



■ Article ■

## Arriving with Machines, Skills, and Transnational Networks: Korean Immigrants' Involvement in the Garment Industry in Latin America

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### Abstract

This article examines the migration and economic adjustment processes of Korean immigrants, concentrating on their involvement in the garment industry in Korea and Latin American countries. Koreans, who were originally sent as agricultural immigrants to Latin American countries in the 1960s, unexpectedly carved out a niche in the garment industry. This garment-related entrepreneurial opportunity became one of the precipitating factors for the later Korean influx into South America. Simultaneously, access to the U.S. clothing market led Koreans engaged in the garment business in Korea to Central American countries. This article focuses on Korean immigrants in Latin America who arrived already having clothing-related skills and experience in Korea. It examines how these Koreans' previous occupational experience in Korea influenced both initial immigration decisions and choice of destination and whether and how patterns of economic adjustment differed from those of Koreans who came to Latin America without relevant experience or skills. Korean immigrants with prior clothing-related skills and experiences have contributed to the further development of Korean-owned garment businesses in Latin American countries. In terms of global Korean diasporic formations, the garment business has played a unique role in the growth and expansion of Korean immigrant communities across the Americas.

■ **Keywords** : Korean Diaspora, Migration, Latin America, Garment Industry, Economic Adjustment

### Introduction

Entrepreneurial business activities are one of the most common facilitators of immigrant economic incorporation. The garment business, in

particular, has been predominant among entrepreneurs of diverse ethnic backgrounds in the Americas (Waldinger, 1986). This pattern holds true for South Korean immigrants, who are highly concentrated in the garment industry both in the United States and Latin America (Kim & Chang, 2009; Min, 1996; Park, 1999; Shin, 2009). This study focuses on the disproportionate number of Korean immigrants engaged in the garment industry in Latin America. Records show that nearly 90% of Korean immigrants in Argentina and about 80% in Brazil work in the textile and garment industries (Shin, 2009). Koreans in Latin America are heavily concentrated in urban areas, and have achieved relatively rapid economic integration through the textile and garment industries (Park, 1999; Joo, 2007). For instance, Koreans in Brazil began to manufacture women's clothing in 1968, and Korean immigrants in São Paulo alone own more than 2,500 small and medium size clothing firms that employ approximately 70,000 people (Guimaraes, 2006).

Regarding the growth of Korean immigrant entrepreneurship in the U.S., three interrelated factors stand out: employment opportunities in the general labor market, resource mobilization, and business opportunity structures (Yoon, 1995). Moon and Jang (2014) contend that the success and concentration of Korean-owned garment businesses in Latin America is attributable to the low-entry and labor-intensive nature of the business. Moreover, by utilizing family and co-ethnic labor, Koreans in Latin America have found the garment business an accessible sector compared to others in the mainstream labor market. Immigrants originating from a diverse range of professions in Korea came to experience a certain level of occupational homogenization in Latin America, regardless of their previous educational or professional credentials. This study analyzes interview data from 102 Korean immigrants to Latin America who have relocated to the U.S.<sup>1)</sup> Of the respondents who migrated to Latin America as working-age adults,<sup>2)</sup> 34.6% were college graduates, 36.7% held white-collar jobs or were professionals, and 30.6% were engaged in small businesses in Korea. In Latin America, by contrast, Korean immigrants were absorbed into the small business sector—mostly the garment in-

dustry—due in part to language barriers and their inability to use their Korean education. For example, 72 out of 98 households<sup>3)</sup> in this study have at least one family member who worked in the clothing business in Latin America.

Previous literature has addressed Korean immigrants' obvious presence and phenomenal success in the Latin American garment industry, with some examining continuous Korean migration across neighboring countries in South America in pursuit of better business opportunities (Park, 2014a). Other studies have explored the relationships between Koreans and other ethnic groups, such as Bolivians and Jews, in the garment business (Buechler, 2004; Park, 2014b). However, the existing literature has largely overlooked how heterogeneities among Korean immigrants, in terms of their experiences prior to coming to Latin America, have affected processes of integration. With respect to differences in human capital, part of the Korean diasporic influx into Latin American countries included some possessing previous clothing-related skills and experience gained in Korea. Korean immigrants' involvement in the garment business of the Americas has been uniquely associated with the development of the South Korean apparel industry as well as with the specific local conditions of immigrant societies.

Against this backdrop, the article initially examines how Koreans' involvement in the garment industry, both in Korea and Latin American countries, has impacted their migration and economic adjustment in Latin America, with a focus on those who arrived with previous garment-related skills and experience. It then explains how the historical and local contexts of the garment industries in Korea and the Americas have influenced the life trajectories of Korean immigrants as well as the formation and development of Korean diaspora communities in Latin America. Finally, the article compares Korean immigrants who worked in the South American garment industry to those who worked in the Central American garment industry.

## **Koreans in the South American Garment Industry**

The statistics issued by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that, as of 2015, there were 105,243 Koreans in Latin America. This includes 50,418 Koreans in Brazil, 22,730 in Argentina, 11,484 in Mexico, 5,162 in Guatemala, and 5,090 in Paraguay. Besides the inflow of Korean laborers to Mexico at the turn of the century and North Korean war prisoners in the wake of the Korean War, large-scale Korean migration to Latin America officially began in the 1960s, originally made up of agricultural immigrants (Park, 1999). Under the auspices of the South Korean government, Latin American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay began accepting Korean immigrants in the 1960s in order to resolve agricultural labor shortages. The bulk of early Korean immigrants to Latin America, however, soon withdrew from the farming sector and moved to urban areas (Kim, 1981; Suh, 2002). Their relocation into cities occurred after some found the lands designated to them unsuitable to farming, while others were discouraged when they failed to obtain farming subsidies from the Korean government. Their movements were also related to former socioeconomic backgrounds in Korea; most of them were inexperienced in farming and were middle or upper-middle class professionals (Buechler, 2004; Joo, 2007; Kim, 1981; Mera, 2008). Even those immigrants who at first tried farming realized that it was not a stable or profitable business and was often subject to price fluctuations.

When Korean agricultural immigrants to Latin America were unable to continue their planned economic engagement and obtain a livelihood, they sought alternative opportunities as a survival strategy. After resettlement in urban areas, the Korean immigrant community began engaging in various commercial activities, also developing a niche economy in the clothing sector. At first, Koreans sold clothes they brought from Korea as vendors. Later they participated in sewing and embroidering works for established Jewish businesses (Kim & Chang, 2009; Shin, 2009). Koreans initially participated in the Latin American garment industry by

starting small businesses sewing exclusively for Jewish immigrants. As the scale of the ethnic economy grew, however, they expanded their businesses into all sectors of clothing manufacturing, from clothing design to final product packaging. In addition, some Koreans began to operate retail or wholesale clothing stores. Other Korean immigrants even began engaging in a broader range of clothing-related businesses that dealt with textiles or sewing threads.

### **Immigrating with Machines**

When early Korean immigrants began to carve out a niche market in the garment business, news of their success in Latin America soon spread to their home country. Ms. Hwang, who is in her 60s, followed her husband's family in 1971 to Argentina, when she married at age 21. She recalls that those who intended to immigrate to Latin America were advised to bring Japanese knitting machines with them when they departed for Latin American countries. Ms. Hwang describes,

In the 1960s and the 1970s, there was still significant tension between the two Koreas. Because North Korean agents were thought to approach South Koreans abroad, all potential emigrants were required to receive ideological training from the South Korean government. Those pre-departure education programs also provided us with guidelines for life as a successful immigrant. We were informed of what Koreans did for a living and were advised to purchase knitting machines. We could buy those imported machines either at Dongdaemun Market in Seoul, or get them during the lay-over in Japan.

From the early phase of their immigration history, Korean immigrants in Latin America started to concentrate on the garment industry. Due to the transnational propagation of migration information, even in the pre-emigration stage, some Koreans were already mentally and materially preparing for their prospective involvement in the Latin American garment business. Later immigrants also contributed to the development

of Korean participation in the garment industry, not only by serving as a new labor source and skill base, but also by bringing capital and other material support from Korea to the Korean immigrant community.

After arriving in Latin America, the majority of Korean immigrants without relevant experience acquired the knowledge or skills necessary to work in the clothing business. Mr. Ban, who was born in 1942 and moved to Argentina in 1976, explains,

When I arrived there, there seemed to be only three kinds of jobs popular among Koreans: small grocery markets, shoe repair shops or garment-related jobs. About 90% of Korean immigrants were involved in the clothing business. In order to survive and start anew, with our limited language ability, my wife and I first went to work in other Koreans' home factories and learned to use sewing machines. In two months, we purchased our first sewing machine, and in seven months, we got six.

Lacking significant start-up capital, experience, or language ability, new Korean immigrants could begin their own business in a relatively short period of time. These Korean immigrants readily integrated into the local garment business by capitalizing on preexisting ethnic resources and networks. Network ties are the fundamental source providing immigrants with information and social support (Bates, 1994). They thus passed on basic sewing skills by established co-ethnic members and used their own homes as workspaces.

### **Cross-Country Occupational Continuity**

The majority of Koreans immigrated to Latin America for purely economic reasons.<sup>4)</sup> Only a small number were political or religious immigrants. One contributing factor to the dominance of business-oriented immigration concerns the existence of a booming garment business in Latin America. With the gradual development and prosperity of Korean-owned garment businesses in Latin America, some Korean immigrants in Latin America invited family members or friends who were

involved in similar businesses in Korea. Consequently, garment business opportunities spurred Korean emigration to Latin America, especially for those with related experience and skills in the Korean garment industry (Moon & Jang, 2014). Fourteen out of 98 households surveyed for this article had at least one family member having clothing-related experience in Korea. These included skilled tailors, clothing/textile storeowners, small- to medium-sized garment factory owners, a fashion major student, and employees of large corporations dealing with clothing export businesses. The next part of this article examines how Koreans' previous occupational experiences in Korea influenced initial immigration decisions and choice of destination and whether or how patterns of economic adjustment were different from those of the Koreans who came to Latin America without relevant experiences or skills.

Ms. Ryu, who is in her 60s, was a skilled tailor in Korea and immigrated to Argentina in 1985. She explains the centrality of economic motives and how a sudden instability in her clothing business in Korea led her to depart for Argentina.

In my early 20s, I worked at the shirt-making division affiliated with the Shinsegae Department Store in Seoul. There, I learned basic sewing and other intricate clothing-making skills. Later, I opened my own dressmaker shop, which specialized in women's suits. The business was quite successful for a while; our family could afford a decent life in Korea. Around the 1980s, however, large Korean companies began to launch their own branded clothing businesses, such as Non-no. These brands targeted domestic consumers and produced ready-made, high-quality women's suits. The overall popularity of tailored suits began to decline in Korea. Many of us who were in the same business were concerned, and looked for other options. Then a tailor friend told me about the growing success of Korean immigrants in the Latin American garment industry and suggested that my family join her immigration to Argentina.

Ms. Ryu's movement to Latin America was closely linked to the historical development of the Korean garment industry. Before the Korean

economy shifted its concentration to heavy or technology-focused industrial sectors in the 1980s, the apparel business represented a critical sector in the export-oriented Korean economy (Lee & Song, 1994; Park, 2000). While large Korean corporations concentrated on manufacturing clothing for foreign markets, small-business entrepreneurs or tailors produced clothes for Korean domestic consumption. However, when large companies began encroaching on the domestic clothing market by supplying new ready-made high-quality clothes, and by using their aggressive marketing strategies, the entire small-scale tailoring business in Korea began to decline (Kim, 1999; Lee & Song, 1994). This domestic development in the Korean garment industry led some independent, skilled clothing-makers, including Ms. Ryu, to move to Latin America. They were often well informed while still in Korea about Korean immigrants' participation and success in the Latin American garment industry. The possibility of continued involvement and maximization of their skills in the garment business influenced their decisions to migrate and their choice of destination.

Because of the industrial infrastructure established under Japanese colonial rule, the textile and clothing industries have long flourished in Korea. South Korea has advanced its textile industry, rendering it competitive on an international scale (Kim & Chang, 2009; Shin, 2009). Until the 1980s, Korea was one of the three biggest textile exporting Asian countries to the U.S. In addition, domestically, there were numerous stores situated in large open markets such as Dongdaemun that featured textiles and clothing. Some Koreans moved to Latin America with the goals of profiting from these resources available in the advanced Korean garment industry and continuing their retail businesses in a new country with better business opportunities. Estela, who is in her 40s, went to Paraguay with her family in 1974 at age 9. She explains the reason her mother initiated the family's emigration from Korea:

My mom had a textile store at Dongdaemun Market in Seoul. One of her business associates, who went to Paraguay, told mom about



the popularity of Korean goods in Latin America at the time. One day, my mom sold all we had and bought a huge number of Korean clothes and fashion accessories. She planned to make a profit by selling the Korean products in Latin America. Thus, the whole family immigrated to Paraguay, and the merchandize was shipped separately in advance.

Since these storeowners were often well connected through professional networks, information on business opportunities were rapidly exchanged among them. Those who conducted retail business in Korea often turned into small-scale importers when they immigrated to a foreign country, linking Korean goods to Latin American consumers. The Korean immigrant community in Latin America benefitted from the spill-over effects of a well-developed garment industry in their home country (Shin, 2009). At the same time, Korean immigrants contributed to the Korean economy by stimulating transnational transactions of Korean goods.

Some respondents operated garment factories of various sizes in Korea. For example, Mr. Kang, who was born in 1940, grew up watching his father operate a Seoul-based garment factory, which his family ran since the Japanese colonial period. While in college, Mr. Kang majored in mechanics, and later went to Vietnam during the war as a mechanical technician. Until his immigration to Brazil in 1974, he managed his own medium-sized garment factory. During this period, he accumulated on-site knowledge and managerial skills involving garment manufacturing. Mr. Kang relates how he also became more familiar with Japanese sewing machines before emigrating.

At that time in the 1960s, Japanese machines were widely used in Korean garment factories. When these machines broke, Korean factory owners usually shipped them to Japan to get technical assistance in fixing them. In my factory, we also used Japanese machines to manufacture embroidered women's blouses, which were exported to Japan and other countries. Since I majored in mechanics and did not want to squander my time or money, I tried to fix the Japanese machines myself.

Since his experiences in Vietnam, Mr. Kang always wanted to immigrate to a foreign country. In 1974, the Korean Overseas Development Corporation arranged for him to immigrate to Brazil as a mechanical professional. At first, he secured employment in a Brazilian company that specialized in industrial machines. Despite his own regular daytime job, however, he often stayed up fixing Korean neighbors' sewing machines. He was also occasionally consulted when other Korean immigrants were trying to purchase new sewing machines. Mr. Kang recalls his earlier encounters with Korean immigrants in the Brazilian garment business.

Almost every evening when I returned home from work, I found notes, which requested urgent help with sewing machines left in front of my apartment door. At that time, most Korean immigrants to Brazil never saw or touched sewing machines before leaving Korea. Due to language barriers, plus the lack of knowledge about sewing machines in general, they hesitated to call Brazilian technicians. They were often frustrated that it would take days or even weeks to get machines fixed by Brazilian technicians. To avoid wasting time, they asked for my help. Sewing machines were an essential part of their everyday lives; when they broke, it adversely affected the business owners' livelihoods.

About a year later, in 1975, he resigned from his company and opened his own sewing machine store. He sold sewing machines manufactured both in Korea and in different countries like Japan, Germany, and Italy to Korean immigrants and provided free repair services. In the absence of Korean-speaking technicians, his skills were highly practical and valuable in this formative period for the Korean immigrant community in Brazil.

Later Korean immigrants to Latin America included those who were formally trained in fashion design at Korean colleges. Veronica, who was born in Brazil in 1988, is currently enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, majoring in Fashion Design. Veronica men-

tioned that she was influenced by her mother, who was also formally trained in fashion design in Korea.

After graduating from college with a degree in Fashion Design, my mother immigrated to Brazil. My aunt was operating a garment factory in Brazil and suggested that Brazil would be a good place for my mom's future career. At first, she worked for my aunt for a few years, and later launched her own business in São Paulo. Now, as an established designer with her own label, my mom deals mostly with Brazilian wholesalers and secures relatively stable distributional channels. She usually designs clothes herself, and they are manufactured in the factory that is attached to her office.

By employing professional knowledge and training from Korea, Veronica's mother could achieve business success in Brazil in a more stable and established manner. As also illustrated by Ms. Ryu's experience, Koreans who arrived with a higher level of garment-making expertise often became incorporated into the ready-made clothing business rather than operating their own custom-made clothing shops or securing jobs at mainstream apparel companies. Their decisions were influenced by the prospective customer base and the benefits of utilizing ethnic resources and the niche market already developed by pioneer Korean entrepreneurs in Latin America.

### **Advantages of Previous Experience and Skills**

Korean immigrants who arrived with experience relevant to the clothing business had advantages in the process of economic adjustment. In other words, their previous experience in Korea enabled rapid economic adaptation in the host society. The typical path taken by early Korean immigrants involved in the Latin American garment industry began with sewing work for others. After accumulating capital and knowledge of the overall clothing business, they opened retail or wholesale clothing stores where some also manufactured the clothes. Early Korean immigrants to Latin American countries were initially unable to enter into

the higher stages of the garment business due to capital requirements. Agricultural immigrants had invested a significant sum of capital in purchasing land. With the later influx of more affluent Koreans in the 1980s, however, some Korean immigrants opened clothing stores without having engaged in sewing or making clothes. As a consequence, Koreans with relevant experience or skills could now more rapidly enter the garment industry at any stage. They did not need to work for other Koreans to ensure skill transfers even when deciding to immediately start up businesses in clothing manufacturing. Furthermore, their entrepreneurial skills allowed them to open clothing stores. Immigrants with more advanced skills and expertise could design and produce clothes with more intricate styles. These designs set the trends and yielded more profit per piece of clothing. For example, Ms. Ryu, a former tailor in Korea, recalls the popularity of her three-piece dress, which she designed as a special Christmas outfit.

These Korean immigrants having relevant experience and skills upon arrival made contributions to the economic growth of Korean immigrant communities. For instance, Mr. Kang served as a liaison between manufacturers of foreign sewing machines and Korean immigrants whose livelihoods were dependent on the clothing business. He even tried to make technical innovations by combining Japanese machines with German sewing needles, which he gauged would work best for Korean immigrants. He seemed satisfied with his contributions to the Korean community in Brazil, providing much-needed technical assistance and transferring his machine-related knowledge to other immigrants. With the influx of new groups of Koreans endowed with capital and previous experience, Korean communities have developed and advanced the Latin American garment industry significantly.

### **Koreans in the Central American Garment Industry**

While some former small-business owners in Korea immigrated to South America independently in order to sustain occupational continuity,

others were sent to Central America as employees of large Korean corporations. South and Central American countries have maintained different economic relations with the U.S. They especially fulfill disparate roles in relation to global garment production. These tend to influence both Korean immigrants' demographic characteristics and their subsequent economic adjustment within their respective host countries. Misters Byun and Suh took comparable career paths, which were both influenced by structural changes in the Korean garment industry. They were commissioned to the U.S. in 1982 and Guatemala in 1989, respectively, by their Korean companies, which were involved in the textile and apparel export business. As noted earlier, in the 1970s, with the mobilization of cheap domestic labor, the garment industry was one of the pivotal sectors in Korea's national economy.

As sales representatives in Seoul, both of them dealt with foreign buyers who visited Korea or made numerous business trips to other Asian and Latin American countries or the U.S. From the mid-1980s, however, to avoid domestic wage hikes and export quotas, Korean corporations started to search for alternatives and establish offshore garment plants abroad (Shin, 2009). This development entailed a substantial international outflow of Korean personnel including managerial, technical, and skilled workers (Shin, 2009). Mr. Suh, who is in his 50s, belonged to this stream of corporation-sent Korean emigrants:

At first, I worked in the apparel sales department in Samsung C&T, which is affiliated with the Samsung conglomerate. When labor costs in Korea began to increase, Samsung embarked on establishing offshore garment factories abroad. In 1989, the company set up a garment factory in Guatemala, and I was appointed president there. I was responsible for overseeing manufacturing and exporting clothing to the U.S. It was a good location with proximity to the U.S. market, availability of cheap labor, and the ability to circumvent the quota for clothing items.

In 1992, when his company decided to withdraw from the garment

export business, Mr. Suh chose not to return to Korea. Instead, he became a business owner, running a garment factory of his own in Guatemala. Illsoo Kim (1981) demonstrates that international trade between South Korea and the U.S. provided entry points and channels for Korean migration as well as economic opportunities to Korean Americans involving imports of cheap Korean goods to the U.S. These developments paralleled Korean movements to Central America. Due to the close economic relations between Central American countries and the U.S., access to the U.S. markets contributed to Korean migrations to both the U.S. and Central America. Koreans move between Korea, Central America, and the U.S. in order to gain access to the U.S. markets.

While Mr. Suh was deployed directly to Guatemala from Korea, Mr. Byun was first sent to the U.S., and he later moved to Central America for his own business. Mr. Byun, who is in his 60s, relates a series of transnational movements in relation to his involvement in the garment industry:

The Korea-based apparel trading company, Sungmoon, established its marketing office in New York in 1982, and I was delegated as a director there. At first, I mostly sold Made-in-Korea clothes to American buyers. Yet, soon, my office mainly dealt with clothes supplied by the Korean offshore factories in Central America. Then, in 1984, I decided to launch my own business, so I quit Sungmoon and started my own garment factories in the Dominican Republic in 1984, then moved to Guatemala in 1988. Finally, in 1989, I settled in Honduras and operated a garment factory there for about 20 years.

In both Mr. Byun and Mr. Suh's cases, their initial movements to the Americas resulted from the expansion of Korea-based garment companies abroad. They left Korea not by individual or family choice, but driven by larger bureaucratic forces deploying them to economically strategic points in a global market. They were initially in charge of clothing exports in Korea or the U.S, engaging only in the sales sector of the garment industry. Then, both of them eventually came to focus on cloth-

ing manufacturing and export in Central America. Under the established systems of Korean transnational corporations, they accumulated experience and built networks in the garment industry, which included connections to American markets. Either as an employee or an owner, they were largely engaged in sewing for American companies or manufacturing clothes for American buyers.

In 2004, Mr. Suh sold his factory in Guatemala and relocated to New York with his family because he wanted to provide a better education for his children. Until 2010, he served to arrange subcontracting between American companies in New York and Korean-owned garment factories in Guatemala. On the other hand, when Mr. Byun was operating a garment business in Honduras, his family lived in New York. Mr. Byun's wife raised their children, while he travelled back and forth between Honduras and New York. After he retired from his business in 2008, he was able to permanently reunite with his family in New York.

In sum, Korean immigrants in the Americas have demonstrated diversity in terms of their motivation for immigration and choices. In South American countries like Argentina and Brazil, Korean entrepreneurs manufacture and market clothes for mainly local, national, or regional consumption; or they engage in small-scale, individual-level import and sale of Korean clothes. In Central America, by contrast, some employees of Korea-based corporations or immigrant entrepreneurs run larger-scale garment factories and manufacture for international trade and American consumers. The dependence of the Korean export-economy on the U.S. market initially influenced Korean emigration to Central America and shaped the construction of the Korean community in the region.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article examined the migration and economic adjustment processes of Korean immigrants involved in the garment industry in Korea and Latin America. Koreans, who were originally dispatched as agricultural immigrants to Latin American countries, unexpectedly carved out

a niche in the garment industry. At first, they began participating in the garment business in Latin America by sewing for other ethnic groups or selling clothes as small vendors. As the scale of the ethnic economy grew, they expanded their businesses into all sectors of manufacturing and sales of clothing. This garment-related entrepreneurial opportunity functioned as an important impetus for the later Korean influx into South America. Thus, ethnic resources and networks related to the booming garment industry have significantly contributed to the formation and development of those Korean communities. The later Korean arrivals to Latin America provided a new labor source and capital to the Korean immigrant community; in turn, those without relevant experience acquired the knowledge or skills necessary for the clothing business from other established Koreans.

This article focused on Korean immigrants in Latin America arriving from Korea with previous clothing-related skills and experience. It examined how Koreans' prior occupational experience in Korea influenced both their initial immigration decisions and choice of destination and whether and how patterns of economic adjustment differed from those of the Koreans who came to Latin America without relevant experience or skills. The respondents in this research included those who were previously skilled tailors, clothing store owners, and garment factory owners in Korea. They were often invited by their relatives or business associates who had already immigrated to Latin America searching for economic opportunities that would allow them to utilize their clothing-related knowledge, resources, and networks accumulated in Korea. They could enter any stage of the garment industry more rapidly upon their arrival in the host society.

Korean immigrants' involvement in the garment business in the Americas has been associated with the historical development of the South Korean apparel industry as well as with the specific local conditions of immigrant societies. Some Korean immigrants benefited from and utilized the well-developed Korean garment industry to continue retail businesses in the host society. This is the first study to pinpoint that economic



structural changes in Korea *pushed* some skilled clothing-makers to move to Latin America. With the decrease in their business opportunities in South Korea due to the encroachment of large clothing corporations into the domestic clothing market, tailors migrated to Latin America motivated by the possibility of occupational continuity. It is noteworthy that some of the Korean immigrants who moved to Latin America did so to offset the decreasing business opportunities in their home country as small-scale entrepreneurs. This study also expanded upon previous literature on Korean involvement in the Americas by comparing Korean immigrants engaged in the South American garment industry with those in Central America, an area of comparison that has been understudied. Access to the U.S. clothing market has led Koreans engaged in the Korean garment business to Central American countries. Some Korean employees were deployed to offshore garment plants in Central America established by Korean corporations in order to avoid domestic wage hikes and export quotas beginning in the mid-1980s.

More recent migratory movements of the Korean diaspora have often been associated with developments in both Korea and each receiving country, particularly involving changes in emigration and immigration policies and laws. In addition, Korean emigrants' human capital and networks or socioeconomic backgrounds while in Korea often led them to different destination sites. In the 1970s, a sizable number of Korean nurses and miners were recruited by mainstream institutions in Germany, and this group laid the foundation for the Korean community in Europe. With respect to global Korean diasporic formations, the garment business has played a unique role in the growth and expansion of Korean immigrant communities across the Americas.

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1) Methodologically, this study utilizes newspapers, census reports, community records, and other secondary sources both in English and Korean. The most significant element of research data, however, was empirically acquired through open-ended, in-depth interviews. The interview data for this research was acquired during the author's field-

work in 2011. This study looks at the life histories of 102 Korean immigrants from Latin America. The research participants were made up of 57 males and 45 females. Their median age was 48.9. There were 13.1% respondents in their twenties; 16.1% in their thirties; 26.2% in their forties; 16.1% in their sixties; and 9% over seventy years old.

- 2) These include 49 respondents who were over 20 years old at the time of their immigration to Latin America.
- 3) Among 102 respondents, four pairs of interviewees were related. Thus, the total number of households interviewed accounts for 98.
- 4) With respect to the factors precipitating the initial movements of Koreans to Latin America, 32 research participants cited economic reasons, 26 family invitations, 16 the influence of friends or acquaintances, and ten political reasons. Five responded that they migrated to Latin America for religious reasons. Each factor is not exclusive to other overlapping factors. Some respondents chose more than one main motive for their initial migration.

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