

Contested Identities of Korean-Chinese : Exclusionary Ethnonationalism in Korean Films

Jong-Ku Park (glorifing@khu.ac.kr), Sang-Hyun Chi (hyungeo@khu.ac.kr)

1. INTRODUCTION

There are more than 1.8 million foreign-born residents in Korea. Among them, the biggest group is Korean-Chinese(朝鮮族, Cháoxiǎnzú) who is the descendants of the Korean diaspora to China during the Japanese colonial period or before. As the population of Korean-Chinese grows, we have witnessed the increase of negative images and identities attached to Korean-Chinese. These identities have been represented and reproduced through diverse media, such as film, soap drama, and other printed materials.

Many of Korean-Chinese live in ethnic enclaves, such as *Daelim-dong*, *Garibong-dong*. There have been violent crimes in these enclaves, which were paid much attention in Korean society. In many cases, the media has used provocative and incendiary languages to report the crimes. The media's coverage and attention has made these enclaves as dangerous and uncontrollable places.

To date, there has been significant amount of discussions on discrimination and sense of hatred to Korean-Chinese by Korean academia, which recently, opened a gate to the discussion on exclusionary nationalism in Korean society. This study investigated how the Korean-Chinese were represented in film in order to understand the exclusionary nationalism in media.

R.Q: Do representations of specific ethnic groups in the media have an influence on the perspective and attitude of the ethnic groups?

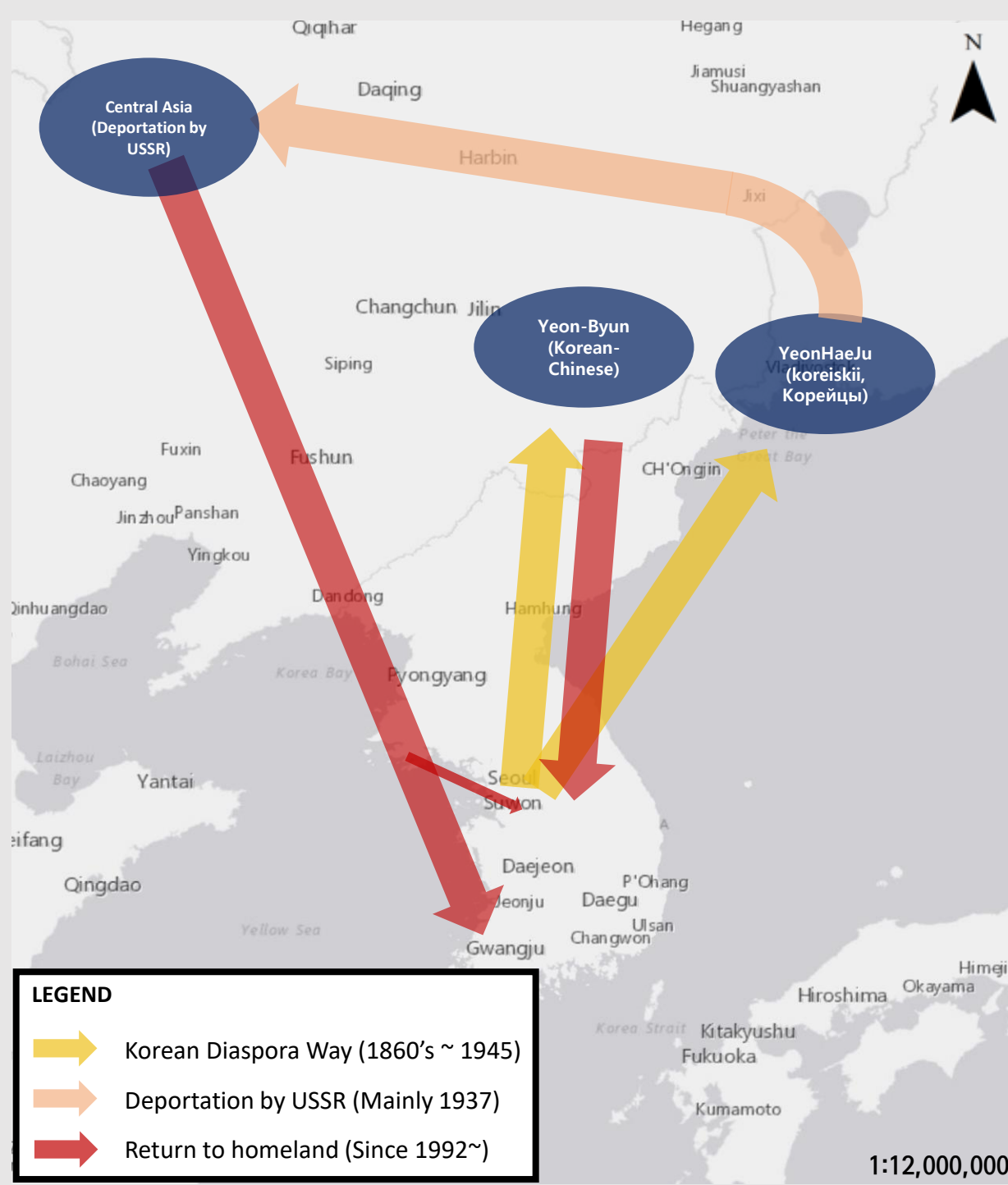
2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study focuses on the fact that specific representations of media can generate, spread, and fortify the specific identities attached to an ethnic group. To date, there are many studies that addressed the association of ethnic identity and media.

Ethnic Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Gellner(2009): Who emphasized that the concept of ‘ethnic’ was fundamentally artificial, defined nationalism as “political principles that believe that political and ethnic units should coincide.”Anderson(1991): Proposed in his book that the scope or size of the 'Ethnic' people could change depending on the situation, arguing that they were imagined to be an imagined political community, limited in nature and sovereign in nature.
Nationailism And Nation-state	<ul style="list-style-type: none">After the Treaty of Westphalia, the idea of "ethnic group is the same as a nation" was emphasized by the concept of 'nation-state'(Popescu, 2011)According to Billig(1995), the identity of a nation was conceptualized as a “form of the life which is daily lived in a world of nation-states”. So the symbols that ‘flag’ the nation on a daily basis no longer register as significant.
Nationalism in Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Billig(1995): In daily life for people who live in a nation-state, the symbol of ‘state’ was replaced by a ‘media’ that frequently exposed to people. And the media’s characteristic is ‘mindlessly remembered’.Skey(2020): compiling Billig's opinion, the ‘Media’ could be used as a means of expressing the state order normally and naturally in daily life.

With regards to the concept of the ‘Ethnic group’ by Gellner and Anderson, there is an much wide spectrum of meanings and definitions in Korean society. According to one of those criteria, Korean can be defined by the two requirements. 1) Sharing historical experience after the Korean War (excluding Korean diaspora before the Korean War from ‘genuine’ Korean).”, “2. Living in South Korea(excluding North Korean from ‘genuine’ Korean).

3. KOREAN DIASPORA



Map of Korean Diaspora

(1) Korean diaspora: History

There are several waves of Korean diasporas. Korean-Chinese have the longest history of crossing border region. Farmers had to sneaked into farm land over the boundary between Chosun Dynasty and Ching Empire. Also the border area became the center of independent movement during the Japanese colonial period. The influx of Korean to this region lead to the designation of ‘Yanbian(*Yeon-Byun*) Korean Autonomous Prefecture’. As the economic growth of Korea, many Korean-Chinese has returned to Korea since 1992 when the diplomatic relations between Korean and China was established. Majority of them came to Korea to have more economic opportunities and other chances, such as better education, and living environment.



(2) Korean-Chinese after return

Korean-Chinese have returned to Korea, finding their own ethnical roots. However, they had hard times to harmonize themselves with the mainstream. Cultural difference and limited economic resources lead to the building of Korean-Chinese enclaves in Seoul. The formation of a Korean-Chinese enclaves in Korea have deepened the cultural gap between Korean-Chinese and the ethnic majority in Korea.


(3) A sense of hatred from cultural gap

Failure to understand each other has highlighted the cultural difference between the two groups. Therefore the Korean society separated Korean-Chinese as ‘different’ from Korean and regarded them as a different group located outside ethnical boundaries. And then, various discourses of hatred, exclusion, and fear about Korean-Chinese have been (re)produced through the media.

4. KOREAN-CHINESE IN GANGSTER FILMS

Contents		
Films	The description of films	Representation of description
 The Yellow Sea (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Korean-Chinese mainly appears in films as underprivileged people with huge debts, loan sharks (gangsters), and contract killers who kill people for money.The illegal way of the main characters entering Korea from <i>Yeon-Byun</i> and the purpose of entering the country is to murder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A group of Korean-Chinese who live in violent, disorderly, and unpleasant environments.Korean-Chinese who came to Korea has an illegal purpose, which can confuse the law and order of Korea.
 Midnight Runners (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Korean-Chinese has been portrayed as gangsters who kidnap, detain, extract their organs and illegally trade.Contrastively, a young Korean guy appears as a righteous solver to solve illegal cases that are the main contents of the film.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The film unfolds the story in a confrontation between a young and good Korean police college student and a group of Korean-Chinese who commit all kinds of illegal activities.Koreans are "heroes" who do the right thing on the good side, and the Korean-Chinese is represented as "villains" who practice evil deeds.

Contents

Films	The description of films	Representation of description
 The Outlaws (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Korean-Chinese who appeared in the film is portrayed as gangsters divided into various groups.They were described as typical of social evils that are common in films of the Noir genre, such as illegal gambling, private loan businesses, and contract murder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">It can be interpreted as giving an inkling that Korean-Chinese is a group that disagrees with each other for a particular benefit or purpose.In the process of overpowering the illegal activities of Korean-Chinese gangsters, excessive suppression by the Korean police is also coming out. But, that representation was a way to justify excessive violence and to place the laughing point of the film.



Description of illegal gambling



Description of loan sharks



Description of Korean-Chinese gang

After these films, There are appearing in earnest that negatively represented the Korean-Chinese. That is changed Korean-Chinese's identity and image to negative that hatred, exclusive and fear. And this identity change process can be explained: "Korean-Chinese's identity contest is due to film's nationalistic representation".

5. CONCLUSION

Oftentimes Korean-Chinese were excluded from the category of Korean. In this process of distinction and exclusion, the identities of the Korean-Chinese have been contested. The result of the contestation often ended up with negative representation of Korean-Chinese especially in media.

By analyzing three films, this study shows that the representation of ethnic minority based on exclusive nationalism in the media is associated to the spread of negative discourses targeted to specific ethnic groups.

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