for a period of five decades under the pretext of paying those debts” (Beauchamp-Mustafaga 2014). Despite this setback, the central government has continued to push (and fund) large-scale infrastructure development in Yanbian, in October 2015 opening a high-speed rail link from Jilin City through Dunhua, Antu, Longjing, Antu, Yanji, Tumen, and Hunchun. Some experts have noted that this rail line would be strategic for both economic linkages and rapid troop deployment in case of instability on the Korean Peninsula (Fifield 2015).

China’s ongoing attention to infrastructure development in Yanbian is significant at several scales. In the wake of North Korea’s political transition from Kim Jong-il, who died at the end of 2011, to his relatively-unknown son Kim Jong-un, China has sought new ways to engage with the DPRK. At the same time, maintaining and enhancing Beijing’s role as a global power broker requires that China not be seen as unilaterally supporting a pariah state like North Korea. China’s ongoing attempts to develop the Tumen region under the auspices of the UN, which have consistently been derailed by North Korean political instability, offers a face-saving
way to lavish investment on the Yanbian area while blaming North Korea for Yanbian’s continued failure to develop. But in an outcome echoing of Ferguson and Lohmann’s comments above (“more power relations are referred through state channels and bureaucratic circuits” (1994, 180)), these ongoing failures provide justification for further state involvement in the area. Furthermore, they also offer up a cautionary tale – without the wise leadership of the Chinese government, the ethnic Koreans on the Chinese side of the Tumen River might be just as destitute as those on the DPRK side.

Some scholarship has sought to situate the Tumen River development programs within China’s larger history of borderland minzu policies. Freeman and Thompson (2011, 3), plunk down the entire progression of Tumen River development initiatives squarely within China’s internal security policy, focused on pacifying disruptive minority groups. Without distinguishing the borderlands of Jilin from those of Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, or Yunnan, they write that “China’s border areas include concentrations of ethnic minority populations that continue to represent hot zones for potentially contagious minority unrest within China.” Rozman (1998, 4) describes the Tumen area as an ethnic tinderbox of rival groups of Koreans, Han Chinese, Japanese, and Russians. These authors center their analyses on the policy-makers and the institutional frameworks which policy-makers envision. Such work erases the complex local and intra-national context of Northeast China. It leaves the Tumen River area devoid of content, a spatial container. Michael P. Lavallee (1997), for instance, begins his analysis of the TRADP by describing the Tumen River as “a sleepy, and until recently, largely forgotten waterway in Northeast Asia, [which] has been thrust into the limelight by radical changes in regional economics and politics.” The text does not clarify who forgot the Tumen River, but presumably it was not the Korean Chinese who live there. Freeman (2010, 141) similarly paints the Tumen
River estuary as “an empty expanse of windswept marshland through which the Tumen River cuts until it reaches the sea.” Such imagery suggests that the Tumen area holds no intrinsic value, that it is merely a blank canvas upon which humans may write their industrial development. But in particular, the Chinese state appears to be approaching the Tumen River area as a blank stage on which new forms of industrial masculinity might be performed.

IV.2.A. Development work among the minzu

Yanbian’s relationship with the larger Chinese state is profoundly shaped by its unique status as a minority minzu autonomous prefecture. The minority minzu system rests on two pillars. The first is the classification of all individual citizens by nationality. No one in China is without a minzu status. 91.51% belong to the dominant Han minzu. The Korean Chinese comprise 0.15% of the Chinese population, and are the 13th largest ethnic group out of the 56 total (after Han, Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Yi, Tujia, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyei, and Yao) (“People’s Republic of China” 2013). Many of the affirmative-action-like benefits that come from being a minority minzu are attached directly to the individual person, including lower admission requirements to university and exemption from many family planning laws. An individual’s minzu classification comes from her or his parents; as Thomas Mullaney (2010, 123) summarizes, “children of two-minzu couples were permitted to adopt the ethnonymic status of only one parent, a policy that continues to the present day. As such, there is no legally recognized ‘bi-minzu’ designation in China – no space for legally recognized ‘hyphenated identity.’ Rather, a child of less than eighteen years has his or her minzu status selected by the parents and, upon his or her eighteenth birthday, is granted a two-year window of time in which
reclassification is possible (but again, only between the ethnonational status of one’s mother or father).” The primary pillar of minzu policy is therefore descent-based.

But the other pillar of the minzu policy is territorial. Areas with large minority populations have been designated ‘minority autonomous’ places, varying in scale from China’s five large minority autonomous regions (自治区, comprised of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Ningxia) to thirty smaller minority autonomous prefectures (自治州, of which Yanbian is one), and 120 autonomous counties (族自治县; there are several Korean autonomous counties in Jilin and Heilongjiang province). Autonomous areas in theory allow local governments, usually with a prescribed quota of minority officials, to enforce national law and to set their own local regulations, policies, and ordinances, even to “adjust central directives to local conditions” (Zhang 2012, 251). Schools in minority autonomous areas offer instruction in minority languages, and minority religious practices are nominally protected.

While all minority minzu are ostensibly governed by the same laws – primarily the PRC’s Constitution and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law – in reality various ethnic groups receive drastically different treatment by the central state. Tibetans, for example, are subject to extensive regulation, face large-scale social, religious, and legal discrimination within China, and are often denied legal benefits like passport, which would allow them international mobility (Yeh 2013, 38). Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province face similar persecution (Kaltman 2014). The Chinese central government accuses broad sectors (or “cliques”) of both of these groups of ‘ethnic splittism,’ or the desire to secede from China and form an independent state based on their ethnic nation (Yeh 2013, Walsh 2013, Primiano 2013). By contrast, the Korean minority is often held up as a “model minority” (Gao 2008), and with the exception of the Cultural Revolution (described in Chapter I) has faced very little historical prejudice.
That is not to say that all Korean Chinese have full or equal social status in China. Indeed, my research finds quite the opposite. The different experiences of ethnic Korean Chinese who live in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and ethnic Korean Chinese who live elsewhere in China show how territorializing an ‘ethnic homeland’ within the larger Chinese state dramatically reshapes the experience of minority ethnicity. In the course of my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with Korean Chinese in Harbin, Beijing, and Yanbian. In general, the Korean Chinese who live within Yanbian report experiencing their ethnic identity through bodily and spatialized daily practice, while Korean Chinese who live in ethnic enclaves or integrated in larger Chinese cities demonstrate a mostly symbolic ethnicity. The ultimate outcome of this difference is ambiguous. Yanbian Korean Chinese share their ethnic identity at a community level, by speaking Korean, eating at Korean restaurants, watching and discussing Korean television shows, and participation and engagement with the minority autonomous government. They expressed pride in their local culture and general satisfaction with China’s minority laws. Most acknowledged that their opportunities in mainstream Chinese society were severely limited, but simultaneously pointed to Chinese state investment in Yanbian as evidence of ‘the good life’ provided to them in China. Korean Chinese from outside of Yanbian, however, did not enact their ethnic identity in daily community life. Many still used Korean language among their families and ate Korean food at home, but in public they spoke primarily Mandarin Chinese, ate at Chinese restaurants, and worked professionally with Han Chinese. Korean Chinese from Beijing and Harbin tended to be more critical of China’s minority ethnic protection laws, and saw little value in ‘perpetuating’ minority culture within China. As Professor Cai (the Harbin sociology professor who studies ethnic minority education in China) told me:

Lots of minorities get free education, but this has changed and now they don’t even have their own language education. They learn Mandarin Chinese and English. Despite this, going to other
minority areas is difficult even now, because their Mandarin skill level is very low. For example, the Mongols [many of whom live in Heilongjiang Province, and in Harbin] mostly just use Mandarin. They have their own language, but only the old people speak it. This is also true of many other minorities. Truthfully, I think this is best. It’s just a waste of time, and a waste of teachers. Their languages are have no use (没有用) and are not used in important places, only in remote and rural places. Many of them don’t even have written languages, so they can’t write in their own languages (没有文字，不能写) (Personal interview, in Chinese, August 2013).

I find that these differences emerge from divergent experiences of territorialization. The Chinese government can actively target those Korean Chinese who have been “containerized” within a minority autonomous area, for ideological and political economy work. This results in different life trajectories and different opportunity structures, which emerge from the “tracking” that occurs at an early age. Children who attend Korean language schools (almost all of which are in Yanbian, although there is at least one Korean language elementary school in Harbin) have a harder time using Mandarin Chinese later in life. Perhaps most importantly, Yanbian’s Korean Chinese guanxi, networks (social networks, 关系) do not extend far into China’s large cities. Guanxi networks are fundamental to success in Chinese social and economic life; without clearly enforced contract laws or equal opportunity employment, Chinese rely on guanxi to bring trust and accountability into business relationships (Lovett, Simmons, and Kali 1999). Beyond the reach of one’s guanxi network, an individual cannot get personal introductions or acquaintances to vouch for one, and it becomes exponentially more difficult to find new opportunities. Owing both to language barriers and cultural limits on ethnic intermarriage, the Korean Chinese in Yanbian typically have very little guanxi in China beyond their local ethnic enclave.

However, these issues only partly apply to Korean Chinese who live beyond the borders of Yanbian. In the words of Professor Chen, a female, late-40s Korean Chinese professor of Korean language in Harbin:
In Heilongjiang Province, even the Korean Chinese speak Mandarin fluently. But in Yanbian, because their Korean Chinese dialect is most commonly spoken, so their overall language level is low. They can’t understand the South Korean dialect of Korean, and they also can’t understand Mandarin. When I go to Yanbian, they think I am a Han Chinese who studied abroad in South Korea. (Personal interview, August 2013).

[在黑龙江，朝鲜族也说汉语得流利。但是在延边，他们平常说朝语、所以他们的预言水平很低。他们不懂韩国语，而且不懂汉语。我去延边的时候，他们以为我是个在韩国留学的汉族。]

Professor Chen argued that Korean Chinese who live outside of Yanbian or are educated in Chinese-language schools (like herself) attain fluency in Chinese and establish those pivotal guanxi connections which allow them mobility within China. But they give up their full membership in the Korean ethnic enclave.

Korean Chinese within Yanbian, though, rarely made that choice. While they almost universally praised China’s development over the past three decades, and claimed great pride in their natal country’s achievements, Korean Chinese interviewees in Yanbian had little interest in migrating within China. Indeed, people like Li Feng Hua’s older sister (who married a South Korean and they together moved to Shanghai to work for a South Korean company there) who ended up in China’s larger cities were often pitied. Li Feng Hua’s mother commented several times on how lonely her elder daughter must be. For the Korean Chinese in Yanbian, South Korea is much more integral to their social world than are larger Chinese cities. China’s minzu policy gives them the linguistic and social skills to succeed in temporary migration to South Korea, migration that serves as a pressure valve to compensate for their lack of opportunity in greater China. But as explored in Chapter III, migration offers better opportunities for women than for men. China’s national, provincial, and prefectural governments have struggled to offer local opportunities and a sense of enfranchisement to Korean Chinese men.
In August 2014, I interviewed four men employed in constructing the high-speed railway on the Chinese side of the border. I met them randomly at a cheap snack-shop where we all happened to be grabbing lunch, and struck up a conversation. Although these were local Korean Chinese men, working the Yanbian region, they repeatedly emphasized the notion that the rail network was a national project, and now Yanbian people could quickly and inexpensively travel to all other parts of China. Furthermore, this particular railway would link China and North Korea, and in the future extend into Russia as well, bringing the entirety of three nations together. They expressed pride in contributing to the high-speed rail network that materially embodies the emergence of China as a global power. They predicted that it would bring economic growth to Jilin Province, but these workers saw the Rason port development initiative primarily as a charity project for North Korea.

One of the railroad workers told me:

In the past 50 years, Yanbian has changed from a rural area to urban area. Actually Yanbian was part of the Japanese puppet-state Manchukuo, but the Korean Chinese are now part of China. People who wanted could return to North Korea or South Korea immediately after the war, so now Yanbian people are here by choice. And Yanbian is becoming highly developed. You can see, we are doing construction here. […] South Koreans now thinks Han Chinese are more advanced than Korean Chinese [shaking his head, disbelievingly]. But everyone jokes that in the future, South Korean people will come to work here. Already we have many South Korean people here, actually. But you can see them [easily identify them]. There are also so many North Koreans. Many factories here use North Korean labor. The laborers get 20% of their wages. We have North Korean restaurants, but the workers are like frogs in a well, they don’t see the outside world. […] Now Yanbian’s Korean Chinese look more similar to South Koreans, but this is superficial. Within China, the Korean Chinese are now much more assimilated. In the future there will be no Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture(自治州), there will just be Yanji. Now there’s too much intermarriage, and their children’s hukou [household registration, which includes ethnic classification] follows father [author’s note, this is not true]. Much intermarriage, but if the Han Chinese can’t speak the Korean Chinese dialect of Korean, the marriage can be awkward (尴尬). If a Korean Chinese man and Han Chinese women marry, it can be a problem. Korean Chinese
men drink a lot, and Han Chinese women are very formidable (厉害). (Personal interview, mixture of Korean and Chinese, August 2014).

Figure 51: Inside a North Korean restaurant, Dandong, China, Sept. 2013

This man highlights the Korean Chinese’ place in the ethnic and geographic nexus between the Han-dominated Chinese state, North Korea, and South Korea. While I do not know his education level, the fact that he is a construction worker implies he is of lower socio-economic status, especially since construction in Yanbian is dominated by Han Chinese migrants. Nonetheless, he talks down to all other ethnic groups. He can’t believe anyone would think that Han Chinese are more developed than Korean Chinese; he looks forward to a future in which South Koreans come groveling to Yanbian for jobs; and he pities the ignorant North Koreans.

One of his co-workers said this:

This railroad will connect China to the ocean, by going through North Korea. North Korea has given China a 20-year lease on the borderland area to use [boastfully]. This is an opportunity for the Korean Chinese, because Han Chinese language and North Korean language isn’t the same, so the Korean Chinese can communicate between them. […] North Korean people come to Yanji, work, or go to school at Yanbian University, 90% are here like this, but they are also
working as spies. Those who come here aren’t ordinary people. One North Korean woman married a friend of mine, a Yanbian person, but she couldn’t change nationality. I also visited North Korea once. There were small children begging for 1 kuai chuar (roasted meat that costs about $0.10), and they tried to steal bits of food from our bus. (Personal interview, mixture of Korean and Chinese languages, August 2014).

Contrasting sharply with these men’s narratives, were the perspectives of women who buy fish and mountain herbs in Hoeryeong (North Korea) for sale in Yanji (China). I met many of these women in the Yanji street markets, and established relationships with two. These women, operating individually through personal networks spanning the trans-border community, were more reflexive about the China-North Korea relationship. They recalled the Cultural Revolution, when persecution of minorities led Korean Chinese to seek temporary refuge in North Korea. One told me the following:

If all this land had become North Korea, and had fallen under the control of North Korean policies, then [today’s] Korean Chinese people would be too unlucky. At the time when it had just become a country, North Korea didn’t resemble the poverty of today. Up to the 70s, the early 80s, North Korea was still ok. Still better than China. I grew up on the Tumen River border between China and North Korea, every day I could see North Korea, they were extremely prosperous. We really wanted to use their manufactured goods, clothes etc. At that time we Korean Chinese had this kind of circumstances, if one had relatives in North Korea, other people will be very envious. Because once those relatives come to China, they can bring North Korean goods here with them. China was extreme poor at that time. But after the China’s reform and opening-up policy, China’s economy began to boom. While China becomes richer, North Korea becomes poorer. So now it is the people in North Korea envy their compatriots who have relatives in China. (Personal interview, March 2014).

如果都变成北朝鲜的话，都成为朝鲜政策控制下的话，朝鲜人太不幸了。当时刚建立国家的时候，朝鲜没那么像现在那样的穷。70 年代，80 年代初为止，北朝鲜还可以。比中国还好。我是在图们江中朝边界长大的，天天能看到朝鲜，他们非常繁荣的。我们非常愿意使用他们的工业品，衣服啊等等。当时我们中国的朝鲜族有这样的情况，要在朝鲜有亲戚的话，就会别人很羡慕，他们一旦过来就把朝鲜的东西都拿过来，中国当时很穷。后来中国改革开放以后，马上经济发达了，朝鲜越来越穷，中国越来越富裕。现在反过来，朝鲜人非常羡慕那些中国有亲戚的人。
In contrast to the state-centric narrative of construction workers, these small-scale traders (most of whom are older than 50 and female) identified at the personal and community scales, expressed a general distrust of top-down social stability, and felt a precarious awareness that all countries experience periodic reversals of fortune. The quote above even identifies the arbitrary national borders that determine so much of a person’s life. These women therefore sought economic opportunities outside the state’s purview, relying on informal local markets and personal cross-border networks of extended kinship. Unlike the railway construction workers, they expressed very little sense of political membership at the state level. For them, whatever powers operated at scales above their own experience were less relevant than the concrete ethnic communities of which they are a part. They acknowledged political strife in the borderland
region, but implied that they could always rely on their personal networks to ensure access to cross-border goods and markets. This suggests that some combination of gender, ethnicity, and local connections allow them to permeate the national borders, subverting the construction workers’ narratives of an all-powerful China, in firm control of the national territory.

Figure 53: Sign reads “North Korean seaweed for sale” (북조선 미역/被朝鮮 海菜), Yanji street market, May 2014
These narratives suggest that beneath official masculine discourses of a benevolent developmental China uniting the Tumen River region through industrial infrastructure, an unacknowledged, highly gendered small-scale mobility remains central to rural women’s livelihoods. This contradiction is mirrored in discourses and narratives of North Koreans’ cross-border mobility. The mobility of male bodies is perceived as a militarized threat to the Chinese nation. Since 2012, as many as 20 Korean Chinese residents of border towns have been killed by male North Korean defectors in search of food (Jacobs 2015, Cathcart 2015, Global Times 2015). This has prompted the Chinese government to install an alarm system in border residents’ homes (Korea Times 2012) and distribute emergency cell-phones to local citizens (Global Times 2015). Beyond the threat of starving defectors resorting to violence to obtain food, Wang and Blancke (2014) report that “during the first half of 2009, 367 [drug] traffickers were arrested and 6,139 kg of illicit drugs – most of which had been trafficked from North Korea – were seized by
police in northeast China’s Jilin Province.” These (male) traffickers deal in both drugs and women, selling whatever they can out of North Korea to make a profit, corrupting and victimizing the Chinese side of the border in the process.

By contrast, North Korean women apparently cross the border in much higher numbers, but are rarely discussed in the Chinese media (Aldrich 2011). In my own fieldwork, Yanbian Korean Chinese interviewees on two occasions told me that North Korean women cross the border to seek work or to get married (contributing to Chinese society), but North Korean men steal things and return to North Korea. In South Korean, U.S., and European media discourses, North Korean women appear framed as desperate victims of persecution and trafficking (Chong 2014). And indeed, as much documentation (Lankov 2004, Davis 2006, E. Kim et al 2009, J. Kim 2010, United Nations 2014) has shown, North Korean women often endure conditions of extreme abuse and virtual slavery when left with no legal protection in China. But simultaneously, as Kyunghee Kook (2015, 90) points out, “even when the abuse and exploitation is severe, escapees still regard the prospect of return to North Korea as more dreadful.” This defies any singular narrative of North Korean migration, male or female, which reduces the complexity of multi-faceted human experience to simply “thief,” “trafficker,” or “trafficked.”

IV.2.C. Dreams for masculinity: infrastructure and investment

Yanbian offers few productive spaces for men, nor do the Korean Chinese men of Yanbian have sufficient connections (关系, guanxi) to effectively seek jobs in other parts of China, nor does the South Korean government want excessive numbers of dangerous foreign
men prowling its streets. The Chinese government is left with a problem then: what to do with men in Yanbian? The perceived dangers of a large itinerant male population emerge on two fronts. First, masculinity itself is perceived as being under threat, both by the loss of earning power and by the loss of control over women. Second, masculinity without a properly productive channel is perceived as threatening to the social system, insofar as the labor power of men might be channeled into antisocial behaviors like deviance and violence.

Academic examinations of gender predominantly focus on constructions and enforcement of femininity. However, this ignores the ways that masculinity too constrains and forbids certain courses of action for those bodies inscribed as male, not least in the realms of social and biological reproduction. In China, this has been most apparent in discussion of men who cannot properly reproduce their households by finding a wife, or supporting that household with steady income. Susan Greenhalgh (2010, 2013) has documented the mental and emotional anguish this can produce among those disenfranchised men. Although the consequences of improperly performing masculinity rarely pose a threat of physical harm or death to the person, they nonetheless find themselves without a position in the social life of the community and are thus essentially dehumanized. The decline in job opportunities for men, in combination with a sex-skewed and highly competitive marriage market, must therefore be seen as a very real threat to the lives of lower-class Chinese men. This was addressed in a round-about way by one history professor at Yanbian University, who told me:

Prof: These days, the most important change in Korean Chinese society has been the lowering of men’s positions and the extreme rise in women’s positions. The main reason for this change is that women go abroad to work, and so the economic power has all gone to the women’s side, because women can more easily find work in the capitalist world economy. In particular, women are needed in the service sector. Even if Korean Chinese women have difficulty in obtaining a position as a high-level official, or a professor, but they can easily find easy work. By comparison, it’s much more difficult for men to find work. After the Reform and Opening, the South Korean wind (hallyu, globalized South Korean culture) arose and the majority of women
wanted to go to South Korea, because they have economic power. But by comparison men are merely atrophying. That’s the change.

Me: And when women go to South Korea, what kinds of work do they do?

Prof: Mainly in restaurants as waitresses, in hotels and motels, or in elderly retirement homes as nurses. This kind of work, which is dirty and pays very little, the South Koreans won’t do. This is what most Korean Chinese do.

(Personal interview, June 2014).

This issue has also been approached from the opposite angle – the threat posed by men unable to properly perform masculinity. Authors like Hudson and Den Boer, in their 2004 book *Bare Branches*, have suggested that large numbers of unemployed, unmarried, rootless, disaffected young men could form violent and deviant gangs, engaging in antisocial behavior and posing a significant threat to social stability in China. When the scale of the sex ratio imbalance was becoming clear in the 1990s, early scholarship on social impacts suggested dire repercussions. Most predicted that cohorts of men unable to marry would turn to violence, commercial sex, and other anti-social behavior to express their frustration at exclusion from normal family patterns (Yi, et al. 1993). Yet the few studies to research actually observed effects of sex ratio imbalance have reported quite the opposite. In Vietnam, where out-bound marriage migration is a significant demographic force, Belanger and Tran (2011, 71) find that daughters
are now more prized and have greater power within the household. At the same time, single men “suffer feelings of depression” and compensate by seeking wives in even poorer neighboring areas. Hesketh (2011, 760) reports similar findings in China, where most single men “felt marginalized, had low self-esteem, and tended to be withdrawn and passive rather than aggressive.”

My own observations echo this. While teaching a summer English class at Yanbian University, I teased two of my students about their obvious romantic involvement, as they were constantly holding hands in class, etc. The male student, a 20-year old Korean Chinese named Jin Kyung, told me very seriously that he loved his girlfriend but neither he nor his brother [actually cousin] would be able to get married soon, because their family didn’t have the funds to buy either of them an apartment. Jin Kyung’s father was disabled and unable to work, while his mother held a fairly high position in the local government. Jin Kyung was extremely matter-of-fact as he explained this to me, and his girlfriend, a 20-year old Korean Chinese woman from a town outside of Yanji, did not argue. Jin Kyung told me that he planned to graduate and look for a job in Shanghai, where his uncle lived. I asked his girlfriend if she would wait for him, to which she replied that she might (but no promises). Another interviewee, an unmarried 41-year old Korean Chinese man who works as an acupuncturist, told me about his relationship with his mother:

We are very close, because we are just two. My father passed away. I went to work in South Korea in the 90s and thought that I would earn money and come back, buy a house, and get married. But I stayed there too long and got old. Now I came back [to Yanji] and look, I’m very old. My mother loves me a lot, but she still wants me to get married. Even now she tries to introduce me to single women, but most of them are divorced. Actually I’m ok, just with my mother. [Translated from Chinese, June 2014].

Society is not threatened by violence alone. High levels of depression and isolation, coupled with economic decline and a diminishing sense of opportunity, are doing far more damage to
families and communities than random acts of violence. Perhaps more serious for the Chinese state, lack of optimism about the future also undermines the legitimacy of governing institutions.

Figure 55: A typical Yanbian village in winter, January 2014

For these reasons, the Chinese central government has made concerted efforts to continue infrastructure development in the Yanbian area. Whether or not the DPRK and Russia ever agree to open their borders or allow the Chinese to develop the ports of Rason, the men of Yanbian must be led to believe that they have an economic future brighter than their present. Infrastructure provides a concrete promise of future development. Few of my interviewees seemed to note that this promise had been made continuously for twenty-five years, and had not yet been fulfilled. The lack of concrete development in the area was blamed on the political
backwardness of the DPRK, which was further held up as proof of how correct the actions of the Chinese government were – and an unspoken threat of where Yanbian might have gone, but for the grace of the CCP’s leadership.

While these infrastructure and development projects offer concrete hopes to men, they are notable for their lack of appeal to women. The jobs to be created are predominantly for men, in industries like shipping and mineral extraction. This is perhaps unsurprising, in a context in which women’s rights and gender equality are rapidly disappearing from the Chinese state’s agenda. As Sun and Chen (2015, 1091) summarize, “After waves of women’s liberation movements, the reform era has witnessed a puzzling stagnation, if not decline, in women’s status in China. […] Intensified economic reform since the 1990s, the massive loss of jobs by women workers, the widening of the gender gap in various labor market outcomes, the commercialization of women’s bodies, and the cultural devaluation of women led many Chinese feminist scholars to conclude that the economic reform has set back the efforts toward women’s liberation…” On the one hand, few women in Yanbian complained to me about a lack of economic opportunity. Most of my students and female interviewees felt that they could always go find work in South Korea, or they could open a shop in Yanji, or they could work for a shop [for an in-depth exploration of women’s roles as small entrepreneurs in Yanbian, see Noh 2012]. None of these jobs were reliant on Chinese state benevolence. But few men saw opportunities outside of the state’s purview.
IV.3. Emergence of new ethnic boundary practices

IV.3.A. Encounter with ROK increases awareness of unique Korean Chinese identity

Experiences of discrimination and ethnic hierarchy in South Korea have served to increase the Chinese side of Korean Chinese ethnic identity (Seol and Skrentny 2009, Seol 2012, Noh 2011, Kwon 2013). The elderly grandmother of one of my English students, when I told her I had noticed some differences between South Korea and Yanbian, volunteered this:

Long ago people came from both North and South Korea, and settled here. They couldn’t live back there, so they came. They came here and lived a lifestyle without regulations, without domestic discipline or family rules (家规). But if you look at South Korea, there are so many
family rules. Their children’s education is also very different from ours. They are relatively civilized. They’re different from us. (Personal communication, Yanbian, March 2014).

옛날에 북한에서 오거나 한국에서 여기로 들어와서 연변에서 정착하고 살았잖아요. 못 살아서 여기 들어왔죠. 여기 들어와서 우리 생활이 규정이 없고 가정규률 (家規) 이 없이 살았는데 한국보니깐 한국사람들은 가정규률이 아주 많아요. 자식 교육하는 것도 그렇고 명절때를 보면 우리랑 달라요. 비교적 문명하죠. 우리랑은 차이가 있죠.

Another elderly Korean Chinese, a retired professor of history at Yanbian University, told me:

Yes, Korean Chinese immigrants in South Korea do have a lot of challenges. They grew up here, and they are influenced deeply by Chinese culture so they have many difficulties in adapting to the South Korea culture. They do not intend to stay long in South Korea, just for money. Their parents, sisters and brothers, and relatives are here. They feel much more comfortable living here. They want to earn more money there and come back, buy a house, and stay. You will think differently if you grew up in South Korea. I heard that there are around 500-600 thousands Korean Chinese in South Korea but I believe most of them will come back here eventually. Because with the same amount of money, you can live much better here than in South Korea, you can buy an apartment. Social status and acceptance is another issues. Chinese have a much lower status in South Korea. They do not want to be discriminated there. In Yanbian, they do not have to worry about this issue. Everyone is treated equally. Wherever you are [within Yanbian], you don’t have to worry if you are Korean Chinese [that is, worry about facing discrimination for being identified as Korean Chinese]. (July 2015).

中国的朝鲜族去韩国的话有问題。他们小时候在这里长大，都受到中国的影响，观念和思想，到韩国不适用，他们不是长期在韩国生活而去，而是为了赚钱而去，这里有自己的父母、兄弟姐妹、亲戚，还是习惯这里的生活。所以赚完钱后还是想回来，在这买房子，在这生活。如果你在韩国长大的话，也许就不那么想了。 现在听说在韩国的朝鲜族已经有 5、60 万了，我看是早晚都会回来的，因为你用那些钱在韩国生活会不够，但是那个钱拿到中国来兑换人民币的话，可以买房子，在韩国买不起。还有社会地位问题，因为韩国人看中国人社会地位非常低，看不起。所以他们不愿受到那种社会上的歧视，但延边的民族关系非常平等的，无论什么场合什么地方，我们不会在意我们是朝鲜族。

But this has not increased the Korean Chinese sense of membership in the larger Chinese nation.

One woman described the emerging Korean Chinese identity thusly:

Korean Chinese in Yanji can interact with Koreans in South Korea or go anywhere in the world. They go to Japan, Europe, Italy, and many other countries. They are everywhere in this world. From South Korea too, they can go to faraway places too, like Germany. Korean Chinese people are everywhere. There are always Korea-towns in any place in the world. Korean Chinese are everywhere, but these days many Han Chinese people came to the places where Korean Chinese are living in the U.S. So now it’s like the Korean Chinese have become go-betweens: they speak both Korean and Chinese, so they can live among Koreans and Chinese even when they are in
the U.S. Some people think Korean Chinese constitute their own society. (Personal interview, January 2014).

Constituting their own society, as separate from but engaged with Han Chinese and South Koreans, aptly describes the attitudes of most of my Korean Chinese interviewees. This sentiment was expressed especially strongly through discussions of opportunity within China, and inter-ethnic marriage.
IV.3.B. Intra-ethnic conflict and inter-ethnic marriage

Their status of being a minority *minzu* underpinned all my conversations with Korean Chinese, but emerged most explicitly in discussions about economic opportunity and family formation patterns. The Korean Chinese I spoke with felt warmly towards Han Chinese, but nonetheless felt that strong socio-cultural differences between them meant that they had very different structures of opportunity. Economically, as previously discussed, the Korean Chinese felt that their lack of *guanxi* left them at a massive structural disadvantage in mainland China. But they perceived this disadvantage to be balanced out by their unique opportunities in South Korea. In terms of marriage though, there was no such substitute or compensation. Unlike Han Chinese and South Koreans, Korean Chinese have not documented a skewed sex ratio at birth; but because so many Korean Chinese women have married South Koreans\(^7\), their current reproductive-age population nonetheless demonstrates a sex skew. For Korean Chinese men, this means that marriage is becoming increasingly difficult.

One solution to this problem might be ethnic intermarriage. While the total number of Korean Chinese women in Yanbian has decreased from 414,643 in 1990 to 402,352 in 2000, the total number of Han Chinese women in Yanbian increased over that same period from 574,417 to 640,989 (D.S. Kim and J.M. Kim 2005, 84). Official support for ethnic intermarriage is

---

\(^7\) Because South Korea does not differentiate between Han and Korean Chinese when collecting statistics about foreign brides, it is difficult to say for certain exactly how many Korean Chinese women have married South Korean men. However, between 1990 and 2005, a total of 107,000 Chinese women married South Korean men, an estimated 73% of them being Korean Chinese (Doo-Sub Kim 2010, 135). Since then, an annual average of roughly 20,000 Chinese women have entered South Korea for marriage, with again 70% of them being Korean Chinese. In addition though, divorces among international couples are also fairly common; 2014 estimates put the total number of Korean Chinese women married to South Korean men at around 150,000. See the South Korean government’s department of statistics, [http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/3/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=350648&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=](http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/3/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=350648&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=)
strong; James Leibold, writing in *Foreign Affairs.com*, (2016) has recently argued that this ethnic intermarriage has become “the cornerstone of ethnic policy under Chinese President Xi Jinping: ‘the acceleration of interethnic contact, exchange, and mingling’—in other words, the blending of peoples through mixed marriages and other forms of social and cultural exposure.” But he also notes that “Overall, mixed marriages are extremely rare in China, especially when compared to rates elsewhere in the world. In 2010, only 2.8 percent of Chinese households consisted of more than one ethnic group, down from 3.2 percent a decade earlier.” Yet almost everyone I asked about this agreed that intermarriage between Han Chinese and Korean Chinese was increasing. As Mi Kyung, a female 45-year old Korean Chinese shopkeeper told me,

It is very common for Chaoxianzu to marry other races. They marry Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongolians, Japanese, Americans, Germans, Taiwanese, and more. [Their parents] prefer their children marrying the same race but the children keep demanding and they are free to date whoever they like. So the parents have no option no matter how much they oppose. [This has changed because] How the Korean Chinese people met one another and got married, such as by meeting in the same hometown or school or being introduced by friends and stuff is totally different from before. People meet others through the internet or by working. Rather than being introduced by others, it’s now more common to meet freely.

But Professor Cai, the Korean Chinese sociologist in Harbin who studies ethnic minority education, explained her views on the problems that ethnic intermarriage can cause:

The Chinese population is aging, the population of elderly is growing, the young population is shrinking, so policies are changing to encourage births. Korean Chinese especially have a sex ratio imbalance (男女比例问题). The problem is, the Korean Chinese used to value boys over girls (重男轻女), and old people still think this way. So now in rural areas there are many boys
and no girls. Boys can’t find a girlfriend or wife. So now many Korean Chinese men marry Han Chinese women, because of this.

The government is also worried about this, encouraging meetings, arranged meetings, marriages. But the result is not good. Many older Korean Chinese don’t speak Mandarin. And the Han Chinese don’t speak the Korean Chinese dialect (朝鮮语). Korean Chinese should not marry Han Chinese, their habits are too unique. Divorce rate is extremely high, especially because hygiene habits (卫生间习惯) among Han Chinese women are very bad. Also the Han Chinese women don’t speak the Korean Chinese dialect (朝鮮语), can’t speak to their in-laws, and don’t care about old people. But because Korean Chinese women’s cultural level is so high, they prefer late marriage, or they don’t marry Korean Chinese but rather marry South Koreans or Japanese.

Figure 58: A government-sponsored scheme to increase marriage rates in Harbin, China, July 2013; each paper is a personal ad for a local single person, including their height, weight, and income.
As a final point for discussion, both Prof. Cai and Western scholars like Leibold (2016) note that the government is actively attempting to increase marriage between ethnicities. Leibold, at least, does not approach this as an innocent project. His analysis echoes that of Ma Rong (2007), both arguing that the central government’s heavy-handed minority policies discourage authentic, fair-minded, or unprejudiced contact between Chinese ethnic groups. But while Leibold refrains from prescriptive analysis, Ma conservatively argues that China’s emphasis on ethnic group outcomes has led to a failure to guarantee basic equality before the law, and essentially calls for the abolition of affirmative-action-type ethnic identity in China.

Of course, Leibold, and Ma are explicitly dealing with the enduring and intractable conflict between Han Chinese and the Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Uighurs of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, in China’s south and west. These situation pose a stark and confounding contrast to that of China’s Korean minority. While it is true that the DPRK offers an extremely unappealing alternative to Chinese rule, the same is not true of South Korea. Furthermore, groups like the Tibetan and Uighur minorities have neither acquiesced to Chinese rule nor expressed a sense of gratitude for benevolent Chinese development (Yeh 2013). Why are the Koreans different? I suggest two reasons: first, as explored in Chapter I, the physical land of Yanbian is important in Korean mythology but was not occupied by the ancestors of its current population. Rather it was a place of refuge during the Japanese colonial era. Second, the Korean Chinese (unlike most current Tibetans or Uighurs) have had the opportunity to taste participation in a politically independent nation-state for their own ethnic group, via immigration to South Korea. The experiences of discrimination and hierarchical nationhood in South Korea over the last twenty-five years have ironically been fundamental to cementing Korean Chinese loyalty to the Chinese state. But that loyalty also rests on the
Chinese state’s continuous performance of itself as a stable entity, governing coherently despite the slippages and alternative performances that inevitably emerge in the attempt to coordinate the performances of thousands of individuals.

**IV.3.C. The Korean Chinese: women workers, indolent men**

As Korean Chinese women’s and men’s subject positions relative to each other, to the Korean diaspora, and to the larger Chinese population and state have changed in the last quarter-century, their self-perceived identity markers have also changed. These ethnic- and gender-identity markers especially have evolved to incorporate new normative economic and mobility behaviors. Here I highlight how my interviewees have discursively rationalized those changes, producing new subject positions for women (defined by a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility) and men (marked by a simultaneous sense of gendered superiority, and an economic dependency on women).

Professor Cai’s quote at the end of the previous section highlights several points that emerged as recurrent themes in my interviews. First, both male and female Korean Chinese told me that Korean Chinese men have a patriarchal worldview compared to other Chinese (usually described as chauvinistic, “大男子主义”). Mi Kyung, quoted above, said that Korean Chinese women end up working harder than Korean Chinese men:

> Well, not everyone is like this, but Korean Chinese men expect to make a lot of money. Making just a little money or doing a small business is not worth doing and is just annoying. They just study how to make a huge amount of money and try to go overseas or start something big, so they don’t want to do small things. Even though they are told to work or go somewhere to work, they complain and say that the pay is too low. They imagine themselves going to a foreign country and making 10,000 yuan per month. But that is not the reality, but most of them still think so. About 60 to 70 out of 100 people probably think so. But that is not true. Every little bit helps [proverb, dust can be gathered into a mountain]. (January 2015)
Another woman, Ok Ja, who was a retired government employee, echoed these sentiments:

In the past, the men would go outside to earn money, but now in Yanbian, the men just play and so many of the women go to South Korea to earn money. Especially women between age 50 and 60, these women all go to South Korea to make money and the husband stays at home, there are many of these couples. This is because there is relatively little work in Yanbian, and Yanbian men really emphasize saving face, they “love face,” so they just stay in the house and play. So in order to not lose face, they play in Yanbian and many women go earn money in South Korea. So in Yanbian at the end of the year when the statistics about the economy are released, however much the imports into Yanbian were, the vast majority of that was money earned by Korean Chinese women working in South Korea. (January 2014).

Another elderly interviewee, aged 58, said the following:

Korean Chinese men have a lot of “male chauvinism” (大男子主义) and so the women, maybe half or 70%, get ordered about. But actually that’s because the Korean Chinese family is quite "尊老爱幼," respecting the elderly and lovingly caring towards the young. I would like to give a simple common example, when we eat at home, first the food is given to the husband, and to the elderly, and finally very last, the wife will have food herself. First men, then elderly, then children, and finally to oneself. This is quite characteristic of “respecting the elderly and lovingly caring towards the young” lifestyle. (April 2014)
Not everyone agreed that male chauvinism is such a serious issue in Yanbian. One older woman, a 65-year-old retired teacher, said:

The Korean Chinese lifestyle in the past, it was very male-oriented, but now at least a bit there is male-female equality. But, in the past, when we had difficulties, especially during the 80s, because of the male-orientation the men ate well (better than women), and men also wore the best clothes, and women were always in last place. But now life is much richer, and it's not apparent if anyone has a higher position or is better-off than anyone else. That's what I think. I think in the house-hold now, students work the hardest, in my experience my children study from early in the morning to late at night, they are at school for a long time, so I think this is a child-orientation. At first male (lit. husband) orientation, now [it's more important that] children work hard, so now I [mothers generally] make food more for my children. In terms of those around me, my retired co-workers also, our life is relatively like that. [조선족 생활에는 옛날에는 남자 위주로부터 지금 조금씩 남녀가 평등으로 가는것이 아닙니까. 그렇지만, 옛날에 우리 곤란할때 80 년대때는 남자 위여서 음식도 남편이 잘 잡수는것을 위주로 하고 옷도 남편을 좋은걸 사입히고 여자들은 자신을 마지막 위치에 놓습니다. 근데 지금은 생활이 부유해지니깐 맘히 누구 위치가 높다 하지 않고 좋은것도 같이 써고 내 생각엔 또 그렇습니다. 제 생각엔 집식구 가운데서 학생 (자식) 이 제일 수고 하므로 제 경험에 의하면 자식이 공부할 때 아침 일찍 계고 저녁 늦게 오고 학교가서 오래 있으니깐 그때는 저는 아이를 위주로 했습니다. 처음에는 남편 위주로 후에는 자식이 수고 하니깐 지금은 먹는 음식이라든가 자식위주로 하고 있습니다. 저희 주변 사람들, 제가 출근하는 동료들도 지금 비교적 그렇게 생활하느것 같습니다.]

Prof. Cai’s quote also alludes to hygiene. This also came out frequently in interviews, and in everyday comments made to me. One 40-year-old Korean Chinese woman described her social life thusly: “I usually go to KTV with my Korean Chinese classmates, because they’re Korean Chinese and so they don’t patronize Han Chinese restaurants, because Han Chinese restaurants are dirty. Korean Chinese are clean. Han Chinese don’t wash food (不洗菜). So Korean Chinese restaurants are more expensive. With Han Chinese friends I will eat anywhere, but with Korean Chinese friends I only eat at Korean Chinese places” (March 2014).

Another Korean Chinese woman, age 60, when asked about ethnic intermarriage, said this:
Mongols and Manchus [other ethnic minorities who live in the northeast of China] can marry Han Chinese because their cultures are not unique. Korean Chinese would better marry North Koreans, to import North Korean women [進口朝鮮女人, a joke about literal import trade, said laughingly]. But seriously, South Koreans steal Korean Chinese women, so Korean Chinese should steal North Korean women. Korean Chinese are not like other minzu, we can’t intermarry. 90% marry within Korean Chinese. Korean Chinese are very clean, washing every day, we must do this. Han Chinese marry in, and they think it’s very strange, very inconvenient (麻煩). Washing food and hands before you eat. Han Chinese don’t do this. Washing dishes every day. My sister came back from [working in] South Korea and she cleans every day. (Chinese language, October 2013).

I offer a final example from one of my key informants and friends. When I returned to Yanji in 2015, I found that my language exchange partner, a 29-year-old man named Sung-min, was newly single. When I left in 2014, he and his long-term girlfriend, both of whom are Korean Chinese, had been planning to get married. Now, no one in our friend group spoke of her. I finally asked Sung-min what had happened. They had been living together in an apartment that he rented, although he traveled often for work. One weekend he returned home unexpectedly, and, in an age-old tale of heartbreak, found another man in their bed. I asked if there was any chance for reunification. No, he replied, never. By way of explanation, he said that the other man was Han Chinese, and his ex-girlfriend was now dirtied.

On the one hand, this should be contextualized in a long worldwide tradition of equating ethnic and racial purity with cleanliness. Dana Berthold (2010, 2-3), examining discourses of hygiene in the contemporary US, notes that “When we look at purity ideals as having not only physical but also moral aspects, we can see how easily slippage takes place between the exclusion of ‘dirt’ and the exclusion of ‘dirty people.’ The function of purity ideals is rarely just about physical dirt—it is about wielding power over ‘impure’ others.” But these quotes also place the burden for cleanliness on women alone, highlighting the conceptual linkage between femininity, ethno-racial purity, and cleanliness. The equation of femininity and the ethnic nation has been further explored by Louisa Schein (1997), demonstrating how the burden of
maintaining and performing the (minority) ethnic nation falls on women, which leads to a kind of ‘internal orientalism.’ In Schein’s analysis of Southeast Guizhou, “[interethnic] encounters were most commonly structured by a class/gender asymmetry in which minorities were represented chiefly by rural women, while Han observers appeared characteristically as male urban sophisticateds” (70). But here, I find that Korean Chinese women and men alike reverse that, defining themselves as a positive minority in contrast to their negative analysis of Han Chinese.

I also want to raise a slight difference between the discourses of my Korean Chinese interviewees and those from other scholars based in different place. Korean Chinese women did often highlight their cleanliness in relation to Han Chinese. But this cleanliness was not an innate characteristic – it was the result of the structural conditions that forced them to work so hard. An overwhelming majority of the Korean Chinese women I interviewed saw themselves as hard-working and disciplined as a result of their position in between China and South Korea. Many spoke fondly of pre-reform days, when they were not required to leave their homes to earn money abroad. But now, because China offers them so few opportunities and South Korea offers so many, they saw themselves as having no choice. By virtue of going to South Korea, they had to adapt to South Korean standards of cleanliness; when they return to China, these habits are praised and valued, to the point where they have become a new form of ethno-cultural marker. Thus, I read this discourse of cleanliness not purely as a form of ethnic hierarchy, but rather as a testament to how Korean Chinese women internalize South Korean norms and bring them back to Yanbian, where they are increasingly valued.

Similarly, the idea that Korean Chinese men have become universally lazy and self-serving in the reform era must be considered in relation to the actual opportunities available to them. When Ok Ja said that “they [men] play in Yanbian and many women go earn money in
South Korea,” she was only partially acknowledging the structural conditions of the South Korean and Chinese economies, which provide opportunities for immigrant women but not men. But for both women and men, these structural conditions have been internalized to the population, rather than recognized as emerging from the cultural conditions of the regional economy. Socio-economic changes have led to new ways of performing gender. What unites these diverse new performances is their broad acceptance as a new way of performing Korean Chinese ethnic identity.

IV.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have situated the Yanbian Korean Chinese population in relation to the larger Chinese population and state. Nested in the northeastern region, this area has suffered economic stagnation and decline in the reform era. Barring “little-d” development, then, the Chinese government has attempted to push “big-D” development initiatives from the early 1990s to the present day. These initiatives have failed. But following a logic emerging from development theory, these failures aren’t really failures at all – they are successful bureaucratic interventions, which provide the government with an opportunity to perform a highly-publicized act of caring for its people.

In the northeastern three provinces and in Jilin Province in particular, these development projects at least have a clear target, to fill the gap left by failing state-owned enterprises that previously formed the basis of the regional economy. But the situation in Yanbian is different, and the grounds for government intervention are less clear. Yanbian was never dependent on the state-owned industrial sector, and now its agricultural economy is being remade by migrant remittances. Scholarship from gender and development studies suggests an alternative motive
for China’s development practice here – rather than trying to increase overall wealth, household consumption, or individual income, development interventions are a way to enroll local men in the state-building project, by offering them an alternative and modern Chinese masculinity. As Chinese men in under-developed regions of China have few means by which to perform the traditional roles of masculinity (those linked to being the breadwinner, supporting a family, and maintaining a professional/work identity), they are imagined to become rootless and potentially destabilizing, posing a threat to society. In Yanbian this is doubly true – local men are being excluded from both Chinese and South Korean economic structures. China counters this with an alternative hegemonic vision, in which this newly-subaltern group has a future of hope and prosperity. Offering them even the mirage of a respectable social position as part of the development process is one way of maintaining their loyalty.

The Chinese central government’s prioritization of economic development in Yanbian reveals an attempt to restore faith in the patriarchal centralized state in the reform era. Having given up the role of centralized economic provider in the reform era, and adopted neoliberalized economic policies which leave women to fend for themselves (and their families), the central government nonetheless wants to retain political control. While exhortations to maintain a “harmonious society” (coupled with a lack of viable alternatives) have been mostly effective in inland China, the Korean Chinese do have an alternative – they can vote with their feet, and over a quarter of the population has left as a result. But the new opportunities, experiences, and benefits offered by South Korea are unequal, stratified by gender and ability to adapt to South Korean hierarchies, and inaccessible to large segments of Yanbian’s Korean Chinese population. The Chinese state is therefore offering an alternative subjectivity to borderland dwellers.
excluded from the Korean opportunity structure. They do this through an appeal to masculinity, and an empty promise to restore the industrial glory of the past in the northeast.
Chapter V: Conclusions

Reflection IV: Monica

Monica was my student at Yanbian University. After I explained my research interests to our English class, she approached me and told me the story of her aunt. Her aunt is 42 years old this year. She is in the middle of her third divorce. She first married when she was 18 years old, to her 32-year-old teacher. He was very handsome. They had a son, and the son looks exactly like the father. But when their son was in middle school, her husband’s first wife came back to haunt them. The first wife told Monica’s aunt, “I want my husband back.” Monica’s aunt became very tired, and so finally just said “I give him to you (送给你).” And they got a divorce. Her son, who had always been among the top 3 students in the school, suddenly stopped studying. Monica’s aunt had always wanted a daughter, and so she married a second time, to a very rich man. But they couldn’t have children, so they divorced.

Meanwhile, her son stopped studying and went to find his father, who was a businessman. The son also became a businessman. Everyone on his mother’s side of the family loved him so much; he was like an older brother to Monica and another son to Monica’s parents. But his own mother didn’t like him, because he looked so much like his father.

Monica’s aunt then met a South Korean man. He was both rich and handsome. They met in a bar, and got married two weeks later. Monica’s aunt went to live in South Korea with him. They had a daughter. The first son went to visit his mother in South Korea, and met his half-sister. He stared at her for a long time, just smiling. Then he left, and disappeared for three years. No one in the family could contact him. After three years he returned to Yanji, a rich businessman. For those three years he had done nothing but work. Now he owns a bakery and
sweet shop in Yanji. Although he never contacts his mother or Monica’s parents, he sometimes sends a cake to Monica.

Monica’s aunt in South Korea, meanwhile, still likes to go to bars and party. But her husband told her to stop doing this. Monica’s aunt felt that he didn’t understand her. And so now they, too, have divorced. During the divorce, Monica’s grandmother went to South Korea, to take care of Monica’s aunt and young cousin. Monica’s aunt does not work; Monica’s mother says that her “work” is getting married. Monica’s aunt will not come back to China now, either, since there are more rich men in South Korea. Although she is 42, Monica says her aunt stopped aging at 25. She has no wrinkles, is very beautiful, and her figure is also very good. But her daughter, ironically, looks like her third husband.

What does it mean to Monica to have an aunt like this? How have her aunt’s choices altered her relationships with her cousins, or influenced her perceptions of normative family relationships, or altered her sense of what’s possible and permissible? How does her male cousin, now a successful baker, understand the proper performance of masculinity? From the time when migration began in the early 1990s to today, the Korean Chinese are now a permanent part of South Korean society, albeit a deterritorialized and external group. How have social structures, community norms, and daily practices in Yanbian changed as a result? From the stories I heard, the interviews I conducted, the conversations I participated in, and the habits, opinions, and choices of the friends I made, I place those changes in three broad categories. First, the altered socioeconomic structure in Yanbian has given rise to new cross-border mobility patterns and new social hierarchies, particularly as result of women’s plentiful employment opportunities in South Korea. Second, while Yanbian’s territory is increasingly marked as
Chinese, the social spaces and embodied practices of the Korean minority there are increasingly governed by South Korean discourses. This is linked to my third conclusion: within Yanbian there is an increasing shift towards symbolic ethnicity, in tandem with the increased material and symbolic benefits of participation in local Korean cultural life.

V.1. New Hybrids and Hierarchies

V.1.A. South Korean creep

My first visit to Yanbian was in 2012. I never saw the place before it ‘reconnected’ with South Korea, so determining what has changed in the last twenty years requires eyes and voices other than my own. My basis for comparison is necessarily other people’s written and oral accounts of the past. I am the first to admit that the stories I heard might be told in different ways by different people, to different listeners, and with slight differences in outcome or implications. But the overarching themes of the stories I heard were strikingly similar, in different cities and towns and villages, over 21 months of fieldwork divided across four years. The Korean Chinese individuals who spoke with me described how South Korean cultural practices crept into their lives, creating new hybrid geographies of everyday life. Young people and middle-aged women started meeting up in coffee shops. Patbingsu (팥빙수, 沙冰), a sweetened shaved ice mixed with red beans, has become a popular snack in summer and winter alike. South Korean slang (like 헐 [heol, “no way!”], the “었” [yong] ending, and use of the informal ~요 [yo] instead of formal ~습니다 [sumnida]) has come to mark a generational divide in language. My Korean Chinese friends described how South Korea opened up a whole new world of opportunities for women, to work as waitresses, at laundromats, in hotels’ janitorial services. But women who wanted to pursue those opportunities had to leave their families
behind, endure discrimination and harsh working and living conditions, and would be rewarded with cash savings devoid of long-term security. They would return home periodically, to find the balance of power in their households altered by the shifting weight of breadwinner status.

V.1.B. New Hierarchies

The new hierarchies within Yanbian are not just between migrant women and non-migrant kin. There is a new divide between men who migrate and those who do not. Almost half of the labor migrants to South Korea are men, although they earn less than women, risk greater physical harm, and are less likely to work as immigrant laborers for more than a few years; still, they earn significantly more in South Korea than non-migrant men earn in Yanbian. This division emerged indirectly, in subtle expressions that signaled a keen awareness of the migrant/non-migrant divide. One 68-year-old non-migrant man told me that women could migrate to South Korea, work hard, and earn money, without disrupting society – but [as my respondent shook his head in disgust] when young men go there, they come back wearing makeup like women (interview in Tumen City, April 2014).
While it is true that in South Korea skincare products are marketed heavily to men, including tinted sunscreen and BB cream, I was never aware of any of my male acquaintances in Yanbian using these products. Regardless of whether or not the practice exists in Yanbian, this older man perceived migrant men as returning to Yanbian having acquired negative, effeminate cultural practices. He did not mention the wealth disparity that likely also emerged. For men, the South Korean connection is a mixed bag. Inordinate numbers of men go there to work, but that experience usually contributes to feelings of powerlessness and emasculinization. And indeed, those men who choose to accept the low-wage/high-stigma jobs that South Korea can offer them are making an exchange and giving up their pride. They are accepting an emasculating subject position. This resonates with and amplifies their experiences of other “effeminizing” forces like China’s neoliberalization, the gender imbalance, and women’s relative (and absolute) increase in earning power.

Negative assessments were not only attached to migrants. The children of migrant workers tend to be much wealthier than other children, and by extension have greater access to resources like supplemental classes after school. But these children are publicly pitied for their
lack of parents. Colloquial knowledge posits that they are more prone to criminality. Again, whether or not this is an accurate characterization of the children of migrants is less important that the widespread perception of its truth.

All of this points to an important development in Korean Chinese migration: it has become a mature immigration cycle. Twenty years ago, travel to South Korea was extremely rare, and public discourse around South Korean culture was similarly non-existent. With the opening of South Korea’s society to Korean Chinese immigrants, people in Yanbian were inundated with various, often contradictory, images and messages about South Korea. People who went there to work came back rich – as long as they weren’t killed or maimed in industrial accidents. They came back with stories of warm family reunions and vicious discrimination. South Korea was alternately portrayed as a rich and welcoming homeland, and a heartless capitalist wasteland. Outlandish caricatures abounded. But by now, South Korea is old hat. Almost every person I spoke with in Yanbian told me they had visited South Korea (except the extremely poor or the North Koreans). Everyone “knows” about it; yet because their own experiences in South Korea are often limited to their jobsites and ethnic enclaves within Seoul, they often rely on multiple ways of knowing – first-hand experience, the experiences of people they know, South Korean TV, print and radio news, and material consumption.

V.1.C. The ‘knowing’ of South Korea

Public knowledge and discourse about South Korea has crystalized into standard forms. While discourses cannot capture the complex realities they describe, Korean Chinese have nonetheless settled on which aspects of South Korean society matter most to them, and how those aspects can be discursively incorporated into Yanbian society. The stabilization of
discourses surrounding South Korea and migration reflect the larger structural adaptations that Yanbian society has undergone, going beyond that of a new economic relationship to being a partial (but potentially permanent) melding of societies. The process of adaption through the 1990s and 2000s was painful and jarring, as detailed in a limited body of ethnographic work (D.S. Kim and J.M. Kim 2005, Noh 2012, Kwan 2014, Freeman 2015). Despite resentment towards South Korea, the Korean Chinese highly value that connection. They have built places for themselves within South Korea – hierarchically, in the ethnic enclave neighborhoods of Seoul like Daerim and Ansan. They’ve developed networks within big companies like Samsung; the educational system in Yanbian has developed to successfully train Korean Chinese for all kinds of jobs in South Korea (including offering language classes in “standard Korean,” based on the Seoul dialect, as opposed to the local Yanbian dialect).

V.2. Territorial power, biopolitical power

But for all the highly visible South Korean presences in Yanbian, I am not suggesting that anyone in Yanbian imagines that territory to be part of a Korean political entity. This speaks to a secondary conclusion of this dissertation – the ambiguous relationship between Chinese territoriality and South Korean normative behavior. By coming under the sovereignty of South Korea’s deteritorialized disciplinary regime in terms of socio-cultural norms, this does not imply that the Korean Chinese are actively shifting loyalties. Rather, they demonstrate a multiplicity of identities, some of which overlap and conflict. This is closely linked to scale; at the household and community level, the South Korean influence is pervasive. But at the national scale, my Korean Chinese respondents still deployed what might be termed methodological nationalism in their discourses. Especially in reaction to North Korea’s instability since the early
1990s, Yanbian’s security is tightly linked to the Chinese state. One Yanbian professor of sociology told me the following:

Now China is unhappy with North Korea because China is opposed to North Korea’s nuclear weapon development. Once they become competitive in the military race, the safety of the whole of Asia is under threat. If every country in Asia participates in this military race, say Japan, South Korea, North Korea, etc., then the whole situation will become really tense. If one of them uses a nuclear weapon, the result is beyond imagination. So developing nuclear weapons is not a wise policy. […] North Korea is really giving China headache these days. […] When I was in college, we had a lot of North Korean defectors, those who sneaked to China. Some of them were sold into China through human trafficking. Many of them are willing to be sold to China because if they stay in their country, they will starve to death. Some of these people are educated, can even speak Chinese. […] Most of them barely speak or understand Chinese, but not all of them. Those who can understand or speak Chinese can communicate well with local people, thus can adapt to the new environment better. In Yanji, you can easily find North Korean girls in some of the local restaurant and dancing halls, and most of them are North Korean defectors. They usually seek opportunities to go to South Korea after a temporary stay in China because it’s not safe for them to stay here for a longer time. At first, China did not regulate those defectors, but then North Korea protested. So those defectors are repatriated once caught in China. But once they return to North Korea, only death is waiting for them. China knows this, so they mostly turn a blind eye on this issue, but they still sometimes send people back when the relationship with North Korea becomes better. This is why most defectors live a hidden life here. Sometimes they get married with local people and got a fake ID. It used to be much easier to get a fake ID by paying extra money, but now China’s household administration becomes more serious and if people are caught by making fake ID, they will lose their jobs and be penalized, so nobody wants to take the risk now, especially after Xi Jinping took office. (Personal interview, July 2014)

现在中国也是不高兴，因为核武器开发中国也不赞同，那样的话经费的竞争就开始了，亚洲的安全也会受到威胁，要是都允许搞核武器，日本也搞，韩国也搞，北朝鲜也搞，那就互相敌对状态就完了，要是谁先使用了武器，那就完了。所以核武器开发是不明智的选择。[…]我们中国是对朝鲜半岛很头疼。

以前我们上大学的时候，脱北者，偷偷地来到中国的朝鲜人很多，有的被人口贩卖，被卖给中国人，卖到别的地方，他们愿意被卖，因为不来中国，会饿死。他们当中有些人素质高，懂汉语。

大部分汉语水平差，但是一部分汉语水平还可以，可以交流，能马上适应。我们延边地区延吉市内，一些饭店，练歌厅等服务行业肯定有朝鲜姑娘，他们很多都是脱北者，然后他们在这待一段时间之后，看机会去韩国，在这不能长待下去，很危险的。中国最初对朝鲜脱北者放弃不管了，但是后来朝鲜提出抗议，所以抓了之后遣返回朝鲜，让他们回国，但一旦他们回国了命都没了。所以他们睁一眼，闭一眼，有时候管，有时候不管，但是关系不错的时候，还是遣返。所以来中国的很多脱北者，偷偷摸摸生活，有时候跟延边地区的人结婚，做假的身份证，当时是给钱的话假身份证变真身份证，现在不行了，因为
户口管理非常严格，谁敢做，就是工作没了，所以大家都不敢做了。现在，中国习近平上台之后，每人敢做。所以脱北者们想尽方法去韩国。

In this narrative, there is no Yanbian and no specific Korean Chinese people, there is only a China that acts as a counter to North Korea.

Yanbian thus display an ambiguous mixture of Chinese territoriality and Korean social characteristics. South Korean advertisements, franchise shops, and pop songs gild the streets of Yanji. At the same time, factories and restaurants manned by North Korean workers are beginning to make Yanbian a new hub for low-cost labor (J. Kim 2015, W. Wang 2012). But visitors to Yanbian must register at the Chinese police station (派出所) upon arrival. Korean Chinese who want to travel to South Korea must first get a Chinese passport. While borders may be weakening globally, I repeat here a joke that was told to me by a North Korean official visiting Yanbian in autumn 2013:

You know, Korean Chinese can take a day trip and visit North Korea, between [the Chinese city of] Helong and [the North Korean town] Hoeryong? And they’re just local people, they don’t have a passport. And when the Chinese border guards check the buses they just ask the passengers “Where are you going?” in Chinese, and if the passengers can reply in Chinese, then they can just enter [China]. So the North Koreans learned this, and they would get on the bus, and when the guards would speak to them, they would just say “Helong.” They don’t know what they’re saying, they just say “Helong” and they can come [into China]. But then the guards figured this out. So the next time they checked the bus, they would ask the passengers in Chinese, “what’s your name?” And all the passengers said “Helong”! [Laughing] They were arrested.

I raise this here to highlight the partial nature of South Korea’s deterritorialized discipline and loose sovereignty in the region. While South Korean cultural discourse and normative gender behavior may reshape how Korean Chinese women plan their life-course, the physical land of Yanbian remains Chinese, and cannot escape its location at the border with the DPRK.
V.2.A. Biopolitical conflicts and territorial cures

But even the scalar differences that seem to separate South Korean influence from China’s enduring power are not so easily disentangled. On the one hand, as Emma Campbell (2015, 483-84) has recently argued, South Koreans themselves appear to be consciously shifting away from a territorialized or descent-based national identity:

…a new South Korean nationalism is emerging among young people and that this emerging nationalism has globalised cultural characteristics. These characteristics contest the importance of ethnicity in young people’s conception of the South Korean nation and its component members. Among young people, the new globalised cultural ideas of nation and nationalism are based in the concepts of modernity, cosmopolitanism and status.

Campbell’s argument is compelling, and aligns with the state’s discursive shifts away from South Korea as an ethnically homogenous nation and towards its embrace of multiculturalism. However, I want to push back against the idea that culture is (or can be) divorced from the physical bodies of the people who enact it. While Campbell astutely notes the decline in descent- and blood-based conceptions of the Korean nation (“Among young people, the new globalised cultural ideas of nation and nationalism are based in the concepts of modernity, cosmopolitanism and status” (484)), it would be erroneous to assume that identity has therefore become a matter of free choice. Rather, as the Korean Chinese so visibly demonstrate, Korean identity is increasingly expressed through bodily performances like language, clothing, grooming, diet, and mannerisms. These seemingly personal choices about how an individual presents her or his body to the world are constructed and legitimized through discursive representations of Korean identity.

But even as the Korean Chinese bodily enact these Korean identities, they are inextricably linked to the physical and social environment. This came out strongly in discussions
of health. In interviews with women who had returned to China after working as immigrant laborers in South Korea for periods from two to twenty years, I was struck by their discursive reliance on South Korean medical terminology to describe their own emotional and psychological experiences. In particular, many referred to hwa-byeong (화병, 火病), also called HB. Hwa-byeong translates as either ‘anger syndrome’ (reflecting Western notions of repressed anger) or ‘fire illness’ (from Chinese medical understandings of elemental imbalance in the body, specifically excess fire energy, which throws off elemental interactions and blocks qi energy) (Roberts et al 2006, 384). HB was called a “Korean folk illness” in early medical literature (Lin et al, 1992), but in 1994 the American Psychiatric Association re-categorized it as a culture-bound syndrome (that is, a psychosomatic disorder specific to one culture) (Park et al, 2002). Western psychology interprets HB as “an illness in Korean women who suppress their anger resulting from family conflict, so as not to jeopardize harmonious family or social relationships, because of the confines of traditional Korean culture” (Min, Suh, and Song 2009, 7).

Alternatively though, my research participants suggested that women who leave their home communities to seek jobs elsewhere develop HB because they are separated from the foods and medicines grown in their native soil. Yet HB was never attributed to Korean Chinese who migrated within China (although, to be fair, I interviewed very few people who had family members working as migrants in other parts of China). The emergence of HB among South Korea-bound immigrants was described to me in various ways. One woman, a 32-year-old Korean Chinese who spent 5 years in South Korea, but currently lives in Yanbian, said “In the South Korean life style, women do more housework and also work outside the home. In China they work together in the home and outside. I didn't hear of Korean Chinese having it [HB] in China, but in Korea it will be different. They live like South Koreans there” (personal interview,
May 2014). One 55-year-old Korean Chinese man, whose wife spent 3 years working in South Korea, told me that HB only emerges after migrants return to China: “When Korean Chinese go to South Korea, they learn to have fun and spend money. It’s hard for them to come back, so they get frustrated in Yanbian” (personal interview, August 2014). Other returned migrants I spoke with felt unappreciated by their non-migrant kin, who had received and spent their remittances. A 45-year-old Korean Chinese woman who worked for 10 years in South Korea told me “I worked so hard for many years. I saved all my money and sent it back to my husband, children, parents, and siblings. I lived in a tiny one-room [studio apartment]. When I came back, they don’t even say thank you!” In reporting her experience of HB, she did not see herself as needing treatment but rather faulted social conditions. She compared HB to high levels of stress, in that both produce hormonal reactions (characterizing it as a bio-physical problem, not mental or emotional), which could only be cured by Chinese medicinal herbs grown in Yanbian.

I include HB in this discussion as an example of Korean Chinese society’s collective physical response to contact with South Korea. These narratives show how individuals simultaneously experience the intersecting scales of the physical environment, gendered economic and cultural hierarchies, and individual corporal response. As Sandra Fahy writes regarding the North Korean famine, “Culture can provide a ‘protective shield’ through religion or ‘local cosmologies’ by which to understand suffering, and from this will emerge appropriate ways of dealing with suffering that are locally embedded and reflect the moral fabric of the cultural influence” (2015, 224). But HB was not a part of Korean Chinese social discourse until contact with South Korea. Its use as a framework for addressing immigration issues is indicative of how Korean Chinese society has collectively accepted South Korean discourses of bodily normality and abnormality, but filtered through a China-centric understanding of territoriality.
V.2.B. Effective sovereignty, affective sovereignty

In narratives of HB, and more broadly, I find a difference between Yanbian’s effective sovereignty and the Korean Chinese’ affective sovereignty. Effective sovereignty recognizes variability in on-the-ground control, is characteristic of all states, and “is not necessarily predicated on and defined by the strict and fixed territorial boundaries of individual states” (Agnew 2005, 438) and simultaneously recognizes that “different states have different abilities to act (different sovereign capabilities)” (Haslam 1999, 43). South Korea is not challenging the effective sovereignty of Yanbian (although the power differentials between the national, provincial, prefectural, and municipal governments that do compete for effective sovereignty in this region are non-trivial). South Korea, rather, has laid claim to Yanbian’s affective sovereignty – the structure of desires and expectations that govern the choices individuals make in shaping their lives. But as discussed, these desires and expectations are not emerging at the individual scale. They are part of the spatial regime that shapes the northeast of China, and the Yanbian Korean prefecture in particular. Affective and effective sovereignty are not necessarily in opposition; in many ways the Chinese government has encouraged the Korean Chinese to engage with South Korea, to send back remittances and attract foreign investment, but also to travel and become modern cosmopolitan citizens. As Lisa Rofel writes, “central to the meanings and practices of becoming a transnational citizen-subject in China is the historical and cultural construction of ‘desire’” (2007, 6).

V.2.C. A hybrid borderland

I conclude by returning to the ideas raised by borderland theory – issues like mestiza consciousness and terms like ‘margizen,’ which are discussed as if they exist in an entirely
unique way at the meeting of national borders. I dispute this. These issues emerge and are made visible in unique ways at the borderlands, but they are present everywhere. Multiple claims to sovereignty are layered upon people everywhere, as we inhabit multiple unstable subject positions simultaneously. The performative construction of the self is remade every day in slightly different ways, as individuals encounter official government action at the state, regional, and local scale, face social pressures and family expectations, and attempt to meet our own malleable desires and expectations. Men and women in Yanbian have been rapidly remaking those performative constructions, in response to their changing relationships with the Chinese state, the global Korean hierarchy, and their own tumultuous local forces. Myeong-Ji said, “Korean Chinese men, if they fall down, they don’t get back up.” In the present moment in Yanbian, this may be true. But their story neither begins nor ends there. The reasons why at any given time men and women fall down and rise again (or don’t) must be understood as part of larger, longer, multi-scalar histories. This dissertation has attempted to aid the understanding of those reasons in Yanbian today.
References


Connor, Walker. "A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a…." Ethnic and racial studies 1, no. 4 (1978): 377-400.


Cook, Sarah. “Informality and Gender Inequality: The Challenge of China’s Labor Market Restructuring.” In Xiao-yuan Dong and Sarah Cook (eds) Gender Equality and China’s


Cox, Robert W. “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method.” Millennium - Journal of International Studies vol. 12 no. 2 (June 1983), 162-175


Goodman, David S.G. "The Campaign to ‘Open Up the West’: National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives." In David S.G. Goodman (ed), *China’s Campaign to ‘Open Up the


Hanson, Susan, and Geraldine Pratt. Gender, work, and space. Psychology Press, 1995.


Kim, Bum Jung, and Fernando Torres-Gil. "Aging and Immigration: The Case of South Korea (with a Look at Italy and Japan)." *Generations* 32, no. 4 (2008): 80-86.


Lim, Timothy C. "Racing from the bottom in South Korea?: the nexus between civil society and transnational migrants." *Asian Survey* 43, no. 3 (2003): 423-442.


Naughton, Barry. “China’s Distinctive System: can it be a model for others?” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2010), 19 (65), June, 437–460.


Salter, Mark B. "When the exception becomes the rule: borders, sovereignty, and citizenship." *Citizenship studies* 12, no. 4 (2008): 365-380.


Zhao Huanxin. “State policy blesses Yanbian.” China Daily. 2002, August 5. Provided by ProQuest LLC.


