

*Palate and Place: Food, Third Spaces, and Identity Among First- and  
Second-Generation Koreans in Montgomery County, Maryland*

A thesis submitted by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how first- and second-generation Koreans in Montgomery County, Maryland understand and perform ethnic community through food and third spaces. It pays particular attention to potential differences in how immigrant generations experience culturally coded phenomena compared to American-born generations through semi-structured interviews with current and former members of Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church in Olney, Maryland. Key findings focused on three main themes: (i) the nexus between food, memory and personal palates; (ii) the intrinsic entanglement of faith and ethnicity for immigrant churches; (iii) the spatialization of ethnic identity across generations. In my conclusion I outline key points and delve into the policy implications, examining how food, third spaces, and intergenerational relationships can inform policies and planning for the improvement of diasporic communities. While many recommendations are directly linked to the findings, they also offer insights that can benefit a wider audience.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *Introduction*

This thesis delves into the dynamics of ethnic community among first- and second-generation Koreans in Montgomery County, Maryland, focusing on their engagement with food and third spaces. It examines potential variations in the experiences of immigrant generations in contrast to those of American-born generations when interacting with culturally significant aspects. To understand this topic, I conducted a case study of Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church (SAK) in Olney, Maryland. Established in 1974 and relocated several times, the church, dedicated to St. Andrew Kim Dae-Geon (김대건), the first Korean priest and martyr, has been a spiritual and social hub for the Korean Catholic community in the Greater Washington area for 30 years. This site serves as a communal space where Korean individuals from different generations and diverse backgrounds converge, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the Korean community.

The core of my research involved conducting semi-structured interviews and conversations with members of the church— focusing on first-generation Korean elders and younger, second-generation Korean Americans to conduct an analysis of the ways Koreans in Montgomery County understand culture and community across generations. The guiding research questions are:

1. How are first- and second-generation Koreans understanding ethnic identity and culture through third spaces and through food cultivation, consumption, and preparation in Montgomery County, Maryland?
2. How are first- and second- generation Koreans practicing and performing culture within these spaces?

These questions are meant to examine how food and third spaces shape community bonds and connections to the homeland for first-generation Korean elders, as well as their role in shaping cultural heritage for second-generation Korean Americans. Insights on the cultivation, consumption, and preparation of food, as well as activities at church explore what it means to practice culture for both generations. Meanwhile, performing culture involves expressing and embodying their ethnic identity within these spaces through interactions and presentations. In this chapter, I address the research questions with a literature review, examining texts that touch on related subjects like food, memory, identity, faith, social interaction, and communal spaces. The goal of this analysis is to highlight the interconnections between the literature, my research, and the broader conversation on diasporic communities.

Chapter 2 provides historical background and context for selecting Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church as the focus of my case study. It delves into the history of SAK and the broader historical context of Koreans in Montgomery County, Maryland, laying the groundwork for understanding the research focus. SAK serves as a communal space where Korean individuals from different generations and diverse backgrounds converge, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the Korean community. Examining this site reveals evolving cultural dynamics regarding food within multigenerational households and the ethnic community, offering insights into how community is spatialized across generations.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I share key findings from my analysis of interviews conducted with first-generation immigrant Korean elders and second-generation Korean Americans. Chapter 3, based on interviews with first-generation Korean elders, is divided into three main sections: the transfer of palate across generations, the intersection of faith and ethnicity in community development, and the changing spatial dynamics of community over time. The final section is

further divided into two subsections, examining the importance of gardening and food cultivation, as well as the adaptation of space and location to accommodate aging. Chapter 4, drawing on interviews with second-generation Korean Americans, explores three key themes: the replication of food to evoke memories of home, the church as a space for multicultural identity formation, and the central role of grandparents in shaping cultural identity.

The concluding chapter of this thesis summarizes key findings and takeaways from my interviews and analyses, referring back to my research questions to summarize my research. Exploring how ethnic culture is imagined and practiced across generations has the potential to broaden academic and policy practitioner understandings of ethnic identity, fostering inclusive spaces for intergenerational belonging within diasporic communities.

### ***Statement of Positionality***

Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) describes feminist research as being “committed to getting at the subjugated knowledge that often lies hidden from mainstream knowledge building” (147). To do so, as a researcher I had to be intentional about stepping back and participating in active self-reflection. This included reflecting on my positionality and understanding how both similarities and differences between myself and my interlocutors could influence my research. Steps taken to mitigate interview bias involves ongoing reflexivity and actively searching for “negative cases” that challenge any pre-existing expectations (Hesse-Biber 2007).

In providing context for my involvement in this research, I recognize my perspective both as part of the focused population (growing up in Montgomery County, Maryland, as a second-generation Korean American) and as a former member of the Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church parish. I also acknowledge having pre-existing relationships and connections

with individuals I interviewed, which shaped my research, bringing both advantages and potential challenges. My insider perspective allowed for cultural sensitivity and a valuable community network, allowing for open conversation with my participants with the assumption that my background would lend itself to deeper understanding. However, the risk of bias or pre-existing relationships influencing interviews or analysis is always a potential drawback and must be combated.

These participants presumed a shared cultural understanding with me regarding Korean, second-generation Korean American, and Korean Catholic culture and identity. They rarely explained terms or practices, readily using Korean language into their speech, acknowledging my upbringing's influence on my familiarity with both Catholicism and cultural nuances. Many of the personal memories shared with me through these interviews about familial traditions and church experiences mirrored my own upbringing. This project serves to tell the simultaneously personal and shared experiences of my participants and the members of the greater diasporic community. I sought to acknowledge my personal connection to this project, while also stepping to the side to allow the voices of my interlocutors to come to the forefront and add to the growing conversation.

It is essential to highlight my mother's significant role as both interpreter and translator throughout the study and her identity as a first-generation Korean immigrant, contributing her linguistic expertise and cultural understanding. Her participation ensures a nuanced interpretation of participants' narratives, providing an accurate representation of the Korean community's experiences in Montgomery County. It is also worth noting that my grandmother played a dual role in this research as both a collaborator and a key informant. Her firsthand experience as a first-generation Korean immigrant and her involvement in the Korean Catholic community

provided valuable insights as I worked through the analysis. Additionally, her participation as an interviewee offered a unique perspective. As the sole elder interviewee without ties to the church community garden or residency at the church-affiliated retirement apartment complex, her input contributed to added nuance and depth of understanding of the elders' experiences.

Despite the familial connection, steps were taken to maintain objectivity and mitigate bias, ensuring the integrity of the research outcomes. I ensured objectivity in my research by subjecting my findings to peer review from diverse individuals, both Korean and non-Korean, and maintaining transparency about methodologies and potential conflicts of interest. Continuously reflecting on personal biases, I stayed receptive to revisiting and revising interpretations during my analysis when presented with evidence conflicting with my own experiences or preconceived notions.

### ***Methodology***

Employing qualitative methods, my research aimed to understand and interpret the social and cultural dynamics of a specific community through active engagement with interview participants. The interviews were semi-structured, providing flexibility to adapt to each participant, fostering open communication, and allowing for depth and control by the interlocutors (Hesse-Biber 2007). The semi-structured interview method involved using an interview guide with specific questions or language to address my research questions. The interview questions explored themes such as food, religion, culture, community, and family narratives.

I used a respondent-driven sampling method where participants were recruited through existing networks, followed by snowball sampling to recruit further participants. I contacted the

church administrative office for the latest parish directory. This provided an efficient way to reach elder parishioners who primarily communicate through phone calls. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and supplemented with written notes from the sessions. I identified initial interviewees based on my existing relationships and knowledge of individuals currently or previously associated with Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church.

I conducted 8 interviews with current or former members of Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church. Of these interlocutors 4 were elder first-generation immigrant individuals and 4 were younger second-generation Korean Americans whose ages spanned from mid-20s to late 30s. In choosing an interview sample of 8 participants, the focus is on the specificity and uniqueness of the population. The group comprises individuals with specialized knowledge, being a part of families with multigenerational ties to the church, prioritizing depth over breadth. Interviews were conducted in English and/or Korean, depending on participants' comfort and preference, with an interpreter present for Korean interviews.

The interviews were conducted during the holiday season, providing an opportunity for participants to engage more openly and extensively, given the relaxed atmosphere and increased family time, potentially enhancing the depth and richness of their contributions. These interviews lasted around thirty minutes to an hour and provided insight into how Koreans understand culture. I relied on my interview guide for interview questions, but not all questions included in the guide were necessarily asked to allow for a more conversational flow and flexibility during the interview process.

## *Analysis*

In analyzing interviews, I combined elements of narrative analysis and grounded theory. Employing narrative analysis, I delved into the structure and content of individual stories, examining how interlocutors construct meaning with food and space within a cultural context. Concurrently, grounded theory aided in identifying recurring themes and patterns, forming a theoretical framework grounded in interlocutors' interpretations and experiences (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Walker and Myrick 2006). My analysis focused on identifying interviewees' perspectives on food, familial traditions, and ethnic culture within the specific spatial context of the church.

Analyzing the two sets of interviews required distinct approaches due to linguistic differences between the conversations with the elders and Korean Americans. The interviews with the elders, conducted completely in Korean, were analyzed with attention to cultural nuances and language intricacies. To ensure clarity in understanding the elders' frequent use of idioms and vivid storytelling, I sought guidance from my grandmother. This was done to prevent misinterpretation of the intention behind the elders' statements.

To enhance readability, certain quotes have been condensed or edited for clarity with care taken to preserve the original intent of the speaker. Certain quotes analyzed in this study incorporate Korean words or phrases, intentionally retained in their original form to preserve the contextual richness and nuances expressed by participants. This deliberate inclusion aims to maintain authenticity and cultural significance in participants' expressions. During the interview process, the first-generation elders chose to introduce themselves using their English baptismal names, despite interviews conducted entirely in Korean. To honor their choice to emphasize the importance of their faith, I have opted to refer to them in my analysis using their chosen English

names rather than their Korean names as I had originally intended. In interviews with second-generation Korean Americans, Korean words are retained with translations and romanizations provided for accessibility. This preserves the blend of Korean and English, often termed “Konglish”, which is commonly used by Korean Americans and has been referred to as the native language of children of the diaspora (Lee 2018). Preserving this blend enhances understanding of the interviewees’ speech patterns and experiences growing up in multilingual households with first-generation Korean immigrants. It also demonstrates their comfort in speaking this way, as they recognize my shared identity as a second-generation Korean American.

### ***Literature Review***

As a study of diasporic communities, this research is in conversation with literature on intersecting themes related to food, memory, identity, faith, sociality, and third spaces. This scholarship on diasporic communities highlights the importance of individual members of the diaspora actively participating in specific environments, such as third spaces, where they both impact and are influenced by the cultural practices, beliefs, and culinary traditions experienced in these spaces. This literature review explores the sensory significance of food and its crucial role in preserving memories and cultural heritage within diasporic communities. It also delves into the historical background of Korean immigrant churches, providing context for their significance within the Korean population in the United States. Lastly, it examines literature concerning the creation of space, including third spaces, and the concept of placemaking. My research work contributes to a nuanced understanding of how food, third spaces, and familial bonds shape Korean diasporic experiences across generations in Montgomery County.

### *Foodways and Identity*

Research on the memory-making and sensory impact of food (Holtzman 2006) and the importance of food routes for immigrant communities (Marte 2011) enrich the discussion on the impact of gastronomy, highlighting food's role as a cultural connector and memory carrier for diasporic identities. Lupton (1994) explores the interplay between food and memories of familial or communal events, delving into the formation of personal and cultural narratives and emphasizing the role of social and collective memory evoked through these culinary experiences. Literature on the intersection of food and memory describes food (memories) as being a form of "historical consciousness," tailored to trigger memories through its multisensory attributes (Sutton 2001, 26). Counihan and Højlund's (2018) research on taste emphasizes its active role, transforming private experiences into public ones, defining the social space that exists between people and food. Their research highlights taste as culturally contextual, inseparable from and influenced by culture, shaping and being shaped by it (2018). Similarly, research by Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2012) on immigrant "kitchen gardens" highlights their role as vessels for memories and past landscapes, facilitating the transfer of cultural identity to a new physical space. The literature underscores food's pivotal role in community-building, connecting shared dietary experiences and cultural traditions to strong, resilient communities and serving as a powerful link to familial memories within diasporic communities (Counihan and Højlund 2018; Gnanapragasam 2020).

Existing literature highlights the role of culturally appropriate foods, such as foods that exist within an ethnic community's traditional diet, in enhancing dietary diversity and overall health, while also fostering cultural continuity and a sense of belonging in a space (Wakefield et

al. 2007; Kudryavtsev, Stedman, and Krasny 2012). A study by Gnanapragasam (2020) shows food as a vital aspect of identity and community for diasporic populations, contributing to the adjustment process of immigration as it provides a sense of familiarity and comfort. Cultural foods can serve as a means for second-generation individuals to learn about their heritage, while also providing first-generation immigrants with opportunities to build social relationships and networks with others (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2012).

Current literature depicts foodways as enabling those in the immigrant diaspora to redefine home and shape new local histories (Marte 2011). Through the repetition and familiarity of culinary practices, contemporary foodways offer a stable foundation, fostering a renewed sense of home amid the challenges of diasporic existence. Nostalgia for home, often at the heart of diasporic literature, fosters a renewed cultural connection. Further literature on food and memory touches on how sharing and passing down recipes is akin to sharing memories of food and homeland, transforming personal recollections into communal experiences through food (Parveen 2016). First-generation individuals may romanticize or idealize aspects of their homeland culture, yet even these idealized representations are vital for preserving the broader cultural heritage. (2016) The existing literature also notes the hybridization of cultures experienced by members of the diaspora, portraying different cultures as being intertwined and shared with one another, emphasizing interaction over isolation (Marte 2002; Welsch 1999).

My research on the relationship between ethnic identity and food extends existing literature on food's impact on community-building and identity for second-generation diaspora members, exploring how familial traditions and cultural foods shape the second-generation Koreans' connection to culture. By highlighting the connection between social patterns, collective memory, and food practices, this study illuminates how second-generation Koreans

engage with their cultural identity through diet. In my research, I shed light on how elders in the household pass down food practices and tastes to subsequent generations. However, there exists gaps in the literature on the rates of satisfaction felt by grandchildren of first-generation immigrant members of the diaspora when it comes to cooking cultural meals through more untraditional methods of learning. I explore how the culinary practices of second-generation Koreans align with or differ from previous generations and how they adapt food rituals and traditions to their bicultural identity as Korean Americans.

### *Religion in the Diaspora*

Sociologist Pyong Gap Min (1992) introduces the concept of “ethnic attachment,” to measure the extent to which individuals in an ethnic or immigrant group maintain their native cultural traditions and social ties with co-ethnic members (1390). Extending from Min’s work, existing literature emphasizes the role of religion in the Korean diaspora, particularly Korean Christianity and immigrant churches (Hurh and Kim 1990; Kim and Kim 2001), which play a significant role in fostering ethnic attachment and preserving cultural traditions within immigrant communities. Religion in this context has a heightened significance, serving an “ethnic role,” offering a space for meaning, belonging, and comfort beyond faith (Kim and Kim 2001; Hurh and Kim 1990). Min further suggests the emergence of a “Korean Christianity” within the diaspora, intertwining religious and social aspects to strengthen cultural connections to homeland within the immigrant community (1992).

There is a significantly higher representation of Christians among Korean immigrants in the US compared to the Christian population in Korea, with Christians in Korea being more likely to immigrate than individuals from other religious backgrounds (Min 2006). Min explains

how the decision to immigrate is often influenced by social and ethno-cultural factors, leading to a considerable number of Korean immigrants converting to Christianity (2006). However, studies indicate that there is a lower retention in church attendance among the 1.5 and second-generation Koreans, the term 1.5 referring to those who immigrated during their adolescence (Min 2006; Hurh 1998). The religious retention rate is even lower among Korean Catholics, pointing to challenges in maintaining cultural homogeneity across successive generations (Min and Kim 2005).

Many scholars have termed the large-scale departure of 1.5- and second-generation individuals from religious organizations as the “silent exodus” due to its significant numbers and the lack of acknowledgment within Korean churches in the United States (Cha 2001; Kim 2003; Lee 2009). The collective departure refers more specifically to the younger generations of Koreans leaving the churches of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, rather than abandoning the religion altogether. For some, navigating ethnic identity within mainstream society can conflict with forming a spiritual identity, especially within the landscape of traditional immigrant churches (Cha 2001). This has resulted in the emergence of a new generation of Korean churches that fall outside the category of “immigrant churches” and better align with the bicultural identity of 1.5- and second-generation Koreans. Sociologist Sharon Kim has researched the rising number of second-generation Korean churches amidst this silent exodus. These new churches serve as spaces for Korean Americans to articulate their spirituality in third spaces while having the ability to confidently mobilize in society, unlike their immigrant parents (Kim 2010a). These hybridized third spaces exist independently from the Korean Christianity of their parents’ generation, allowing individuals to navigate their religion within the context of their ethnic identity and Western upbringing more freely (Kim 2010b).

In my research, I enhance the existing body of literature by examining the community solidarity nurtured within Korean religious institutions and its influence on later generations, who, though not immigrants, are shaped by the cultural and communal groundwork laid by their forebears. My thesis provides insight into how second-generation Korean Americans engage in or seek cultural community outside of the church. It offers a broader perspective, particularly for Korean Catholics, beyond the existing literature that predominantly examines the experiences of Protestant Koreans. I also investigate the evolution of social experiences and the interpretation of ethnic community from immigrants to second-generation diaspora members, specifically exploring how multi-generational households interact with and perform in third spaces.

### *Third spaces and Placemaking*

The literature on third spaces characterizes the home as a private familial space, while the workplace is seen as a formal setting for professional activities (Dolley 2020). The concept of “third spaces” arises from the recognition that individuals seek additional social environments beyond home and work. These communal hubs bring together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering social interactions, shared experiences, and a sense of belonging (Dolley 2020). Existing research explores how these spaces function as platforms for cultivating a collective sense of ‘community’ among those engaged with the environment (Firth, Maye, and Pearson 2011; Oldenburg 1997).

French sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s (2012) theory on the production of space contends that space is a social product, intertwined with societal relations and power structures. Taking inspiration from Lefebvre, Setha Low’s “Embodied Space(s)” concept (2003) focuses on lived experiences and bodily engagements in specific environments, exploring the intersection of

body, space, and culture. In her article, “Towards an anthropological theory of space and place” (2009), Low examines the cultural and social dimensions of spatial practices, investigating how communities shape, perceive, and attribute meanings to their surroundings. Low extends her exploration further with the theory of trans local spaces from her book, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (2017), investigating how individuals and communities construct and navigate meanings across diverse places. This highlights the interconnectedness of experiences and identities in a globalized world (2017). The theory dives into how people establish connections to multiple locales, influencing their sense of belonging and cultural identity beyond physical boundaries. Placemaking is further discussed in literature, especially through the lens of “transcultural place-making,” recognizing culture’s fluidity and instability, influencing the reshaping of urban environments, particularly in connection to migrants and immigrants (Hou 2013).

In discussions about the diaspora, scholars describe placemaking as a process that goes beyond physical spaces. However, there is also a slipperiness to placemaking as noted by growing literature on the idea of placemaking as “unmaking” or “place taking,” putting a spotlight on the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous populations from their native land (Novacevski 2023; Moran 2021). When considering placemaking as a collaborative, community-driven process, it raises questions about the perspectives and voices of those who have long been removed from their lands (Moran 2021; Barry and Agyeman 2020). Current literature stresses the importance of proper recognition and how members of the post/colonial world understand what it means to belong in the inter/multicultural landscape (Sandercock 2003). Celia Haig-Brown (2012) emphasizes the significance of not only focusing on the places diasporic members originate from but also considering the land they have settled in.

While current literature acknowledges the role of placemaking in constituting immigrant communities, there is scope for a more comprehensive exploration of how spaces are collectively shaped and experienced across generations within diasporic communities and how these communities make space for themselves. Building on the literature, my research analyzes the interplay among societal structures, embodied experiences, and cultural meanings within contemporary Korean diasporic communities. My research works to uncover how families, spanning multiple generations of Koreans with unique experiences, navigate these spaces and engage in placemaking, offering insights into their unique interpretations of culturally coded spaces and practices of cultural identity.

## Chapter 2: Background

Since the 1990's, there has been a notable increase in the Korean population in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, with Virginia ranking fifth and Maryland ninth in terms of absolute population at the state level (U.S. Census Bureau 2023). Many Koreans, even within the United States, relocated to the area in hopes of improved employment and educational opportunities (Korean American Foundation-Greater Washington 2009). The Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area itself stands out as the third-largest Korean population hub among metropolitan areas. Following a brief transition period after the adoption of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished discriminatory restrictions on immigrants based on national origin, the annual influx of Korean immigrants experienced a steady rise over the subsequent decades (Koo and Yu 1981; Kim and Min 1992). The new legislation introduced a seven-category preference system for incoming immigrants and exempted immediate relatives from numerical restrictions. This included children and parents of individuals aged 21 and older, thereby enabling immediate relatives to reunite with their family members who have already immigrated over (Vecchio 2013). The yearly volume of Korean immigrants in 1965 stood at 2,165, but by 1977, it had surged to 30,917 (Koo and Yu 1981).

The increase in population is closely linked to migration patterns influenced by the concentration of small businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities available to the Korean community in the region (Min 2006). The Korean immigrant population engaged in small business ownership and entrepreneurial groups is significantly higher than that of other immigrant ethnic groups in the United States (2006). This, combined with the prevalence and growth of Korean immigrant churches for religious and social support, contributed to Korean migration and community patterns (2006). Montgomery County, Maryland, ranked as the 12<sup>th</sup>

most diverse county in the nation, has a total population of 15.2% Asian, with 1.5% being Korean (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). In Montgomery County, cities like Rockville and Silver Spring in particular showcase how Korean businesses have clustered in specific areas, becoming central hubs for the local Korean community (Min 2006).

Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church (SAK) began as a small group of Koreans, including students, in October 1965, initially conducting services at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. Their first Korean language mass took place on May 1, 1973, in Bethesda, Maryland. Over time, services and meetings of the SAK church community transitioned between various college campuses and locations. On March 19, 1974, they held their first mass with an appointed priest from Korea with 77 worshippers, officially marking SAK as the first Korean Catholic church in the Washington metropolitan area. In October of 2002, the new SAK church was opened in Olney, Maryland, fulfilling a plan set in motion since 1986 (Korean American Foundation-Greater Washington 2009). The new building featured a 750-seat chapel and a spacious fellowship room utilized for events, prayer gatherings, and Sunday lunch services following mass. Additionally, the pastors' residence was built in the same year adjacent to the church. In June 2005, the church's education wing was inaugurated. This section included classrooms for Sunday School spanning kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, along with Korean School. Adjacent to this, a gated, outdoor playground was constructed for recreational purposes. Within the education wing, a smaller chapel was erected to host simultaneous English-language masses for students, as well as various club meetings and events.



*Fig. 1: Aerial view of Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church, the chapel at center with the fellowship wing to the left, and education wing to the right. Image Credit: Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church.*

Concurrently, in 2002, alongside the opening of SAK, the Andrew Kim House was constructed next door with a \$6.24 million grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This retirement community, consisting of 76 units, was built to cater to the growing number of Korean elderly in the area, earning the church considerable praise from the church community and Korean community at large (Korean American Foundation-Greater Washington 2009). Three of the first-generation Korean elders I interviewed reside in Andrew Kim House, which offers proximity to the church and other Koreans, enabling them to practice their faith and engage in ethnic community freely. Regina, Elizabeth, and Maria Magdalena have a shared history, having previously worked in the church community garden together. There they grew and sold produce and kimchi to raise funds for the new church and later for the education building. They continue to garden together at Andrew Kim House, each with their own raised plots provided by the church on a first-come, first-served basis. My grandmother Maria, the

fourth participating first-generation elder, lives in a senior living complex near St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring. Since her move in 2012, Grandma Maria has regularly attended mass at St. Camillus rather than SAK, due to its close proximity to her. However, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic she has not felt comfortable attending mass in person.



*Fig. 2: Entrance to the Andrew Kim House. Image Credit: Victory Housing.*

The SAK Catholic Korean School was founded to educate second-generation or American-born Koreans in Korean language and culture. It was established in 1978 and is considered one of the strongest Korean schools in the area. The SAK Senior Academy was also established, offering English language classes, support, and assistance with matters like citizenship studying. This approach not only fosters language proficiency but also empowers individuals with skills and knowledge needed to navigate various aspects of life in their new community. Such initiatives underscore the church's commitment to nurturing holistic development of its members and facilitating their integration into broader society. For diasporic

communities, the impact of these third spaces extends beyond spatial boundaries, providing innovative, place-based solutions to preserve cultural heritage (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Dolley 2020). SAK serves as a constant, an environment where multiple generations in one family engage with food, traditions, and social interactions over time in one space. This third space, outside of home and work, allows for a variety of cultural perspectives and community experiences to flourish. The Korean Catholic Federal Credit Union (FCU), the first and only one of its kind, was established in the church as well. The FCU provides vital services to elderly patrons, assisting in money orders and bill payments, enabling them to be more independent.

In this study, the perspectives of four second-generation Korean Americans are contrasted with those of first-generation immigrants to explore diverse views on ethnicity and community integration. Jina shares insights from her upbringing, navigating between assimilating into American culture and embracing her ethnic identity. Stephen serves as a social bridge between first-generation Korean immigrants and second-generation Korean Americans, having developed a strong appreciation for ethnic community over time. Alisa and Matthew reflect on their teenage years spent engaging in church activities and socializing within a close-knit community of fellow Korean Americans and how they gradually drifted away from this homogenous social environment as they matured.

The interviewees share interconnected experiences and relationships through their connections to SAK. Jina's mother served as a Korean school teacher and was a figurehead in the church's educational department. Stephen's grandmother attended mass alongside my grandmother Maria for several years, and now resides at the Andrew Kim House. Matthew, who is my sister's godbrother, was taught by my mother for First Communion class and similarly, Alisa is my cousin's goddaughter. My grandfather also served as the president of the Senior

Men's Social Club at the church and was a prominent social figurehead at SAK, helping to create broader community through his relationships. These intertwined relationships underscore the shared experiences and religious, familial, and affective bonds that connect the interviewees as a result of their affiliation with SAK.

My thesis topic emerged from a convergence of personal experiences, academic interests, and a desire to explore the intricate dynamics of cultural identity and community formation within the Korean population of Montgomery County, Maryland. Growing up in Silver Spring, Maryland, and raised by first-generation Korean immigrants I was immersed in the richness of Korean cultural heritage, witnessing diverse expressions of diasporic identity. Recognizing the pivotal role of food and communal spaces in shaping my own sense of Korean identity and belonging sparked my curiosity about how these phenomena manifest and evolve across generations within the Korean diaspora. My motivation and interest in this topic were further fueled by my experiences working at a sustainable care farm and by the pandemic, which brought me back to the home gardens my grandparents and their friends had tended. There is limited local research on the intersection of these topics, driving me to delve into them, seeking to illuminate the diverse experiences of members of the Korean diaspora and enrich discussions among practitioners on cultural identity and belonging.

## Chapter 3: A conversation with Korean elders

This chapter explores the interviews of first-generation elders, highlighting the intergenerational familial bonds forged through shared taste preferences and the transmission of cooking traditions. Food serves as the conduit through which elders impart and guide younger generations towards cultural connection. This chapter also underscores the intrinsic role of ethnicity in the elders' community formation through faith. Finally, it explores the changing spatial dynamics of community, framed within the constraints imposed by aging as individuals progress through their life course.

### *Heritability of Palate*

In her gastronomic ethnography, *Eating Korean in America*, Sonia Ryang (2015) poses the question, "Can a food still bear a national identity even after it has traveled beyond the boundaries of the nation in which it originated?" (1). These interviews with first-generation Korean immigrant elders underscore the enduring influence and interconnectedness of cultural foods within the diaspora. The conversations shed light on the interviewees' perceptions of intergenerational familial bonds formed through shared taste preferences, which are reinforced by the passing down of cooking traditions and techniques specific to Korean cuisine.

Memories from Korea and childhood eating habits had a lasting impact on the elders and their eating habits after immigrating to the United States. These memories influenced their food preferences and choices, shaping their culinary practices into adulthood. Whether it is the comfort of familiar flavors, or the nostalgia associated with traditional dishes, these memories played a significant role in maintaining cultural identity and connection to their homeland. As

immigrants adapt to a new culinary landscape, they often seek to recreate the tastes and experiences of their childhood, finding solace and continuity in the foods they grew up with.

The strong connection between family and food was evident as the elders reminisced about their childhoods. Discussions about food sparked memories from the elders' distant past. For Maria Magdalena, she answered most interview questions with detailed anecdotes, sharing her experiences through vivid stories. For instance, she fondly recalled her family's daily consumption of fish, linking it to her current health. She recounts: "In the old days, my family ate fish every day. Apparently, I do not have osteoporosis after growing up eating like that. My primary care doctor tested me for osteoporosis after I arrived from Korea and shared the 'good news' that it is rare not to have it. I still enjoy fish and beans, and even now, my favorite lunch days at [senior] daycare are fish lunch days." She reminisced about her upbringing and family meals, recalling: "Despite my brother's absence in Canada, our family of three children, including myself, gathered around the table. My father would generously give us the middle portions of the fish while he savored the head and tail." The elders' vivid and personal recollections of food memories highlight the profound impact of routine meals and daily gatherings on their culinary experiences and sense of connection to familial belonging.

Everyday routines, like family dinners, are more than just practical activities; they serve as meaningful expressions of cultural heritage within collective social memory (Sutton 2001). Within Korean immigrant households, first-generation elders passed down cooking practices to bridge generational gaps and simulate a connection to a distant "homeland" through traditional foods. These elders played a vital role in transmitting culinary knowledge and cultural heritage to the American-born and raised generation. Through shared cooking experiences and the preparation of traditional dishes, familial bonds are strengthened, and a sense of cultural identity

is reinforced. This intergenerational exchange fosters a deeper appreciation for Korean cuisine and cultivates a sense of belonging with one another and to their shared ethnic culture within the family unit. As younger generations embrace their heritage through food, they not only honor their roots but also continue the legacy of their ancestors, ensuring that traditional culinary practices remain alive and cherished in the diaspora.

Maria Magdalena shared how her son praises her daughter's cooking, noting that it tastes just like hers, even though Maria Magdalena never formally taught her daughter: "Even though I never taught her how to make braised pork short ribs (*dwaeji galbi-jjim*, 돼지 갈비찜) and braised beef short ribs (*so galbi-jjim*, 소 갈비찜), only giving her recipes for those, whenever I go over to her house, she is able to cook lots of things. My younger son says, 'Mom, *noona* (누나, older sister) has your cooking touch.' I never taught her to cook but I guess by eating my food she is recreating that taste. He says, 'When you go over to *noona's* house, everything tastes good as if you cooked it.'"

Similarly, as I have grown older, my mom has taken over cooking for Korean holidays and family gatherings. My uncle has remarked that her cooking tastes just like our grandma's did when he was young. Grandma Maria noted that my mom's cooking skills have improved over time, particularly her kimchi-making abilities. Now, my mom even prepares kimchi regularly to share with her. As my family has aged, my mom's cooking has developed to embody the flavors of my grandma's cooking, demonstrating the lasting influence of passing down culinary knowledge within our family. These instances of skillfully recreating traditional tastes for Maria Magdalena's and my own family illustrates the enduring gastronomic legacy transmitted through generations.

These same traditions are gradually being passed down to grandchildren, with my Grandma Maria and Elizabeth noting how their granddaughters are learning to cook Korean dishes one by one, the same meals once prepared for them by their grandmothers. This continuity may be because grandparents, particularly grandmothers, often take on significant childcare responsibilities and are deeply involved in the lives of their grandchildren. Elizabeth described her children and grandchildren's eating habits: "They eat the way we have always eaten. My grandchildren like Korean food too and they continue to like it. They cannot visit too often but it seems like they cook the way I used to cook. They say to me, '*halmoni* (할머니, grandma), I cooked this, and I cooked that' just like me." This reminded me of the frequent calls I make to my grandma when cooking Korean dishes for the first time, seeking to replicate her classic recipes from my childhood. The consistent presence of grandparents and their practice of preparing Korean dishes for daily meals influences subsequent, American-born generations to uphold and practice cultural heritage through cooking, as evidenced by Elizabeth and my Grandma Maria.

The inheritance of taste palates along kinship lines reflects the intergenerational familial bonds formed through food, along with the unique language used to describe these connections. In Maria Magdalena's observation about her children's eating habits, she describes how their preferences reflect both family tradition and genetic inheritance. She explained: "My daughter took after her dad, liking pickled cucumber (오이지니, *oh-ee ji-ni*) and such, while my son's palate differs. I inherited my broad taste from my father, he liked all kinds of food." This perception of inherited taste underlines the idea that food preferences are not only shaped by cultural traditions but also perceived as a genetic legacy passed down through generations. My

interviewees' theories about inherited palates served to emphasize family ties and make every meal an opportunity to reiterate and celebrate these ties to both family and homeland.

Personal palate and taste preferences often serve as a link to ancestry beyond kinship, and are interpreted as reflections of deep-seated ethnic cultural connections. In Korean families, like many others, individual tastes are intertwined with familial traditions and cultural heritage. My own preference for certain Korean dishes like *nameul* (나물, seasoned edible grass/leaf dishes) side dishes were often met with comments from my grandma about my “*yeong gam*” (영감, “old man”) taste palate. Comments from elders like teasing about having an “old man” palate, highlight how culinary preferences not only reflect individual identity but also are interpreted as a connection to ancestral customs and culinary traditions. Thus, one’s palate can be interpreted as unveiling deeper aspects of our cultural background and history beyond family connections.

The interviews highlighted a unanimous preference among the elders for Korean cuisine, which they enjoy daily at home. They value the simplicity of Korean food, as Regina succinctly put it: “For Koreans, is there more than rice and kimchi?” Kimchi as a non-negotiable staple food and signifier of Korean identity came up many times throughout the interviews.

### ***Entanglement of Faith and Ethnicity***

Ethnicity appears to be an intrinsic aspect of how the elders form community through faith, even if it is not consciously sought after or prioritized by them. Despite not actively seeking out ethnic community connections, the elders find themselves naturally gravitating towards spaces and activities that align with their cultural background. Whether it is attending services or participating in volunteer activities and events through the church, their religious practice becomes intertwined with their ethnic identity. This suggests that ethnicity plays a

significant role in shaping the elders' social interactions and sense of belonging within their faith communities, reflecting the enduring influence of cultural heritage on their lived experiences.

Sociologist Pyong Gap Min discussed the development of what he calls “Korean Christianity” within the Korean diaspora, describing the blending of religious and social elements to reinforce cultural ties to the homeland within the immigrant community. First-generation members of the Korean diaspora with no prior ties to religion may be driven to join religious communities, not solely due to reasons of faith or belief, but also for social connections and community building. The church emerges as a pivotal source of ethnic community for interviewees, influencing their migration patterns and residential decisions. Grandma Maria's experience highlights the significant role of the church in facilitating connections within the Korean community. She shared how her desire for her daughter to marry within the Korean community led her to join an immigrant church, despite never having attended church before. She explained: “When we first moved to Silver Spring, it wasn't easy to meet other Korean people, so my thought was that in order to get my daughter to marry a Korean we need to go to where Korean people gather.” Initially knowing no one, she eventually connected with her daughter's friend's parents who attended the church and that is how she began going to SAK. This underscores the spatiality of community formation, where individuals are drawn to communal spaces like churches that serve as hubs for cultural gatherings and social interactions. The church not only provides a platform for religious worship but also serves as a nexus for fostering ethnic identity and solidarity within the diaspora.

In the context of immigrant experiences, religious institutions have long served as multifunctional hubs that offer more than just spiritual guidance; they provide a sense of familiarity, support, and community within an unfamiliar environment. The church becomes a

space where they can find companionship, mutual understanding, and a sense of belonging, thus fulfilling social and cultural needs alongside spiritual ones (Weber 1978; Min 1992). In this way, the concept of “Korean Christianity” within the diaspora extends beyond religious practice, serving as a means of strengthening cultural connections and fostering a sense of identity and community among immigrants. What started as a social endeavor evolved into a deepening faith journey as she regularly attended mass. This led to a multi-generational tradition of Korean Catholics in her family. Grandma Maria elaborated: “In the beginning, it was just my daughter and me. After we got baptized, I asked if my son and daughter-in-law would go, and they all got baptized as well. The church gave a nice sense of acceptance. All the grandchildren got baptized one after another.”

When questioned about their sense of community, particularly within the Korean ethnic community, the elders seemed to view it as more of a natural occurrence rather than a deliberate pursuit. Despite this, many of their anecdotes about volunteering and church involvement revealed underlying ethnic community motivations. The three elders residing in the senior living apartment adjacent to SAK seemed amused by the question about how they find community, emphasizing that church was the only place they experienced community in a cultural and ethnic sense with other Koreans. Regina and Maria Magdalena responded firmly and simply, stating they do not participate in any Korean community beyond church. Maria Magdalena said: “No, I have not. I have only attended gatherings through the Korean Catholic church.”

The elders’ responses imply an intentional choice to attend a Korean church for ethnic community, despite not explicitly stating it. The elders at Andrew Kim House spoke candidly about how their complex was initially occupied solely by members of SAK, but over time, more non-Koreans or Korean Protestants moved in, even though the majority were still parishioners.

The presence of new residents, Korean or not, at the Andrew Kim House did not lead the elders to widen the scope of their social circles, as they remained committed to engaging primarily with fellow parishioners from the church. Elizabeth shared: “I do not meet with any [Koreans] except here. I do not have time to. We meet each other while coming and going to the church or in this apartment building.” Regina shared similar sentiments when asked about how she participates in community with Koreans: “Nothing from outside of the church, it is only the church. I do not participate anywhere else. Just within the Korean Catholic church. Nothing else, just engaging in activities within the Korean Catholic church.” Their statements underscore the implicit role of the Korean Catholic church as a focal point for ethnic community engagement, reflecting the significance of religious institutions in fostering social bonds within immigrant communities.

### *Spatiality of Community Over the Life Course*

The conversations with the elders helped uncover the way community is spatialized changes over the life course among first-generation Korean elders, particularly through the lens of home and community gardens. These gardens serve not only as spaces for recreation and cultivation but also as sites for community building and the replication of homeland in America. As individuals age and face limitations in mobility and the boundary of their social network condenses, the significance of homes and community spaces evolves, shedding light on the interplay between space, community, and aging within the Korean diaspora.

### *Cultivating Memories of Homeland*

For the first-generation Korean elders, home and community gardens hold significant spatial and cultural importance. Engaging in gardening activities, whether at home or in church

community gardens, serves as a means of recreating portions of their homeland on American soil. Grandma Maria highlighted the significance of gardening in her family history, recalling: “My mom and dad maintained many large vegetable gardens. Seeing them tending to those and the vegetables they harvested for our meals, I developed a deep appreciation for Korean food, which I still prefer over others.” By evoking memories of traditional Korean gardening practices, these garden spaces enable immigrants to maintain a connection to their cultural heritage and traditional produce, fostering continuity with their past while adapting to life in America. Both Elizabeth and Grandma Maria emphasized passing down farming practices to their children. Elizabeth explained: “My younger daughter purchased a house and set aside a garden plot in the backyard, where I now go to teach her how to garden.” These gardens serve as a physical representation of their homeland, offering a sanctuary for preserving cultural traditions in their new environment.

The community garden served as more than just a space for growing food; it provided a clear purpose and objective for the elders, fostering socialization and community care. Regina, Elizabeth, and Maria Magdalena, all involved in the church community garden, cherished their volunteer experiences. Through their involvement in cultivating staple Korean vegetables like napa cabbage and radish, essential for making traditional kimchi, Regina, Elizabeth, and Maria Magdalena found a meaningful way to contribute to their church community. The act of harvesting these vegetables and making kimchi not only connected them to their cultural heritage but also strengthened bonds within the congregation. The garden’s physical space became a nexus where food and communal goals intersected, emphasizing the integral role of the church garden in both feeding the community and fostering social connections. Elizabeth’s experience volunteering was one of joy: “When we gardened, eight years for me, we would have a table for

our breaks with coffee and fruit, that was fun. It was hard work but talking and teaming up was fun and just going outside was fun. And of course, whatever we harvested was a joy... We worked so hard there but later it ended unpleasantly.”

In 2003, a community garden plot was established at the new church for volunteers to grow vegetables. Unfortunately, a series of incidents led to the abrupt closure of the garden. Maria Magdalena, actively involved in the garden at that time, was the only participant who provided detailed insight into the reasons behind its closure:

There were too many accidents and encounters with animals in the area. Deer would even eat up pepper plants because they are so tall you cannot build adequate fencing. The initial accident occurred when an elderly woman, who no longer lives here, saw a snake. There are snakes because [the garden] was densely planted. While attempting to move away she ended up scratching herself on barbed wire surrounding a nearby garden. The incident prompted an emergency call. Not only that, despite the pastor at the time, Father Lee, having had some trees chopped down for the garden many large trees remained. There was an older tree near the entry and another elderly woman narrowly escaped when a large tree cracked and fell behind her as she stepped forward. If that tree fell on her, she would have died right? Anyway, there were more small accidents here and there, the woman who got scratched did not require hospitalization but there were others who got hurt too.

The decision to permanently close the community garden sparked intense debate and conflict. Dedicated volunteers, despite growing safety concerns, pushed to continue the garden, while

other church members, including the pastor, expressed deep worries about potential risks. Following the garden space's dissolution, raised garden beds were constructed adjacent to Andrew Kim House, where Regina, Elizabeth, and Maria Magdalena have been gardening ever since. The significance of the new raised garden beds lies in their transition from a communal endeavor with shared goals for community events and church fundraising to personal use, lacking the previous sense of common purpose and collective engagement experienced in the community gardens. The dissolution of the community garden spaces represents not only the loss of a practical resource but also the loss of a communal gathering space where the elders could interact and socialize outside of traditional faith-based activities, thereby impacting their sense of community and connection.



*Fig. 3: Raised beds for residents constructed outside of Andrew Kim House. Image Credit: Author.*

### *Navigating Age and Changing Spaces*

The decisions of the elders to relocate to Maryland from Korea were primarily influenced by familial ties, knowledge of existing Koreans in the area and the desire to form community with them. Regina's family initially followed her sisters-in-law to Virginia but eventually moved to Maryland. Similarly, Elizabeth immigrated to Maryland to be close to her sisters and the church community they were part of. Maria Magdalena's family chose Maryland as their destination to be near her sisters-in-law, echoing the importance of family connections in their relocation. Grandma Maria's immigration was facilitated by a State Department invitation, made possible by my grandfather's more than 15-year work history on a US Army base in Korea. My family, which consisted of my grandparents, mother, and two uncles settled in Maryland due to the presence of other Koreans and an acquaintance who provided support upon their arrival. Since their respective arrivals, each family has remained in Maryland, drawn by a combination of familial proximity and personal connections established within the community.

The connection between spatiality, proximity, and life course becomes evident in the experiences of Korean elders, particularly in relation to their religious and social activities. The proximity of the Andrew Kim House to Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church (SAK) is crucial for accessing essential services like senior daycare, which are often intertwined with church attendance. The senior daycare is a Korean-run, community-based program, that provides a space for social interactions and essential services such as transportation to medical facilities, prescription pick-ups, and culturally centered meals and activities for elderly individuals who are largely independent in their daily lives but may benefit from such companionship and extra care during the daytime. The senior daycare these elders attend also provide transportation to SAK, ensuring seniors can maintain their religious practices and community engagement through

church throughout the week as well. As individuals age, their dependence on such services increases, making proximity to church and other community resources vital to meet social and health-centered needs.

The centrality of spatial proximity in shaping community engagement and access to essential services is evident in Elizabeth's routine, demonstrating the evolving significance of distance and spatiality as individuals age. She prioritizes attending SAK, and it influences her choice of other services and social opportunities. She explains: "[The apartment] is close, so it's always the best thing for me to be able to go to church. When I go to the [senior] daycare service, they provide round trips to the church on Thursdays. So, I cannot go to another daycare since only this one provides that service. This way I get to worship one more day." The convenience of the apartment's proximity to the church enables them to engage in worship and utilize daycare services provided by the county. As individuals age and progress through different life stages, the significance of distance within network boundaries undergoes notable shifts. With advancing age, physical limitations and changing priorities can illuminate the significance of one's living environment and mobility. What once may have been easily accessible in terms of distance becomes increasingly challenging to navigate. As social needs and health concerns mount, the proximity of essential services and community resources becomes paramount.

Regina contends that her church attendance is solely motivated by her faith, with little significance placed on engaging with the Korean community outside of religious obligations. She states: "There's no impact on me beyond my faith. Just my faith by itself. The good thing is the church's proximity to the apartment, going to church is my hobby." Regina attends church primarily for her faith, with the proximity of the church to her apartment making it convenient for her religious practice. This highlights how close physical proximity influences the

experiences of Korean elders. This spatial aspect demonstrates how age can both limit and hinder our ability to move or get around, emphasizing the importance of being close to support networks and essential amenities as individuals progress through their life course.

Living further away from SAK outside of Andrew Kim House has led to Grandma Maria branching out to other ethnic communities for friendship and community. Grandma Maria gradually overcame language barriers while residing in a more ethnically diverse senior living apartment complex. Despite her limited English proficiency, she found comfort in greeting others with simple phrases like “Good morning. How are you?” Communicating with one another, despite limited English proficiency, has never been a significant issue since most residents are also immigrants from various backgrounds. Over time, Grandma Maria formed a sense of community, with many of her new friends also attending the nearby American Catholic church (which offers services in English, Spanish, and French reflecting the diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of the congregation). She credits their shared faith, immigrant status, and friendly disposition for enabling her to forge connections with non-Koreans. This demonstrates how distance from peers sharing the same ethnic identity may prompt exploration of alternative community connections. However, religious devotion remains a unifying force, along with shared experiences of living within a diaspora, fostering connections among diverse immigrant groups.

Even so as Grandma Maria has aged, she expresses the importance of being within an ethnic community becomes increasingly evident. Grandma Maria’s experience highlights this phenomenon, as she expressed a growing desire to be surrounded by fellow Koreans. The linguistic barriers that connect Grandma Maria with her diverse network of immigrant friends in her current apartment also hinder her from forming deeper connections with them, highlighting

the limitations not only in her residential location but also in her social interactions. The dwindling number of Koreans in her building has intensified her longing for community, prompting some to relocate to areas with a greater concentration of Korean residents. Just in the past few years many have left to live with their children and others have moved to Andrew Kim House. Grandma Maria admitted: “I do prefer the Korean Catholic church. I can speak the language, interact with other Korean seniors, and feel more familiar. Attending an American church can feel a bit awkward for me, but I still attend diligently. Even now, I contemplate moving to an apartment near the Korean Catholic church because I do enjoy attending services there.” For Grandma Maria, being in proximity to SAK would provide opportunities to interact with other Korean seniors, practice faith in her native language, and feel a sense of familiarity and belonging. This preference emphasizes the significance of ethnic community ties in providing comfort, support, and cultural connection as individuals navigate the challenges of aging and spatial limitations.

### ***Conclusion***

The interviews with first-generation Korean immigrant elders revealed the lasting influence of cultural foods, shaping culinary preferences and maintaining ties to homeland. Through the transmission of culinary knowledge and cultural heritage, familial bonds are strengthened, fostering a sense of belonging within the family unit and preserving traditional practices. The elders’ natural inclination towards culturally aligned spaces and activities suggests ethnicity significantly shapes their social interactions and sense of belonging within their faith communities, particularly in religious institutions like SAK. These discussions illuminate how community spatialization changes over the life course, notably through home and community

gardens, which serve as sites for recreation and community building, highlighting the dynamic interplay between space, community, and aging within the Korea diaspora.

## Chapter 4: A conversation with Korean Americans

This chapter delves into key findings from these interviews, exploring the second-generation's attempts at replicating home through food, the role of the church as a heterogeneous space for identity formation, and the significance of grandparent as a locus of cultural and ethnic identity, or “Koreanness”, within the Korean American community.

### *Production and Reproduction*

The four interviews involving second-generation Korean Americans highlight the role of food in connecting individuals of successive generations in the diaspora to their ethnic culture and identity. They demonstrate how Korean cuisine evolved through participants' personal tastes and local contexts, emphasizing the significance of home-cooked meals and food rituals as symbols or gateways to understanding ethnic identity.

The interviews revealed the correlation between the presence of Korean elders in their childhoods, in or outside of their homes, and whether participants had experience with or memories of growing their own food or having access to community gardens growing up. Alisa and Stephen grew up with their grandparents having an active role in their lives, Stephen having lived with his maternal grandmother in the house until adulthood. Both participants spoke extensively about their grandparents' home gardens, growing a variety of staple Korean vegetables such as 깻잎 (*gae-nip*, perilla leaves), 고추 (*gochu*, peppers), 호박 (*hobak*, squash), and 상추 (*sang-chu*, lettuce). Stephen said it was like “living with a farmer,” describing the way squash vines would take over the small backyard like a fairytale.

The influence of elders in showcasing methods of food cultivation extended beyond the household. Jina, the participant with the most distant relationship with her grandparents, spoke of

her experience seeing female elders working in the church community garden. She shares: “They had 무 (*moo*), the daikon radish, and cabbage too, so then the 할머니s (*halmunee*, grandmas) could sell kimchi. That was part of their fundraiser. It was great, and we always bought it. It would just be jars of kimchi in the church refrigerator. They worked on their kimchi making twice a week. They would harvest it and then go through the process and making it, they would pickle it, jar it, and then do a little taste test.” She went on to explain that around once a month the elders would use the kimchi to cook lunch for the kids attending Korean school, including her. They would cook dishes like 김치찌개 (*kimchi jjigae*, kimchi stew) and 부대찌개 (*budae jjigae*, Korean army stew), Jina found herself enjoying it and preferring it over her mom cooking similar meals at home. Elders at the church not only introduced Jina and other second-generation churchgoers to traditional cuisine but also served as a bridge connecting food, culture, and religion within the church community.

The second-generation Koreans were drawn to recreating dishes from their childhood, cooked for them by their parents and grandparents. They were motivated to do so not just by nostalgia but by a desire to enact their cultural heritage in a new context. This endeavor to replicate home went beyond the literal reproduction of cultural dishes, and involved producing something new, while still capturing the flavors and feelings of home.

Matthew was the most vocal about how his aversions to the home-cooked Korean meals from his childhood evolved into cravings as an adult living away from home. He shared that being in a relationship with someone Korean helped ground him in his ethnic identity while being distant from natal family and Korean friends back in Maryland. One way he actively performs culture with his partner is through cooking: “We’ll try to cook Korean food at home. I know growing up, I hated 찌개 (*jjigae*, stew), and 된장 (*doenjang*, soybean paste), and stuff, and

that every day we would make it at home. But you know now, that's the thing that I crave most. So, we will cook stuff at home if we miss home and want a little taste of home. Last weekend we cooked 된장찌개 (*doenjang jjigae*, soybean paste stew).”

Unlike their predecessors, who passed down culinary traditions through hands-on instruction, the second-generation individuals are often learning to cook Korean cuisine independently or through alternative resources like cookbooks and online tutorials. Consequently, they lack the physicality and embodied understanding of cooking that comes from years of firsthand experience, making the replication of traditional dishes a daunting task. The interviewees did not disclose why they never acquired these skills from their parents or grandparents, or the extent of their involvement in cooking or assisting alongside them during their younger year. In subsequent conversations with some participants, we discussed their reliance on popular Korean cookbooks, online cooking videos, and phone calls with parents or grandparents as they endeavor to replicate the flavors they remember from childhood.

Alisa shared her struggles with learning her family’s traditional dishes, noting the way her family cooks with no measurements or rules but just through instinct and practice. “I feel like Korean food really requires your soul” she said to me when discussing the ways our mothers and grandmothers throw ingredients in reflexively, their bodies knowing how much of what to add through repeated motions and intuition. In that way, the ethnic identity that lives through traditional foods and culinary practices seemed to exist as a bodily function and physical knowledge.

In their efforts to reproduce Korean dishes, the second-generation Korean Americans were not only grappling with the absence of hands-on learning but also confronting the reality that their reproductions may necessarily differ from the originals. The attempt to learn how to

cook these dishes from alternative sources, such as following online recipes or instructional videos as mentioned in conversation with interlocutors, introduces new variables that inevitably alter the final outcome. While striving for authenticity, these individuals inadvertently infused their own interpretations and adaptations into the cooking process, resulting in dishes that possess a unique flavor and character. Thus, the act of reproducing Korean cuisine became a form of creative expression, showcasing the evolving culinary practices shaped by the experiences and influences of the second-generation diaspora. Cultural theorist Marina de Camargo Heck (2003) described how younger generations approach cooking cultural foods by simultaneously trying to adopt traditional eating habits and adapting to new ones, resulting in the blending of culinary cultures – a reflection of their bicultural experience.

In their pursuit of replicating these dishes, these second-generation Korean Americans aimed to recreate the tastes and experiences of home as adults. However, their culinary endeavors often resulted in the creation of something new, rather than a direct copy, reflecting their unique culinary journey and identity. Even so, there is a range of satisfaction in their reproductions, as each attempt combines nostalgia, experimentation, and personal interpretation.

### ***Textured Spaces, Multicultural Places***

The church emerged as a vital space for connecting with ethnic culture and fostering community among second-generation Korean Americans. Each of the four interviewees actively engaged in various extracurricular activities at church beyond Sunday school, such as altar service, Korean school, and participation in youth orchestra or choir. These additional engagements not only maximized their time spent at church but also provided opportunities to expand their social circles beyond school. Furthermore, for these individuals, the church represented a tangible means of navigating their bicultural identity as Korean Americans,

offering a platform to engage with Korean heritage through a multicultural lens and language, albeit in a distinct manner from their elders.

Matthew's experience echoes the significance of the church as a cornerstone for cultural connection and community among second-generation Korean Americans. He shared: "I was pretty involved in church activities, and I think for me a big part of that was just so I could learn more about Korean culture, hangout with Korean people, and stuff like that. It was nice to be able to have this kind of second life outside of school. Looking back now on how church as a Korean community has molded me as a as an adult, [as someone] who now doesn't go to SAK anymore. I think I do miss it a lot, being able to hang out with, or having an easily accessible, available group of Korean people to hang out with." His experience highlighted an acute awareness of the ethnic aspect of church, which facilitated his connection to Korean culture as well as community.

For the second-generation Korean Americans, the church served as a textured space where they can engage with their Korean identity in diverse ways. Unlike the elders, they appear more conscious of the ethnic aspect of the church and navigated it with a nuanced understanding, acknowledging the importance of being in a space characterized by its Koreanness. Whether through language, cultural events, or shared traditions, the church provided a multifaceted platform for second-generation individuals to connect with their Korean roots and forge a sense of belonging within their community. Each participant spoke about the ethnic aspect of community within the church setting. They recognized and appreciated the various permutations of Koreanness that existed in their peers and social circles, enjoying the different facets of their cultural heritage.

Alisa reminisced on the many hours spent at SAK every weekend, where she was engaged in Korean school, altar service, and Youth Orchestra. She detailed her time in Youth Orchestra in particular, noting not only the long hours she spent each week at practice but also crediting it as her main source of socialization: “That's how I really connected with my Korean American friends. I felt like I was able to really find my people who have the same background as me. I think, kind of going back, I feel like in elementary school I kind of did have a bit of an identity crisis trying to figure out who I was, which group I belonged to, just because at that young age I wasn't going to church yet. I wasn't finding people with the same background as me. And so, when I did go to church, I found that group. It was a really embracing period for me.” Alisa stressed the importance of being in community with other Korean Americans who shared similar bicultural identity and experiences as her. She also discussed forming friendships with recently immigrated Koreans of similar age at church, noting that the diversity of her Korean social circle at SAK inspired her to seek community among Korean students during college, especially when confronted with another predominantly white environment similar to her elementary school experience.

Second-generation Korean Americans perceived the role of the church through a multicultural lens, acknowledging their bicultural identity. Stephen attended private catholic school for elementary and middle school, and attended an American catholic church during his adolescence where he was a part of the altar service. He shared that this made his attendance to SAK inconsistent at the time. However, he explained that attending public school in high school opened his world up as he had the opportunity to diversify his friend group and found community with other Asian American students through orchestra and music. As his social world grew even larger in college, it encouraged him to seek community with other Koreans. He

shared: “In college, I was still hanging out with fellow Asians – Asian Americans, Koreans, Korean Americans – altogether. But that’s also where I was able to kind of further progress in terms of like, ‘oh ok I’m able to hang out with *Korean* Koreans *and* I can hang out with Korean Americans.’ So, I like to be like in the middle of both, where there’s no such thing as a language barrier, you can be two in one.” It was during this time that he returned to SAK where he volunteered, taught Sunday School, and took part in the Korean Youth Ministry group.

He went on to explain further how being able to speak Korean allowed him to grow relationships with younger Korean immigrants as well as American-born Koreans. He said: “Once you know how to be in both [groups], in terms of being able to communicate with both, hang out with both– that really spearheaded my [ethnic] foundation even more. Anyone can be born here and be like ‘oh I’m American’ so it’s just a label. Being Korean, you cannot change your ethnicity.” His ability to bridge linguistic and cultural divides allowed him to forge meaningful connections with both younger immigrants and American-born Koreans, enriching his ethnic foundation. From his inconsistent attendance during adolescence to his active engagement in SAK’s various ministries during college, Stephen’s journey illustrates the enduring significance of ethnicity in all its different textures and tones when creating community. For Stephen, the diverse ways in which his peers at SAK exhibited and connected with their Koreanness suggested how individuals expressed their Korean identity was contextual, even if ethnicity itself was immutable.

Both Alisa and Stephen navigated their Korean identity alongside other cultural influences, recognizing the complexities of their multicultural heritage. Through this lens, the church became a space where they could explore and celebrate their multifaceted identity, fostering a sense of inclusivity and belonging that transcends traditional boundaries of ethnicity

and nationality. Contrary to the elders' more homogenous perception of the church community, prioritizing religious over ethnic aspects in our conversations, second-generation individuals openly appreciated the diversity within their Korean community, recognizing the diverse permutations of their cultural heritage.

### ***Generational Anchors***

The interviews revealed the multitude of ways the experiences of previous generations within one's family can influence how second-generation Koreans were brought up to understand and interact with their ethnic identity. For Stephen, being raised primarily by his maternal grandmother while his parents worked long hours, left an impression. He described her as a true pillar, and said she created a monocultural environment within the house: "I think my grandma would be the overarching theme of the interview, because she was the one who cemented the [Korean] culture and how I grew up to be a Korean American... She helped me not to forget what my identity is." Having a close relationship to an elder had a strong impact when it came to understanding and connecting to ethnic identity. Alisa and Stephen grew up with their grandparents having an active role in their lives, Stephen having lived with his maternal grandmother in the house until adulthood. For some second-generation Korean Americans, grandparents became synonymous with home and ethnic culture, especially when they served as primary caretakers or lived with their grandchildren, as observed with Alisa, Stephen, and me. In such cases, grandparents played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural identity of the younger generation, providing a sense of continuity and connection to their Korean heritage.

In this study, elders and grandparents serve as the locus of identity for second-generation Korean Americans. Three out of the four second-generation interviewees, along with myself, are

children and grandchildren of two generations of immigrants. Our grandparents, the oldest members of the family with the deepest ties to the homeland, became anchors for ethnic identity. Grandparents played a central role in transmitting cultural heritage and values to the younger generation, emphasizing the primacy of intergenerational dynamics within the household in shaping ethnic identity. All elder interviewees immigrated alongside their children as well, contributing to the population of families with two generations of first-generation immigrants. Interestingly there was a tendency to invisibilize the parents' generation, as Korean Americans located their identity primarily through their elders and grandparents.

In extreme circumstances, grandparents served as the pillars of ethnic culture due to unique factors. In Matthew's case, his father's adoption by a white family during his middle school years disrupted his connection to his Korean roots. It was not until his twenties that his father was able to reconnect with his birth family and establish a relationship with them. Matthew recalls the endless stories his father used to tell him growing up: "My dad would tell me a lot of stories, about the history of our family. Here's what your great grandfather did, here's what happened during the Korean war, this is the type of man your grandpa is and stuff like that. How my grandpa grew up, and older ancestors, it's to hear about these Korean people, like where your parents come from, it's like, I've got a rich history. I think that it was, probably outside of church, the biggest [influence] for me."

In Matthew's case, grandparents proved to be crucial figures in preserving and transmitting ethnic culture, serving as a link to the family's Korean heritage despite the challenges posed by adoption and disconnection. Matthew shared: "My [paternal] grandparents had flown in from Korea and helped raise me for 6 or 8 months or so. And so, I learned Korean, growing up with them, ever since I was very young. It's interesting because – I don't know, it's

like I obviously didn't see them as often. I saw them very young, and then maybe once again, in early elementary school when I was a kid, when I graduated high school, and saw them maybe this past year. But I've always thought of them as my real, like closest grandparents. And you know, that could be wrong it could be right, whatever it is. But when I think about my dad's adopted parents versus his genetic parents, I think about my grandparents in Korea, it's like I have more love for them. I feel a bigger sense of family for my grandparents in Korea, even though I see my grandparents in Pennsylvania [every year].”

Despite infrequent physical contact, his Korean grandparents served a primary role during his formative years, instilling in him a deep sense of family and identity through language and a shared ethnicity, coupled with his father's consistent retelling of stories about Matthew's Korean grandparents. This experience illuminated the profound impact of intergenerational relationships in shaping the Koreanness of the second-generation for Matthew. It illustrated how familial ties transcend geographical distance and serve as enduring anchors of cultural identity.

The contrast between the first-generation elders and second-generation Korean Americans lie in how they navigate their cultural identity and the centrality of their Koreanness. For elders, embodying culture often means relocating to be with peers and fellow Koreans, where their Koreanness is closely linked to their physical surroundings. In contrast, for the second-generation Korean Americans, their identity is shaped more by generational ties than specific places. Their Koreanness is not tied to the physical spaces for social interaction but rather to the intergenerational relationships that preserve and transmit cultural heritage across generations.

## ***Conclusion***

The interviews with second-generation Korean Americans highlight the enduring influence of Korean cuisine in preserving cultural identity. despite challenges, their culinary journey reflects a creative effort to recreate authentic flavors, showcasing the evolving nature of their heritage. The church emerged as a vital space for connecting with ethnic culture and community, fostering a nuanced understanding of bicultural identity. through activities like altar service and Korean school, they engaged with Korean heritage, forming bonds with peers who shared similar experiences. Intergenerational relationships, particularly with grandparents, profoundly influence the ethnic identity of second-generation Korean Americans. Elders transmit cultural heritage and practices to the next generation, ensuring the continuation of their ethnic legacy and family history, while Korean Americans perceive their grandparents as the cornerstone, or locus of their ethnic identity, supporting each other across generations to navigate and uphold cultural identity within the diaspora.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Policy Implications

In *Palate and Place*, I explored the dynamics of ethnic identity and cultural practices among first- and second-generation Koreans in Montgomery County, Maryland, with a particular focus on the significance of third spaces and food-related themes and practices. Through semi-structured interviews with first-generation Korean elders and second-generation Korean Americans from Saint Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church (SAK), this research illuminated how these individuals negotiate, express, and sustain their ethnic identity across generations within these contexts. By examining food cultivation, consumption, and preparation, as well as the utilization of third spaces such as community gardens and religious institutions, this study sought to elucidate the multifaceted ways in which Koreans navigate their cultural heritage in a diasporic setting.

The first-generation Korean elders navigate a complex balance between adapting to western society and preserving their Korean heritage. They brought a taste of Korea to their new surroundings by cultivating cultural foods and nurturing memories of their homeland on new soil. Korean elders discussed the inheritance of taste palates within their families, suggesting a continuity of culinary preferences, specifically concerning Korean cuisine, across generations. By cultivating, consuming, and preparing traditional foods, elders have modified the landscape to fit their needs, preserving and passing on cultural practices and ethnic identity through food. The community garden at SAK offered elders a venue to engage in cultural practices by cultivating culturally significant foods. These foods were later sold or distributed within the church community for fundraising purposes, thereby also transmitting ethnic identity through food to the broader church community.

The interviews with second-generation Korean Americans revealed complexities in passing down recipes and cooking skills. Participants shared challenges in the preparation of dishes cooked by their elders, highlighting the absence of hands-on learning experiences. Their attempts to replicate these foods and the sense of home they represent as adults often fall short of childhood memories. Anthropologist David Sutton (2001), in his study of the people on the Greek island of Kalymnos, discusses how reliance on alternative methods of learning detracts from the hands-on experience and embodiment of knowledge that typically characterizes cooking. The gardening and cooking techniques and practices passed down from grandparents to parents, who are also first-generation Koreans, have not been transmitted to the second-generation. Their perception of culture through food primarily centered on enjoying Korean cuisine at home. The nostalgic sensory aspect of food-related memories drove them to attempt to replicate cultural practices in order to recreate the feeling of “home,” despite lacking the acquired embodied knowledge.

**Policy implication:**

Promote programs that support the transfer of knowledge between generations within diasporic communities. Such programs could focus on preserving culinary traditions and skills by facilitating hands-on learning experiences between first-generation elders and second-generation individuals. By providing opportunities for direct instruction and practice, these programs can help bridge the gap between generations and ensure the continued transmission of cultural practices and ethnic identity through food. Investment in spaces that celebrate culturally diverse food preferences promotes cultural preservation and social unity for members of the diaspora and the broader community. Intergenerational programming can facilitate the sharing of

knowledge, resources, and skills across generations, fostering mutually beneficial relationships within communities (Tompkins 2007).

One model that aligns closely with the outlined principles is Oldways, a nonprofit organization based in Boston. They host heritage cooking classes tailored specifically for members of African and Latin American communities. These classes not only emphasize the importance of healthy eating but also provide a framework rooted in traditional culinary practices and palates (Oldways n.d.). Oldways facilitates hands-on learning experiences that promote the transfer of culinary knowledge and skills within a cultural context. Similarly, organizations like Migrateful in London offer cooking classes taught by refugees and migrants, providing a platform for these individuals to celebrate their cultural heritage through food while also fostering integration and promoting unity within their communities (Migrateful n.d.). Such initiatives not only preserve culinary traditions but also serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation, social cohesion, and exchange.

The church served as a vital space for elders to engage in community and faith with fellow Koreans, offering a sense of solace and socialization alongside spiritual fulfillment. The elders' formation of community through faith seemed to inherently incorporate ethnicity, despite their remarks of not actively pursuing it. These remarks emphasized the implicit significance of the church as central for community interaction, highlighting the vital role of religious spaces in nurturing social connections for immigrant populations. Within the church space, the elders can practice their culture almost effortlessly, as the homogeneity of the ethnic community within the church's confines allows them to prioritize their faith.

Unlike the elders, the second-generation Korean Americans demonstrated a heightened awareness of the church's ethnic dimension, navigating it through a multicultural lens. The church provided them with a multifaceted environment to explore their Korean identity. Faith-based activities such as altar service, Sunday school, youth ministry, and extracurricular activities like the youth orchestra served as avenues for cultural understanding within the church space, facilitated by the presence of fellow Koreans Americans. Hall describes the 'hybridity' of diasporic individuals, experiencing a constant reinventing and mixing of identities (2012). The second-generation interviewees acknowledged and valued the diverse expressions of Korean identity present among their peers and social circles, embracing the multifaceted ways they practice and understand culture as bicultural individuals. In contrast to the elders, for the second-generation interviewees, the ethnic community took precedence in their church experience. All these experiences underscore the intrinsic entanglement of faith and ethnicity within community formation for both the first- and second-generation participants, whether intentional or not, highlighting the role of religious spaces in nurturing social bonds for diasporic populations.

**Policy implication:**

Religious institutions should be recognized and supported as crucial community hubs for immigrant populations. Policymakers could prioritize initiatives that foster intercultural understanding within these spaces, promoting inclusivity and appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds. By acknowledging and leveraging the ethnic dimension of religious spaces, policymakers can facilitate the integration and socialization of diasporic communities, thereby strengthening social bonds and promoting overall well-being. Recognizing the significance of these social identities and communities within immigrant churches marks the initial stride

towards developing more impactful and pertinent resources. Navigating the separation of church and state can be delicate in such cases, yet the ethnic dimension within these religious institutions persists beyond matters of faith, despite the language used by the elders. When thinking of the political landscape, language can be used that prioritizes the cultural aspect of partnerships over religious affiliations.

The Diocese of Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO) in Austin, Texas, provides a clear leveraging of religious institutions as essential community hubs for immigrant populations. By focusing on supporting diasporic church communities and partnering with local networks, C4SO aims to facilitate the integration of immigrant populations into the broader community (C4SO 2020). The Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, formerly known as the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) established in 2001 by George W. Bush, has the opportunity to promote intercultural understanding and inclusivity within religious spaces through partnerships within diasporic networks (Levin 2014). Recognizing the ethnic dimension of these communities and utilizing them as platforms for integration can strengthen social bonds and enhance the well-being of immigrant populations.

In my conversations with the elders, it became evident that the spatialization of community for first-generation elders is largely contingent on their residential location, especially in proximity to the church and other members of the Korean community. Their experiences underlined the significance of being near their ethnic community as they aged, especially for engaging in religious and social activities, illustrating the increasing importance of spatial proximity in navigating age-related spatial constraints.

Second-generation individuals anchored their identity in generational ties rather than physical spaces. The Korean American interviewees highlighted how the experiences of their elders shaped their own sense of ethnic identity, with grandparents serving as the focal point of Korean identity for them. Their Koreanness is not bound to physical spaces but resides within the people and intergenerational relationships that uphold and transmit cultural heritage and traditions.

**Policy implication:**

Community development initiatives that enhance social connections and support networks for aging immigrant populations should be prioritized and expanded. Policymakers could focus on creating age-friendly environments that facilitate continued engagement in religious and social activities within ethnic communities. Ethnic spaces will remain vital for the next generation of Korean American elders, as noted by second-generation interviewees expressing difficulty in finding ethnic community beyond the church and their residential areas, especially as they move away from their childhood homes. Additionally, there is a need to recognize and support intergenerational relationships as key components of cultural preservation and identity transmission, emphasizing the importance of family and community bonds in maintaining ethnic heritage across generations. Children raised in households and engaged in organizations where elements from their parents' or grandparents' home countries exist organically are not only socialized into the norms of their current country, but also those of their family's country of origin (Levitt 2009). Programming in spaces like the senior daycares mentioned by interviewees that involves younger generations can be beneficial in the preservation and transmittance of ethnic culture and identity.

An existing example that embodies similar principles is Link Generations in Bethesda, Maryland, an organization dedicated to educating middle and high school students about aging through intergenerational programming (Link Generations 2023). Similarly, the Korean senior daycares attended by the Korean elders can adopt similar programming by involving younger, second-generation Korean Americans. By expanding their activities to include younger individuals and also potentially extending their services to residential spaces to accommodate mobility limitations, these daycares can further enhance intergenerational relationships and support networks for aging immigrant populations. By fostering connections between different age groups within ethnic communities, such initiatives not only promote social engagement but also contribute to the preservation and transmission of ethnic culture and identity across generations.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through my research, I have gained valuable insights into how Korean immigrants and their descendants navigate ethnic identity, community formation, and cultural practices within the diaspora context. I have discovered the intricate ways in which cultural heritage is passed down across generations, the importance of communal spaces such as churches, and the complexities involved in negotiating identity among different age groups. Additionally, my findings have deepened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Korean Americans in preserving and expressing their cultural heritage within diverse social contexts.

While my research provides valuable insights into the experiences of first- and second-generation Koreans in Montgomery County, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the geographic scope of the study. Despite Montgomery County being a significant area of settlement for Korean Americans, not all members of the church community are exclusively from this location, which may impact the generalizability of the findings to other diasporic communities. Additionally, the participant pool was limited and guided by personal connections or word of mouth, potentially introducing bias and restricting the diversity of perspectives represented in the study. Accessing certain participants, particularly elders, proved challenging due to their limited availability and avenues for communication. Time constraints associated with completing a thesis project also imposed limitations on the depth and breadth of data collection and analysis.

Moving forward, future research endeavors can address the invisibilization of the parents' generation within the participant pool and in conversations with second-generation Korean Americans. Understanding why the parents were not mentioned more prominently when discussing cultural continuity or ethnic identity, despite also being first-generation immigrants

like the grandparents, could provide valuable insights into intergenerational dynamics and perceptions within Korean diasporic communities. Incorporating the perspectives of 1.5-generation Koreans, like my own mother, who immigrated at a young age and straddle the line between first and second generations, would enrich the discussion by offering nuanced insights into the complexities of identity formation and cultural adaptation. Including younger immigrants in future studies would further broaden perspectives and shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by newer members of the diaspora. By expanding the scope of research to encompass an even more diverse range of experiences and generational perspectives, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of diasporic communities and their evolving identities.

### *Epilogue*

As I reflect on this journey's culmination, a heartwarming moment stands out, embodying intergenerational connection and unwavering support. On the day of my thesis presentation, my grandmother, a crucial part of this research, took a simple yet heartfelt act of support. Weeks prior, she had marked down the exact date and time of my presentation, planning to pray the rosary for my success from seven hours away in her Maryland apartment. In doing so, she infused her prayers with an earnest plea for my success, a testament to her unyielding belief in me, her faith, and her unwavering support throughout this endeavor. This gesture not only reflects the depth of our bond but also underscores the profound impact of familial ties, leaving a legacy of love and encouragement that transcends generations. As I reflect on this touching gesture, I am filled with gratitude for the role my grandmother has played in shaping my journey.

# Appendix

## *Interview Guide*

1. Describe your family and the place where you grew up.
2. What sorts of meals did you and your family eat growing up?
  - a. What meals were your favorite?
  - b. Who helped to prepare these meals?
3. What sorts of meals do you eat now?
  - a. How has the food you eat changed?
  - b. Has the way your family gathers for meals changed?
4. How do you define culture as a Korean?
  - a. What role does Korean culture play in your daily life?
  - b. In what ways do you keep your culture alive?
5. In what ways do you experience ethnic community?
  - a. What places or events make you feel part of your ethnic community?
  - b. Who contributes to your sense of belonging?
6. What was your experience like attending church?
  - a. Did you find a sense of community while attending church?
  - b. What aspects of attending church were most impactful to you?

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