

# Population Behaviors and Language Maintenance – A Case of the Korean-Speaking Community in China

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## ABSTRACT

*With the regard to language maintenance, one of the most successful in over fifty of ethno-linguistic communities in China is the Korean community with more than two millions of Korean-speakers, in which there have been Regulations Regarding the Ethnic Language Use, and a maintenance-orientated and bilingual education system. However, language attrition comes to be occurring in the Korean community because more than two hundred thousands of Korean-speaking migrants have streamed from the Korean-rural community to the Chinese-urban community for the last twenty years. This paper, in urban-anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives, is aiming at an analysis of the cause of population moves and the urbanization process of the Korean community as well as their impact on the language maintenance and bilingual education in the Korean community. It is mainly divided into four sections, namely, (1) the situation of Korean-speaking community; (2) the problem of language maintenance; (3) the impact of Korean-speakers moves on language maintenance; (4) the impact of negative growth of population, and (5) the impact of uneven ratio of female population.*

**Key words:** *language maintenance, Korean, China, bilingual education*

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## Introduction

Ever since Fishman and Kloss proposed the terms of 'language maintenance' and 'language shift'<sup>1,2</sup>, some linguists have pointed to specific factors that have caused the decline of certain languages. These factors can be grouped as follows: economic changes<sup>3</sup>, demographic factors<sup>4</sup>, status and institutional support<sup>5,6</sup>.

In terms of first-language maintenance, the Korean-speaking community in China, since the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been the most stable and successful compared with speech communities of some 50 ethnic minorities of China or with the Korean communities in Russia (former Soviet Union), Japan or Mongo-

lia. In the past twenty years, however, the population moves of the Korean-speaking community in China have been made continuously, due to urbanisation of the country and the development of Sino-Korean economic and trade relations. The Korean-floating population accounts for a much larger percentage of their native population in China than the Han (Chinese)-floating population does and than other ethnic minorities do. There is no doubt that such spontaneous and massive population moves have alleviated in an effective way the pressure arising from redundant labour in rural Korean-speaking communities and helped promote the local economy and accelerate the modernisation of the Korean community. However the mobility of people has exerted some impacts on the language maintenance and bilingual education in the Korean-speaking community.

This article gives an objective description of the situation of the Korean-speaking community in China from urban-anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives, and makes an identification of the issue of language maintenance of the Korean-speaking community in the context of economic reform. It also analyzes the impact of population behaviors, such as the movement of population, the negative growth of population and the imbalance of male and female portions of population, on the language maintenance in the Korean-speaking community.

## **The Situation of Korean-Speaking Community in China**

### *Ethnic origin and population distribution*

The ethnic Korean is not an aboriginal group in China but an immigrant one, which migrated to China from the Korean Peninsula. Owing to economic and political reasons, approximately 1.11 million Koreans migrated into China from

the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. They joined the Chinese nation and became one of ethnic minority groups officially recognised by the Chinese government after the founding of the People's Republic of China (1950).

More than 95% of Korean-Chinese are rice farmers, living in the Provinces of Jilin, Heilongjiang and Liaoning in Northeast China. In accordance with the 1990 census, the Korean-Chinese in China have a population of 1,920,597. Of this, 1,181,964 live in Jilin, making up 23.55% of the Korean population in China, and 230,378 in Liaoning, amounting to 11.99% of the population. Koreans in other provinces only account for 2.96% of the Korean population in China<sup>7</sup>.

Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (YKAP) and Changbaishan Korean Autonomous County are two Korean autonomous areas, where Koreans live in compact communities and number 835,987, accounting for 43.5% of the Korean population of the country, while the rest 56.5% of the population lives scattered in other parts of the country and/or live together with other ethnic groups<sup>7</sup>. In 48 Korean towns (villages) there are sixteen being administrated by Koreans and other ethnic groups. The total number of Koreans in the towns and villages is close to 200,000, making up 10% of the Korean population in China.

The distribution of the Korean population in the three provinces in Northeast China characterizes a semi-circular area, radiating from the center of the circle, namely Yanbian Prefecture to the north, west and southwest.

### *The use of the Korean language*

Areas where Koreans live in compact communities:

Almost half of the Korean population nationwide lives in compact communities in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefec-

ture, Jilin Province. Therefore, the Prefecture of Yanbian is often considered the largest area where Koreans live in compact communities in China. The rate of the Korean language being used as the native language in the prefecture is nearly hundred percent<sup>8,9</sup>.

Urban areas where Koreans live together with other ethnic groups:

Except for Yanbian Prefecture and some of remote and isolated areas where most of Koreans live in compact communities, Koreans in other parts of the country often live together with other ethnicities, especially the Han Chinese. The distribution of those Koreans is often characterized as 'a large dispersion and small concentration,' i.e. 'the dispersion as a whole and the concentration as a part.' In the cities in these areas, Koreans are

scattered in all parts of the city. A small number of Koreans attend Han Chinese schools. In these schools, Chinese is the first language of the most of pupils. According to a sampling in the early 1980s, 60%–80% of the Korean students in primary and secondary schools in big cities were unable to speak in their own native language (Table 1).

Town-village areas inhabited by several ethnic groups:

Natural villages in the rural areas are usually the basic living units where Koreans concentrate although between two villages a large number of Han and/or other ethnic groups live. The reason why the Korean language is used as the native language of most of the Korean students in these areas is the fact that there are many Korean schools, in which the Ko-

**TABLE 1**  
SURVEY OF USE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE BY KOREAN STUDENTS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KOREAN-INHABITED CITIES (COMPILED ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS BY XUAN)<sup>10</sup>

City	Province	Year of sampling	Number of students (N/S)	N/S with as Korean mother tongue	%	N/S with Chinese as mother tongue	%
Jilin	Jilin	1983	3400*	700	20.6	2700*	80.4
Fushun	Liaoning	1980	202**	94	36.7	128**	63.3

\* Korean students in primary and secondary schools.

\*\* Korean students in primary schools.

**TABLE 2**  
SURVEYS ON USE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE BY KOREAN STUDENTS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS (COMPILED ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS BY XUAN)<sup>10</sup>

Location	Year of sampling	Number of students (N/S)	N/S with Korean as mother tongue	%	N/S with Chinese as mother tongue	%
Jilin Province	1983	400*	281	70.2	119*	29.8
Liaoning	1980	1338**	1039	77.7	299**	22.3

\* Korean students in primary and secondary schools.

\*\* Korean students in primary schools.

rean language is used as the medium of instruction of all the courses and the Chinese language is just the medium of instruction for the Chinese course. According to a sampling conducted in early 1980s, around 70–80% of the Korean students in primary and secondary schools use Korean as their native language, and 20–30% of the students have begun to shift their native language to Chinese (Table 2).

*Ethnic education and ethnic language legislation*

The ethnic Korean has traditionally put great emphasis on education and has respected the teacher. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), there has been great advancement of culture and education in the Korean community by means of the regional autonomy policies. Furthermore, the Korean language is also maintained and is the language of wider communication in the Korean community. Primary education, back to 1952, was already universal in the three provinces of Northeast China, and junior secondary education has become available to the masses generally after 1958. Higher secondary education has also witnessed considerable development since then. There has been almost zero illiteracy in the young adult population.

Korean has its own written language and the writing system. The schools in the Korean compact communities in Northeast China are solely for the Koreans. These schools put into effect a maintenance program from grade one in primary school to graduation from high school, i.e., the Korean language from grade one in primary school to graduation in high school is used as the medium of instruction for all the courses and the Chinese language is just as the medium of instruction for the Chinese course. In areas where Koreans live scattered or together with other ethnic groups, schools

open specific classes for Korean students. Even with one Korean student, the school authority may put him/her in a single class<sup>11</sup>, where the Korean language is used as the medium of instruction for most subjects. In Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province, the number of Korean students in primary and secondary schools is 133,000, and 93.5% of the primary school students and 86.6% of the secondary school students attend the schools or classes in the Korean language<sup>12</sup>. As regards higher education, all courses in Yanbian University in the Prefecture of Yanbian were instructed in the Korean language before 1958, however a 'Korean-Chinese' bilingual program has been gradually practiced at the university since 1959. In order to guarantee the implementation of the bilingual program in Korean schools, the education and ethnic affairs authorities in the three provinces in Northeast China issued many documents, stipulating that the 'bilingual program' be carried out in the Korean communities by way of adoption of separate Korean schools or Korean classes<sup>11</sup>.

*The Regulations of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture* being promulgated in October 1985 stipulate the following:

*Spoken Korean, written Korean, spoken Chinese and written Chinese may be used as working languages of government organs in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, with stress on spoken Korean and written Korean.*

*The Ordinances on the Korean Language Work in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture*, being approved on July 21, 1988 at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee of the 7<sup>th</sup> People's Congress of Jilin Province, point out the following:

*The government organs of the Autonomous Prefecture shall put emphasis on*

*native language education of Korean children. The Korean language should be used as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools in the Prefecture. Both Korean and Chinese languages should be used in language teaching, with stress on the former, so that students can have good command of Korean and Chinese languages<sup>13</sup>.*

*Educational quality of the population*

In addition to a high value of education and a comprehensive Korean-teaching system, an ethnic Korean, among other ethnic groups in China, has the highest rate of literacy, and highest level of public education. The educational quality of the Koreans in China has always been on top of the list (Table 3).

With respect to the educational quality of the population, as Table 3 shows, there is a wide gap between Koreans and other ethnic minorities and all the ethnic groups in China. The number of Koreans having obtained a college degree (one out of 1000), according to the census of 1982, was over twice as high as that of the national average and 5 times as high as that of other ethnic minorities; and the Korean population with senior and junior high degrees (one out of 1000) was 1.7

and 0.7 times respectively as high as those of the national averages, and 3 and 1.5 times respectively as high as those of other ethnic minorities. According to the 1990 census, 822.5 persons out of one thousand Koreans were literate. Out of a thousand Koreans, 43.2 had a university degree, 2.1 times as many as that of the national average and 3.7 times as large as that of other ethnic minorities. Also, 203.3 had a senior high degree, 1.6 and 3.6 times as many as those of the country and other ethnic minorities respectively, and 589.7 had obtained a junior high degree, which means that almost 2/3 of the Korean population have a junior high degree or above.

The Korean illiteracy over the age of 6, according to the 1990 census, came to 8.18% of the Korean population. The illiteracy rate was lower than that (20.6%) of national average, and was much lower than that (29.86%) of other ethnic minorities<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of vocational composition, the proportion of special technical professionals of Koreans in 1990 was 12.15%, and was over twice as high as both that (5.31%) of the national average and that (5.38%) of Han Chinese. The proportion

**TABLE 3**  
THE COMPOSITION AND COMPARISON OF EDUCATION DEGREE BY KOREANS 1982–90  
(ONE OUT OF A THOUSAND PEOPLE) (3<sup>rd</sup> (1982) AND 4<sup>th</sup> (1990) NATIONAL CENSUS)<sup>7</sup>

Ethnicity	Year	Literate population in 1,000	University	Senior secondary school	Junior secondary school	Primary school
Korean	1982	794.8	19.6	183.5	306.9	284.9
	1990	822.5	43.2	209.3	337.2	232.9
Other ethnic minorities	1982	473.4	3.70	45.4	122.3	302.0
	1990	601.0	9.20	58.2	161.1	372.5
All ethnic groups in China (average)	1982	605.3	6.15	67.8	178.9	352.4
	1990	698.1	13.9	79.5	233.0	371.4

**TABLE 4**  
 SURVEY OF LANGUAGE USE BY YOUNG KOREANS IN PANSHI TOWNSHIP, PANSHI COUNTY,  
 AND JILIN PROVINCE (COMPILED ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS BY PIAO)<sup>9</sup>

	Number of samples (N/S)	N/S who understand Korean	%	N/S who do not understand Korean	%
Young people (Aged 18–25)	70	53	75.8	17	24.2
Pupils (Aged 7–12)	426	193	45.5	233	54.5

of rural population of Koreans was 51.65%, and was 18.92% lower than that (70.57%) of the national average.

Comparatively speaking, the fact that the ethnic Koreans have a smaller rural population but a higher percentage of population employed in first and secondary industry as compared to the national average shows not only that the Korean community is more developed, but also that the overall quality of the population is relatively higher. This is a natural result of the development of ethnic education of the Korean community.

Up to now, Koreans who had migrated to Russia, Japan, Mongolia and other countries have all lost their own culture. Only Koreans living in China have managed to maintain their own traditions, language and culture intact. With respect to language maintenance of the ethnic minorities, the Korean community is the most successful one compared to other 50 ethnic minorities in China, and the Korean language is the least affected minority language remaining.

*Problems of Language Maintenance*

Since 1980s, drastic reforms have taken place in China, accompanied by huge social transformations, accelerating urbanization and inflow of rural population into urban areas. Substantial progress has been achieved in various aspects in the Korean community. However, some problems have arisen with regard to the

maintenance of the Korean language, which are as follows:

Shrinking of the Korean-speaking areas

As large numbers of rural Koreans flocked into cities, the population of Korean-speakers is on the decline. According to statistics, there were 390 natural villages in Heilongjiang Province where all villagers were Koreans in 1982. The number shrank to 305 in 1990<sup>14</sup>, decreasing by 22%. Yanbian Prefecture of Jilin Province is the largest area where Koreans live in compact communities. It has a Korean population of 800,000, with an outward population movement of at least 70,000 to 80,000 till 1997<sup>15</sup>, decreasing at a rate of approximately 10%. In the rural areas of Northeast China, the number of those who lacked proficiency in the native language of young Koreans was inversely proportional to age, meaning that the younger the group is, the greater the lack of proficiency in the Korean language in the group. Such a trend unveiled itself already back in the early 1980s, and “will accelerate its pace of development in the future”<sup>16</sup> (Tables 4 and 5).

Due to the differences in the rates of births and deaths as well as migration among different ethnic groups, the Korean population in the Prefecture has been on a gradual decline (Table 5).

According to a sampling study in the early 1990s, the younger the Korean sam-

ples were, their proficiency in the native language tended to decline more (Table 6).

*Korean education in villages and townships*

Due to the waves of a large number of Korean voluntary migrants, Korean language teaching in rural Korean communities is facing unprecedented difficulties, which are as follows.

Due to the fact that the number of Korean primary and secondary students is shrinking increasingly, many schools in the Korean language are forced to either close or merge with one another. The situ-

ation that there is a Korean-speaking primary school in every village and a Korean-speaking secondary school in every town no longer exists. According to statistics, in the largest area where Koreans live in dense communities, i.e. Yanbian Prefecture, there were 19 village secondary schools for Koreans and 33 mixed secondary schools for all ethnic groups, with 8,836 Korean students in 1989, accounting for 21.8% of the total number of students in the prefecture. However, only 6 Korean secondary schools and 19 mixed secondary schools remained in 1995 and the students numbered 2,730, occupying 6.2% of the total, and decreasing by 15%.

The situation with Korean primary schools is even worse. There were 198 Korean primary schools and 147 mixed primary schools in 1989, with 33,460 pupils, covering 42.6% of the total number of primary schools in the prefecture. Nevertheless, the number of Korean primary schools in 1995 dropped from 198 to 77, while that of mixed primary schools from 147 to 100, with 21,778 pupils, amounting to 26% of the total number of pupils, and decreasing by 16.6%.

Since the number of Korean students has been on the decline, the size of village Korean primary schools is also shrinking and the student-to-teacher ratio is highly imbalanced, and the ratio in individual cases even dropped to 3 (students): 1 (teachers). There were, for instance, only 14 primary students from grade one to grade three and 3 teachers remained at a school

**TABLE 5**  
PROPORTION OF KOREANS AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS MAKING UP THE POPULATION OF YANBIAN PREFECTURE (%)<sup>17</sup>

Year	Korean	Other ethnic groups
1949	63.36	36.34
1953	60.95	30.05
1959	56.91	43.09
1969	44.86	55.14
1979	40.69	39.31
1990	40.54	59.46
1993	39.96	60.04
1994	39.67	60.33
1995	39.52	60.48
1996	39.33	60.67
1997	39.18	60.82
1998	38.94	61.06

**TABLE 6**  
SURVEY OF LANGUAGE USE OF KOREANS IN HAILIN TOWNSHIP, HAILIN COUNTY, AND HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE (COMPILED ON THE BASIS OF MATERIALS OF XU)<sup>9</sup>

Age	Number of samples (N/S)	N/S with proficiency in Korean	%	N/S without proficiency in Korean	%
Above 30	219	219	100	0	0
20–29	88	80	90.9	8	9.1
8–19	58	39	67.2	19	32.8

that was already on the verge of shut-down in 1999 in Beidao and Nandao villages of Antu County, Yanbian Prefecture. Comparatively speaking, there used to be the time when 26 teachers taught 300 pupils at school<sup>16</sup>.

In areas where Koreans live together with other ethnic groups such as places in Heilongjiang Province, there used to be 382 Korean primary schools and 77 Korean secondary schools in 1990. The former, however, decreased to 256 in 1997 and the latter to 43, and the rates of decrease were 33% and 44% respectively as compared to the past. Also, at Dongjiangyan Korean Primary School in Wangqingmen Town of Xinbin County of Liaoning Province, the number of pupils was over 180 in 1991 and had dropped to some 70 in 1996<sup>18</sup>.

As large numbers of rural population in the Korean community flow into cities, many teachers in rural Korean schools also join the outflow. By the end of the 1990s, 116 teachers in 20 Korean secondary schools in Heilongjiang Province went abroad and other 145 teachers were in business, and the rate of the brain drain was 15%<sup>19</sup>. With so many teachers (many of whom were the backbone of the schools) leaving Korean schools, the normal teaching was badly affected, and the elementary education in the rural Korean community was further weakened.

Many Koreans migrating from Northeast China to areas south of Shanghai

Pass, where Northeast China and North China meet, take school-age children along; however their children, due to the language barrier, are unable to attend school and to finish their primary education because they come into the Chinese-speaking community where there are no Korean-teaching schools.

Though some of Koreans, before entering Chinese-speaking areas, leave their children to senior members or other relatives of their families in the rural Korean community, many children usually get worse and worse at school, which partly raises illiteracy rate, and cannot be guaranteed against a deprived education since the Korean education in rural areas is itself shrinking. For the rate of illiteracy of the Korean population between the ages of 7 to 14 in the 1990 census (see Table 7).

Table 7 shows that 18.31% of the Korean population aged between 7–14 was illiterate. Although the rate was lower than (26.34%) the average of national ethnic minorities, it was still higher than (17.42%) the average of all ethnicities. Illiteracy of the 7–14 age group of Koreans in Table 7 means there were approximately 40,000 Korean children who were unable to go to school. This was by no means a small figure given the Korean population in China, and was quite a rare phenomenon in the half-century-long history of Koreans in China. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon has exerted a certain

**TABLE 7**  
RATE OF ILLITERACY OF THE KOREAN POPULATION AGED BETWEEN 7 TO 14, 1990<sup>7</sup>

Ethnicity	Total	Male (M)	Female (F)	M/F ratio	M/F ratio in 7–14 age group
Korean	18.3	17.78	18.86	94.27	104.35
All ethnic minorities	26.34	22.20	30.72	72.27	105.46
Han	16.41	15.49	17.39	89.07	107.36
All ethnicities	17.42	16.17	18.75	86.24	107.17



negative impact on the population quality of ethnic Koreans in general.

**Population Movements:  
The Factor with Direct Impact  
on Language Maintenance**

*Concept and scale of population  
movements*

In the Korean-speaking community of China, the terms 'population movements' and 'population migration' are two different concepts, though under the same category of 'population mobility'. The former term indicates that the parties concerned, for the purpose of making a living, move from their original living area to another area and live there on a temporary basis, from several months to several years, provided that the permanent residence remains unchanged in their residence registration. The latter term indicates that the parties concerned migrate from one area to another, and the permanent residence in their original residence registration is relevantly changed into their current residence.

In the case of international experiences, rural-urban migration is not only an indispensable demand but also an attendant phenomenon to urbanization. Since Chinese government adopted the policy of reform and opening-up in the 1980s, there has been a tempestuous tide of non-agriculturalization of agricultural labor in the southeast coastal areas, and yet a great surplus of rural labor in other parts of the country. The number of surplus labor in rural areas in 1998, according to estimation<sup>20</sup>, reached 106.83 million, or 30.2% of the total of 353.68 million rural work forces in China. However the process of non-agriculturalization in many rural areas was so difficult and slow that local surplus labor had to move out for economic opportunities. Statistics<sup>21</sup> show that the number of floating population in China totaled 30 million in 1982, and by

1999, it exceeded 120 million, three fourths of which were those who had moved from rural areas to cities.

During the 1990s, a large part of Korean rural population left their community in northeast China to go down to areas beyond the Shanhai Pass. According to incomplete statistics, between 1990 and 1996, there was an influx of 200,000 rural Koreans, into inland China and coastal areas with stronger economy, making up 10% of the Korean population in China. The percentage of floating population of Koreans was the highest among those of all 56 Chinese ethnicities, and over 3% as large as that (6.8%) of the Han Chinese<sup>22</sup>.

*Factors that influence population  
movements*

Great political changes took place in China from October 1976 to December 1978, and the government adopted the policy of Reform and Opening-up for modernizations, including the measures below.

First, a reform of the system of rural economy was introduced. Productivity in rural areas was largely improved by the abolition of the system of People's Commune, and carrying out the family contracting responsibility system.

Second, a reform of the system of household registration was carried out. With two different census registers instituted for urban and rural population respectively, surplus rural labor could not, under the traditional system of household registration, be transferred to cities for employment until the early 1984, when the central government made a decision that peasants could work and settle in cities by taking grain ration with them there. Afterwards, a major obstacle to free movement of the rural population into cities for work in industry and/or in business was eventually cleared away through further lifting of restrictions on the grain

market, and a gradual elimination of the state monopoly for the marketing of grain.

Third, the system of socialist market economy was established. As the rational flow of labor was officially permitted and the labor market was open in the early 1990s, there was an ever-increasing number of rural moving populations and employment that was then market-oriented. The state policies above have forcefully facilitated population movements.

#### Human geography

As mentioned above, Koreans are not aboriginal in China, but have migrated from the Korean Peninsular over a hundred years ago. Living next to each other, Koreans in China and those on the Korean Peninsular have kept close cultural contacts. According to the 1990 statistics, among the total of 233,204 families in Yanbian Prefecture, 49,397 had relatives in North Korea, 21.2% of the total, and 3,799 in South Korea, 1.6% of the total<sup>23</sup>. Of nearly 500,000 Koreans in Heilongjiang Province, 70% had relatives in South Korea<sup>22</sup>.

Because of closeness in kinship, physical distance and language, the Korean ethnic group in China was the first to pass in and out of North Korea in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to have small commodity trading there. After China and Russia resumed normal relations in 1989, the Koreans in China, living close to Russia and in kinship with Koreans in the far-eastern part of Russia, began to pass in and out of Russia, and get involved in trade and economic activities with the Russian side. Statistics have it that between 1991 and 1994, there were nearly 30,000 person/time visits from Yanbian Prefecture to Russia<sup>24</sup>.

The migrant population of Koreans in Beijing numbers about 50,000, and their relatives and friends have an important bearing on the population movement of Koreans into cities for employment. In a

survey of the migrant population of Koreans in Beijing<sup>25</sup>, samples being introduced into major cities for work by their relatives and friends amount to 68.97% of the total. 'One of the reasons why some surplus labor of ethnic minority still remain in rural areas,' Zhang demonstrates, 'is the fact that they either have no relatives or friends in cities, or the relatives and friends do not enjoy a high status or great popularity, and thus find it hard to get them a job'<sup>25</sup>.

#### Sino-South Korea relations

With the end of the Cold War, the long-lasting cold relations between China and South Korea began to warm up. The economy of South Korea has been among the northeast Asian tops since the 1970s, and rapid economic growth in China appeared in the 1980s, particularly in the 1990s. Since China and South Korea finally established diplomatic relations in August 1992, the trade and economic relations between the two sides has been developing at a soaring speed, and the two countries have become close trade partners. According to statistics, South Korea had 50 investment programs in China with a total value of 65 million RMB in 1990; and the number of investment programs has increased, by June 1994, to 1539 with a total value of 1.36 billion U.S. dollars. By the end of 1993, China has become the largest receiver of foreign investment from South Korea<sup>26</sup>. Some Koreans in China, worked with companies solely funded by South Korean investors or with Sino-South Korean joint ventures at home, and others worked in trade, traveling and other industries, either as agents for the South Korean side or business partners. The South Korean invested corporations are comparatively centralized in the areas of Beijing, Tianjin and Tangshan and the Peninsulas of Liaoning and Shandong. According to reports, in 1995 the migrant population of

Koreans reached 45,000 in number<sup>27</sup>, and there were also tens of thousands of them in Shandong Province.

With regard to Koreans from China going abroad for work and business, there was a considerable number, for instance, 120,000 of them working in South Korea, with an annual average of 20,000 persons<sup>27</sup>, (80,000 from Heilongjiang Province) going abroad for labor services and other business in 1997 exceeded almost 18% of the Korean population in the province. Over 40,000 of them went to South Korea<sup>23</sup> and 5,265 of them left Yanbian Prefecture by the early 1997.

**Negative Growth of Population: Another Factor with Impact on Language Maintenance**

In Jinlin Province, Yanbian Prefecture is the largest area where Koreans live in compact communities, and the only Korean autonomous prefecture in China as well. Jilin is the largest Korean populated province in China, and the Korean population in Jinlin

The Province, according to the fourth census in 1990, accounted for 61.54% of the Korean population in the country. The average of population growth rate of Koreans in Yanbian Prefecture is lower

than that of the whole country, and of the whole province, and of the whole prefecture. Moreover, the Korean population in this prefecture has experienced negative growth since 1996 (Table 8).

Below are the main causes of the negative growth of Korean population in Yanbian Prefecture:

*Education degree of women at childbearing age and birth rate*

According to the 1990 census, the illiteracy rate of the Korean population aged above 6 years of age was 8.18%, the average illiteracy rate of the whole nation was 20.6%, and the illiteracy rate of all ethnic minorities was 29.86%. The illiteracy rate of Korean women aged between 20 and 29, the peak years for childbearing, was 6%, and the illiteracy rate of Korean women at childbearing age was only 7.65%. This was the intrinsic factor in the birth-rate of the Korean population being lower than that of other ethnic minorities<sup>7</sup>.

*Death rate of the aged*

The death rate of Koreans aged above 60 was 79.95% and was above the average death rate (74.74%) of the whole nation, and above that (73.18%) of the Han Chinese, and above that (57.09%) of all ethnic minorities<sup>17</sup>.

**TABLE 8**  
COMPARISON OF POPULATION GROWTH RATES 1990–98<sup>18</sup>

Year	Nationwide	Jilin Province	Yanbian Prefecture	Koreans in Yanbian Prefecture
1990	14.39	12.51	10.0	7.09
1991	12.98	7.07	6.5	4.12
1992	11.60	6.52	5.4	3.73
1993	11.45	7.84	4.8	1.52
1994	11.21	6.87	3.7	0.74
1995	10.55	7.19	3.7	0.03
1996	10.42	6.58	1.9	-1.07
1997	10.00	1.7	-	-1.09
1998	9.53	3.44	0.99	-1.32

*Uneven Ratio of Male and Female Population – A Covert Factor with Impact on Language Maintenance*

In the moving population of Koreans in China, unmarried young females and the females married to South Koreans make up a considerable part. According to statistics, Korean women aged between 20 and 30 in China number approximately 200,000, in which 70,000 to 80,000 persons have migrated to Chinese communities in inland China, and over 20,000 have married abroad, and over 30,000 left the country through procedures for going abroad<sup>16</sup>. In Yanbian Prefecture, Jilin Province, the number of young Korean females married to South Koreans was 1463 in 1993, 1000 in 1994, and 2467 in 1996, with an annual average of about 2000<sup>28</sup>.

Such a situation has led to an uneven ratio of male and female population in rural Korean communities in China. For example, in a township where the Koreans live in compact communities in Longjing city, Yanbian Prefecture, the ratio between Korean males and females at marriageable age was 22:1, while it was 57:1 in Bijin township<sup>18</sup>. As a result of this, in the rural areas where the Koreans live, there are hardly any unmarried young females. If things go on like this, about half of the local unmarried young Korean males will fail to get a spouse in their own ethnic group, so they will either marry young females of other ethnic groups, or simply stay unmarried. In either case, the language maintenance of Korean will be under an increasingly negative impact in several years.

**Conclusion**

In the time of planned economy, the maintenance of the Korean-speaking community in China used to be considered a model by other ethnic minorities, much more by ethnic language planners

in South China. They believed that if other ethnic speech communities, like the Korean speech community, could establish their own bilingual education system guaranteed by local ordinances regarding ethnic language working, then their languages would undoubtedly be maintained longer and more stable. Nevertheless, since the start of the economic reform and the transfer from the planned economy into the socialist market economy, the living conditions among Koreans, along with those of other ethnic minorities, have been greatly improved while the language maintenance and bilingual education of the Korean community has been adversely affected.

The fact is that language attrition arising in the part of the Korean-speaking community tends to be attributed to several social factors playing a role in common. Among them, the most direct and essential factor is population movement. Generally speaking, a nation, in the course of achieving modernization, industrialization and urbanization, is bound to take place in rural-urban population moves. China in this respect is no exception. The question is, however, why it is in the Korean-speaking community that such large-scale and spontaneous population movement takes place, and why the percentage of migrating population in the Korean population is among the highest of some other 50 ethnicities in the country. There are at least two important reasons accounting for this: first, Koreans live across the borderline between China and both North and South Korea. There is no language barrier across the borders; second, South Korea having a rather developed economy and its enterprises in China, has a large demand for labor with Korean-Chinese bilinguals as the economic and trade ties strengthen rapidly after the two countries had established diplomatic relations. The flowing population of Korean in China cannot

only migrate to cities of the Hans, but also to North and South Korea as well as to Korean-invested companies in China.

The negative growth of the Korean population is another factor that gives rise to language attrition in the part of Korean-speaking community.

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## **POPULACIJSKO KRETANJE I OČUVANJE JEZIKA KOREJSKE JEZIČNE ZAJEDNICE U KINI**

### **S A Ž E T A K**

Što se očuvanja jezika tiče, između preko pedeset etničkih i jezičnih zajednica u Kini jedna od najuspješnijih je korejska koja broji više od dva milijuna govornika, ima pravilnik o upotrebi etničkog jezika te dvojezični obrazovni sustav usredotočen na očuvanje korejskog jezika. Usprkos tome njegova upotreba se smanjuje zbog preseljenja korejskih govornika iz korejske ruralne u kinesku gradsku sredinu tijekom posljednjih dvadeset godina. Cilj je ovog članka iz urbano-antropološke i sociolingvističke perspektive analizirati uzroke populacijskih kretanja i urbanizacijskih procesa korejske zajednice kao i posljedice tih promjena na očuvanje jezika i dvojezično obrazovanje u korejskoj zajednici. Članak je podijeljen u pet dijelova: (1) opis korejske jezične zajednice; (2) problem očuvanja jezika, (3) posljedice preseljenja korejskog stanovništva; (4) posljedice negativnog populacijskog prirasta; i (5) posljedice neravnomjernog udjela muške i ženske populacije.