

Korean Immigration to Paraguay: Looking Forward the Pioneers

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Introduction

Paraguay, located in the center of South America, was one of the first countries that had received immigrants of the Republic of Korea in the 1960s. The legal framework was sustained by the Korean Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas, issued in 1962. The first group of Korean arrived in Asuncion in 1965, and they were 95 people (members of 25 different families). But it was during the 70s in which the Korean immigrants increase (almost 20.000 residents) and the life of Paraguayan was changed. Currently, there is an important Korean community concentrated in Asuncion and other larger cities of Paraguay (Ciudad del Este, Encarnacion, etc.) and the last Census of Korean Association (2005) specifies that there are around 6.000 Koreans living in Paraguay.

This paper examines the role of the first Korean immigrants to Paraguay. There is clear evidence that these pioneers made a

considerable impact to the Paraguayan standard of living. To that purpose, the first section introduces the main thoughts about international migration. In the second part, it is narrated briefly the advent of the first generation of Korean migrants to Paraguay. Next, it is illustrated two main microeconomic impacts that were considered as a structural feature of the Paraguayan in the 70s. Furthermore, in the last section, it advocates three main features of the Korean community.

I. Theoretical Approaches on migration

Before to enter into the theoretical outlook about the phenomenon of migration, it is significant argument that how we could define "immigrants. In general, the international migration process involves the movement of people from one country to another. When the main intention is living, working in another country the people became to be immigrants.

Different approaches analyze the causes and effects of the international migration, in order to identify what are the main reasons or mechanism that raises the migratory flow between two countries, but in this article we just will mention two leading standpoints. One of the schools of thought that made considerable contribution to the explanation is the neoclassic approach. According to this perspective, the migration is a consequence of the wage differences between the different countries, result of geographic differences in the supply and demand of the labor force. Indeed, it is considering migrants just as productivity factor. Under this premise, the migration allows a balance mechanism, adjusting the differences between both countries involved. The decision to migrate is conceived as a result of a rational calculation in which an individual pool the costs and the benefits to be a permanent resident in the place of

origin with the one of being immigrant in another country. One of the classic example of migration, under this perspective is the Harris-Todaro (1970) model of migration is the traditional and more individualized, model of migration, which focus in the rural-urban migration process due to wage differential.

On the other hand, the "new economics of the migration"perspective stands its proposal critiquing the basic assumptions and conclusions of the neoclassic theory, indicating that the wage differentials it is not a necessary condition to address international migration. In agreement with this perspective, the migration decisions are made by families or household and not by individual actors. This implies that the families resort to the migration of its members to reduce their poverty and to improve welfare. With the migration, the families diversify their sources of income. This theory explains that some members of a household might migrate and send back wages (or remittances) and the most illustrative example is the migration of workers and people from less developed countries. Massey et al (1993 and 1994) apply this theory to North America, they found that the new economics theory combined with the neoclassical theory better explained migration, because the origin is the wage differentials, and also it is throughout the remittances that households can improve their welfare.

Besides these two assumptions, alternative theories try to explain the causes of the migration, summarized in two points of view. On the one hand, the demand side indicates that the main causes are the high level of living standard in the receptor countries and the labor demand in the secondary market. Whereas by the supply side it is the pressure population in the countries of origin, the strategies of diversification of the families, the development of networks, the costs of information, etc., the reasons that affect and cause the migration from a country to another one. All these approaches disclose that the migration is the result of the

economic and social development factors. Sriskandarajah (2005) affirm that many people move from poorer to richer and migration can have positive economic impacts on countries of origin, especially if the money that migrants send home (remittances) can contribute significantly to the recipients' welfare as well the receiving country's economic well-being countries. In fact, a strong migratory flow can contribute to a greater development and to the improvement of the economic and social conditions.

Another singular aspect to consider in the migration analysis is the referring to the formation and strengthened of the social capital, based on family link or to the place of origin. Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible (Cohen and Prusak, 2001). This thematic is very important, although there are lacks of literature in this field. Generally speaking, the migratory flows are fortified by networks of social and family relationship among their members.

II. The advent of Korean immigration

Paraguay, located in the center of South America, was one of the first countries that had received immigrants of the Republic of Korea in the 1960s. The Official Diplomatic Relation between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Paraguay was established on June 15th, 1962.¹⁾ The first group of Korean arrived in Asuncion in June 1965; they were 95 people, members of 25 different families. But it was during the 70s in

1) FEALAC (http://fealac.mofat.go.kr/eng/information/bilateral_002.php)

which the Korean people increase (almost 20.000). Currently the Korean community in Paraguay is about 6.000 residents.

Looking at the beginning of the Korean migration, Kwon (1997) stated that the Korean government drew up an ambitious plan to organize massive agricultural movements to Latin American countries giving aid to family-unit emigration to Brazil and Argentina. The Korean government proposal to promote emigration to the Latin America had basic goals such as: an efficient population policy, economic stability, and enhancement of national prestige. Latin America with its vast territory and rich natural resources was attractive to contemporary Koreans, and the region also welcomed more labor force for its agricultural and industrial development (FEALAC).

In Paraguay, the first immigrants (according to the data of the ROK Embassy in Paraguay) were located in several points of countryside, following the same scheme for the Latin-American region. They were located in uncultivated forest land for reclaiming in farm and community settlements. But the farming was a total failure and virtually all migrants deserted the land, and left for the capital and neighboring cities. The beginning for the first generation of Korean immigrants in Paraguay was so stressful, because they were abandoned in a huge land without technical aid and tools to cultivate the land, and all of those were worst because they were living in a foreign country with different culture, food and language. But those forces were not an obstacle for those Korean families. The vision to be a survivor and to be a competitive people, forced them to look for other economic activities that substitute the agricultural one. It was this the way as the first Korean community started to connect with the Paraguayan people, because they moved to Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay and some satellite cities with peculiar commercial activities, which will be described in the following section of this paper. It is noticeable to see the adaptive role of these

pioneers'immigrants facing the new cultural environment with a different custom, and to try to break the language barrier.

III. The microeconomic impact of Korean migrants in Paraguay

It is possible to be emphasized two basic aspects of the impact²⁾ of the first wave of Korean immigration to Paraguay with a deep outcome at socio-economic level in the urban and suburban area. First of them, it is the establishment of a retail sale stores, preferably in clothing items; and the second, is the establishment of systems of sales and schedules offering basic products of daily consumption. The first immigrants gave an innovating seal to the Paraguayan community in the sale or marketing system in the textile and clothing industry based on a "door to door"sale with a scheme of installment payments (weekly or monthly). This availability of good quality of clothing offering by Koreans, at that time, allows certain standardization in the way to dress of the middle-class in Asuncion and other suburban areas. Before the entry of the Koreans in the market, the difference between the way of dressing a person of the Capital of the country and the country- side people was very notorious. With an economy on scale in their sale system, arriving at each family, practically the Korean sales uniformed the dressing way in the 70s and 80s in the Paraguayan urban areas. It is good to mention, that in those years Paraguay was living the "boom" on Itaipu Dam (the largest dam built with Brazil) which allow the purchasing power to get those clothes made by Koreans.

2) Espinola, Zulma (2002 and 2005)

Besides the textile activity of the Koreans, as facilitator of accessible products of good quality and good prices to the Paraguayan market, there was a second influence in the commerce system. Korean people open mini supermarkets in almost each point of Asuncion and other close cities, offering a diversity of products in a continuous time during the day. So, this scheme was one of the first commercial activities that burst the famous "siesta" (relaxing time from 1 to 3 pm) in Paraguay.

Both mentioned impacts and/or legacies in microeconomic field played a fundamental role in the creation of a context that is favorable for the interests of the Paraguayan consumers. Furthermore, we can mention Korean immigrants were a leading channel of supplying better options of consumption for Paraguayan community. In this regard, looking at the microeconomic feature of those two key impacts, we can wrap up that the first Korean immigrants allow a greater access to goods, not just in amount but also in quality, with a direct effect in the welfare of Paraguayan consumers. However, although both types of sales implemented by Koreans have almost disappeared from Paraguayan urban area, the Korean community continues to commercially lead the commerce of clothing and electronic items.

III. Characteristics of the Korean immigration to Paraguay

a) Legal Migration and entrepreneurs

One of the main features of the Korean immigration is its "legal" status with a high level of spirit of entrepreneurship that comes from their culture of discipline. Indeed, that personifies Koreans as a complementary labor force inserted in the Paraguayan economy and not as a substitute factor of the Paraguayan workers. Moreover, they

contributed to generate employment and income for Paraguayan, when they hire Paraguayan as worker of their small businesses in the textile, clothing and footwear sector.

b) Wealth Generator inside the Paraguay territory

Another key feature of the Korean immigrant was their role as active wealth generator inside the Paraguayan economy. Despite the fact that most of the immigrants sent remittances to their home country, the case is different for Koreans in Paraguay. In this case, they were working as business family creating their own income and welfare in Paraguay. A collateral effect of this behavior was the multiplier effect in the labor market hiring Paraguayan young people as their workers).

c) The social capital of Korean community

Great part of the social capital of the Korean community in Paraguay is based on the Christian mission's job. And it is very noticeable to mention that the main nexus between the Korean community and the Paraguayan take place in the religious centers (especially Christian missions). Their role as social capital developer among the Korean residents includes exchange of information, marriage and friendship relations, and social aid, among others. The role of the churches in the process of formation of social capital is not exclusive for the Paraguayan case. Compiling the work of Pyong (1992) for the United States the author adjudged to the churches four fundamental functions, such as: 1) to provide a social scope to the immigrants; 2) to maintain the cultural traditions; 3) to provide social services to the members of the community; 4) to provide a status and social position to the Korean adults. These same four functions are observed in the Christian Korean community in Paraguay, then, from pre-migratory stage to the current

days, they have helped to the social and economic development of the Korean and Paraguayan communities. The different associations and institutions from the Korean community are promoting the reinforcement of the identity of the group, relating to their origins as Koreans.

This process of production and replica of histories and facts strengthens the existence of the solidarity network, and, it is simultaneously the pillar of the "identity" of this population. These mechanisms affirm to the identity of the members of the Korean collectivity through the conservation and reinforcement of their cultural outlines.

Other pillar that make so tied to the Korean collectivity in Paraguay is their native language, that prints the connection of the person to certain behaviors, and by as much they act as a true mark of belongings or not of the group. Usually, "to be Korean: is to speak Korean, to eat Korean food and to behave like Korean" implying this model of the "melting pot" based on their cultural homogenization. The permanence of the native language between the immigrants is been from a communitarian work and the family work as proud Korean families.

There are two main institutions that are working in the community: the Korean Church and the Paraguayan Korean Association (founded by 1967) dedicated to provide insights into the rich cultural heritage of Korea, addressing the needs of those of Korean heritage.

Summary finding

The first basic observation to be made from the sum of this study, and other which use a similar approach, is that migration of a homogenized cultured group, such as the Korean, offers an attractively link between family mobility and the outcomes in the economics sphere

in Paraguay. Nevertheless, we should recognize some of restriction that the first generation of Korean faced in the new land due to the cultural and custom barriers. As mentioned, the preceding paragraphs have investigated the impact of Korean migration, in the first stage, into the Paraguayan society. Drawing on the evidence we can illustrate some conclusions about the impact and we can see that Koreans play a key role during the 70s, mainly in the welfare implications of Paraguayan poor and middle-class families.

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❖ ABSTRACT

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Key Words

international migration, Korean, Paraguay

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