

***Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics*  
by A. Y. Chung. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2007. 322 pages.**

**Book Review by:  
Akarath Soukhaphon  
Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

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Recent immigration reform stemming from the event of September 11 has only served to exacerbate the current racial politics of the United States. As with other immigrant groups Korean and Korean-Americans have continually re-conceptualized notions of ethnicity and community while trying to navigate the socio-political spaces of American society in search of a unified political agenda. Chung challenges the long upheld view of assimilation theorists that “residential mobility, acculturation, and racial intermixing will inevitable dissolve mutual interests and those relationships created within the ethnic enclave” (p. 11).

Paying attention to “geoethnic organizations,” a term used to describe organizations located within ethnically concentrated areas that serve local communities and act as bridging organizations to outside mainstream funding agencies and political outlets, she intends to portray these new community-based organizations (cbos) as the future of models of ethnic incorporation into mainstream American political culture. In *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics*, Chung reveals the dynamics and changes of a diverse Korean and Korean-American community characterized by intergenerational, inter and intra organizational, and engendered conflicts and cooperation.

The book is broken into two parts. The first describes the context in which 1.5/second generation Korean-American organizations have had and continue to reconstruct ethnic political solidarity. Looking at the changing demographic of Korean-

Americans, Chung traces the origins of Korea Town as an ethnic enclave and the institutional organizing of the first generation Korean ethnic elite. It is from such a context from which 1.5/second generation Korean-American organizations have had to forge new political agendas.

The second part of the book focuses on two particular “geoethnic organizations” or bridging organizations, the Korean Youth and Community Center (KYCC) and the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA). These 1.5/second generation organizations “have been able to reconcile some of the inherent contradictions of ethnicity in this type of context by constructing distinct specialized frameworks of ethnic political solidarity based on different relationships with the ethnic elite” (p. 24).

Beginning with the discriminatory immigration history of the United States, Chung places Korean immigration within the context of the larger Asian immigrant experience – from limited access to resources in the spatial clustering of residents and mutual aid associations. Pointing to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act as the key piece of legislation that allowed for much more socio-economic diverse immigrants into the United States, questions of how to unite such a community of diverse backgrounds and interests characterizes the difficulties of ethnic community organizations everywhere.

The homogenous nature of earlier immigrants made such unifying efforts much easier than is, in creating ethnic solidarity, acquiring and utilizing human and monetary resources, and stabilizing hegemonic institutions. Three distinct institutions mark the Korean immigrant leadership – immigrant organizations, the church and the ethnic entrepreneurial elite. Such institutions draw on the hierarchical nature of Confucian culture and Korean society in general. “...it is also not surprising that top organizational positions were almost exclusively reserved for older, immigrant men well endowed with money and prestige” (p. 59).

The first part of the book also sets the stage for major changes within the organizational leadership of the Korean-American community from first generation immigrant leadership to the 1.5/second generation leadership comprised predominantly

of younger English-speaking, ethnically diverse coalitions. The 1992 Los Angeles riots or civil unrest, depending on one's sources, served as a wake-up call for the Korean community; especially when the first generation immigrant leadership was discovered to be ill-equipped to represent and publicize the grievances of the Korean community to the outside world (p. 106).

Much equipped and willing to reach out to both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic organizations and funding agencies were the bridging organizations such as the KYCC and the KIWA. Organizations such as these bring in financial support and human resources from mainstream entities as well as well-intentioned second generation Korean-Americans that have chosen places of residency outside of confines of Korea Town and yet choose to return to assist the Korean community.

The second part of the book focuses primarily on the 1.5/second generation workers. Chung asks the question of why these socioeconomically mobile individuals return to the ethnic enclave. The book offers many interview responses from these workers expressing a wide range of reasons for working for bridging organizations like the KYCC and KIWA. Most interesting is the discussion of place and community.

Chung explains that "...bridging organizations create an alternative type of community for their members by providing a 'place' where they can pursue their individual goals, embrace their dual identities as Korean-Americans, and connect with other like-minded staff members," (p. 166). The 1.5/second generation leadership, like the immigrant leadership before them and co-existing with them, have reconstructed what it means to be Korean and what community means.

Also, competition for resources and political agendas are often points of contention. In fact, conflict often arises not only between generations, but also within generational leadership. However, it is clear in Chung's research that such contentions have led to new ideas and varying degrees of cooperation.

The book offers several examples of how bridging organizations such as the KYCC and KIWA have taken different approaches to political action. For example, the KYCC utilizes mainstream channels of negotiation to push for political change, whereas KIWA

roots itself in social justice politics and relies on coalitions with other smaller leftist organizations. Although both bridging organizations “stand out in terms of their greater inclusion of non-Korean-Americans at all levels of membership” (p. 227), “unlike the KYCC, KIWA has shown a greater willingness to step up to the immigrant elite leadership when it is unwilling to concede to the larger issue of social justice” (p. 216). Such differences reflect the varied dynamics of conflict and cooperation even among 1.5/second generation leadership.

*Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean-American Politics* is an invaluable resource for scholars of disciplines both inside and outside of sociology. Its in-depth look at the changing dynamics of Korean-American political incorporation informs not only one aspect of Asian American politics, but also that of all immigrant politics. Chung calls attention to the racialized paradigms that currently exist in American political culture and media.

Such attention serves to expel notions of Asian Americans as not only homogenous anomalies of American society, but rather as heterogeneous ethnic groups within a larger construction of a politically racialized stratification created and reinforced by the dominant White society (p. 290). Clearly, Chung has presented Korean-American organizations within Korea Town as being instrumental in forming new constructions of Korean identity, place, and community. With new ways of envisioning ethnic incorporation, future research might be more apt to consider various frameworks of migrant adaptation and political involvement.