

Oh, Joong-Hwan (2016) *Immigration and Social Capital in the Age of Social Media: American Social Institutions and a Korean-American Women's Online Community*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books

Review by Lin HSIEN-MING

Before articulating his research questions and theoretical framework, the author discusses the reasons for conducting this research of Korean-American women. Until 2010, there are more than 1.7 million Korean immigrants residing in the United States. As a result, the author is curious about how these Korean immigrants overcome the obstacles in their migration settle down processes? And what is the role of social network site play during migration processes?

Due to the immigrants' lack of knowledge about the social institutions in the host country, they usually encounter huge challenges regarding how to collect correct information and how to deal with the problems of these social institutions. The book focuses on several social institutions related to migration matters including legal permanent resident procedures, welfare applications, education opportunities, housing facilities, and financial arrangements.

The author shows that when Korean immigrants face obstacles related to the relevant social institutions. Korean female immigrants typically play a significant role of collecting information and helping relatives to cope with such problems. When facing such problems, the author found that Korean female immigrants accustomed to gathering information and requesting for help on the ethnic network sites namely as "Miss USA". By examining this virtual ethnic community, the author shows that how this virtual community can serve as the information and resource centers to help immigrants get the institutional guidance and emotional supports for their everyday life.

Apart from these research questions and curiosities, the author adopts Social Capital as the theoretical framework. According to the theory, social capital has been defined as resources and capacities which embedded in the individual's

social networks. Moreover, the accumulation of social capital mainly depends on the social networks' establishment. If someone has more heterogeneous social networks, then he/she may have more opportunities to gain the network resources and social capital than the people who have the homogeneous one. The scholars categorize two different types of social networks. The first type is "weak ties" social network, which consists of the people who don't have many and highly interaction frequencies with us. The second type is "strong ties" social network, which consists of the people who have highly interaction frequencies and close intimacy with us, for example, our parents, family, good friends and so on. The weak tie social networks can help people to acquire "bridging social capital", which could assist people to obtain more different resources, information, and supports via the interpersonal relations. On the other hand, strong tie social networks help people to gain "bonding social capital", which could help people to obtain the emotional support from their relatives and close friends.

In this book, the author wants to know whether this virtual community usage experiences would help immigrants to maintain their interpersonal relationships, and gain social capital? By analyzing the posts of questions and answers on the board of "Life Q&A" on the Missy USA website. The author argues that this ethnic virtual community serves as an important channel for Korean immigrants to improve their understanding of the rules and social institutions in United State. In addition, the author also demonstrates that this virtual community also provides Korean immigrants with the emotional support. From chapter two to six, the author chose different social institutions to examine the arguments of the book.

In chapter two, the author chose the institutions which are related to the regulations of getting legal permanent resident status and naturalization procedures. When the immigrants arrived in the host country, the first and foremost thing to consider is how to get the legal status, which is not only related to how long the immigrants can stay, but also influences how many social welfare resources they could apply. As a result, in chapter three, the author chose some welfare institutions to exam the main arguments of the book. When immigrants face different life challenges during their settlement process, they would like to apply for the social welfare from the government. In this chapter, the author juxtaposed five types of welfare institutions, which are most important for the immigrant, as follow: unemployment insurance, social security, Medicaid program,



food assistance, and public housing. The rules, application procedures, and qualification conditions of these social welfare institutions may be different across states and local areas in the US. Therefore, how to understand well of these practical issues across the different area in the US could be one of the major challenges for most of the immigrants. Moreover, after several years of living in the host country, some of the immigrants would have their own children; as a result, the immigrant may have to deal with the problems related to the educational issues. For the educational issues, the parents and children usually should face the problems for registration procedures, course selection, applying for scholarship or loans, and so on. How to let the children get into a well-reputation school is one of the most important problems of the immigrant family; as a result, the author chooses education institutions to be analyzed in chapter four.

In addition to the social institutions mentioned above, after the immigrants have earned more money and fortune by several years of hard working, some of them may want to have their own house or at least rent a temporary house to make their family lives more stable. Under these circumstances, these immigrants may have to face some practical issues related to the housing matters: for example, home finance, home-buying process, rental housing process and so on. So, the author analyzes the questions related to house institutions in chapter five. In chapter six, the author chooses the financial institutions including banking, insurance, and taxation to exam the arguments of the book.

To examine the arguments of the book, the author downloaded and analyzed the users' posted messages on the 'Missy USA' from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2012. The total number of messages in this period were 121,297 posts. However, the number of the posted messages were too large to analyze, the author just chose the messages which have more than 100 viewers to be analyzed. According to this selection standard, the final number of selected messages were 2,050 posts.

The author adopted traditional qualitative approach to conduct this research. After reviewing and examining all these posted messages, the author indicated that all these messages could be divided into two main functions: **institutional guides** and **emotional supports**.

In these two functions, the author further divided each of the function into different sub-functional types. For the institutional guides, the author indicated that the messages could be categorized in four different subgroups: information

describer, information analysts, information confirmer, and information advisors. The author believes that most of the messages could be fit into one of the subgroup. Moreover, some of the messages may be categorized into two or more subgroups. The book shows that different kinds of messages play significant roles of providing Korean immigrants useful social institutional information which could be helpful for the immigrants to deal with various practical problems during the settle down processes.

Based on the Social Capital theory, the author claims that by obtaining these useful institutional guidance messages, which provided from other anonymous and the unacquaintance members of the virtual community, facilitating the Korean immigrant obtain the bridging social capital. Furthermore, from the social network perspective, owing to these interactions with other unacquaintance members of the virtual community, the author indicated that this ethnic social network site also helps Korean immigrant to establish more complex weak ties relationships with other unknown online users.

The author discovers that the companions and encourages information are the two most frequently posted on the 'Missy USA' website. However, the criticism messages are rarely posted in this virtual community. In other words, most of the emotional messages posted on this social network site are positive emotional supports to the members. In this sense, the author deems that such kind of emotional support from other unacquaintance members could foster the Korean immigrant to gain the **bonding social capital**.

The main contribution of this book is to show how the ethnic social network site could play an important role of providing the institutional information and emotional support for the immigrants to overcome the everyday life problems. Besides, this book also demonstrated the possibility of the ethnic virtual community could be a place which helping the users create different kind of social network ties and obtain social capitals on the internet.

There is a weakness of the book is the method of data collection. The author wishes to show a positive relation between the social network site usage and social capital accumulation; however, the evidence given in the book is not strong enough, as the author merely analyzes messages posted on the website.

The author did not interview the users of the virtual community to further explore how the online information could really help the Korean migrants to overcome the challenges and facilitate them to build more divergent interpersonal



relationships in their everyday life during the processes of immigration in the host country. If the author could have conducted the interview with these online community users, in so doing, the author could have provided stronger evidence to verify the effects and functions of virtual community and the capacity of helping immigrant to acquire the social capital. The book without providing other kinds of evidence, as a result, the readers cannot know that whether these posted messages on the virtual community could have the real capacity to help Korean immigrant to accumulate the bridging and bonding social capital or not?