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Korean Americans, the Protestant Christian Church, and the Future of Asian American LGBTQ Rights

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the Korean American Protestant Christian church and their past, present, and future support for LGBTQ rights. It explores both first-generation Korean American immigrants and their children, native-born second-generation Korean Americans. Specifically, it recounts the process of emigration for many first-generation Korean American immigrants and how it carried over the conservative, traditionalist, and religious frameworks that contribute to stonewalling future LGBTQ equality rights. Additionally, this paper addresses second-generation Korean Americans swinging between ideologies and social underpinnings of the older generation and a new “American” identity. By recounting Korean immigration to the United States, the role of the Protestant Christian church to these newly immigrated Koreans, and the influence of the Korean American Protestant Christian church in previous LGBTQ-related battles, this paper seeks to understand Korean Americans Protestant Christian attitudes regarding future LGBTQ issues.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are always two sides to a claim. The claim here is that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) individuals living in the United States should have the same rights as heterosexual individuals.²

On one side of this claim is the LGBTQ community. On the other side, it is hard to say exactly who or what exists. This is not because the other side does not have a name. Rather, the other side interchanges between multiple communities: the conservatives, the traditionalists, and the religious, to name a few. Historically, these communities have attempted, with at times success, to stifle LGBTQ rights. The very fact that marriage was only recently and finally afforded to same sex couples is a testament to the successful efforts, by these communities, to prevent LGBTQ people from enjoying equal rights. To continuously strive for equality is to understand who or what stands between basic civil rights and the LGBTQ community who has been fervently fighting for these rights.

This paper focuses on the Protestant Christian church. Specifically, the Korean American Protestant Christian church.³ Though this community is not entirely responsible for stonewalling LGBTQ rights, it is one of the larger communities within the opposition. Korean Americans, in fact, make up one of the largest, if not the largest, community of Protestant Christians among any Asian American community currently in the United States.⁴ Specifically, Korean Americans represent that largest portion of the American Evangelical Protestant community.⁵

In the current American landscape, the Korean American Protestant community is represented by two groups: the first-generation Korean American immigrants and their children, native-born second-generation Korean Americans. The former brought remnants of Christianity from their homeland during the process of emigration. First-generation Korean American immigrants likely fit squarely within the conservative, traditionalist, and religious framework of those preventing equal LGBTQ

2. "LGBTQ" is used here to refer to the larger community of non-heterosexual individuals. The LGBTQ community broadly encompasses individuals who identify as questioning, intersex, allies, asexual, pansexual, and two-spirits, to name a few. This paper does not claim any experience as specific to individuals not included within the named LGBTQ spectrum.

3. Korean American Protestant Christian churches are predominantly Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Evangelicals. Though there are nuances with each denomination, for the purposes of this paper, the Korean American Protestant Christian church will be referred generally.

4. CARY FUNK ET AL., ASIAN AMERICANS: A MOSAIC OF FAITHS (Pew Res. Cent.'s Forum on Religion & Pub. Life, July 19, 2012).

5. *Id.*

rights. However, as immigration from Korea slowly declines, their hold on Korean American society and, in turn, politics wane slowly.⁶

The latter group, the second-generation Korean American, is often engaged in what is known as “the pendulum swing.”⁷ This generation swings between ideologies and social underpinnings of the older generation and a new “American” identity. At a certain point, however, the pendulum will eventually settle. The exact location it settles is most critical for the future of LGBTQ rights.

This paper seeks to analyze the Korean American Protestant Christian’s future engagement as it pertains to LGBTQ rights; specifically, as it pertains to Asian American LGBTQ rights. By recounting Korean immigration to the United States, the role of the Protestant Christian church to these newly immigrated Koreans, and the influence of the Korean American Protestant Christian church in previous LGBTQ-related battles, this paper seeks to understand Korean Americans Protestant Christian attitudes regarding future LGBTQ issues.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Koreans immigration to the United States did not significantly occur until after 1965. Prior to that, Koreans did not constitute a significant portion of overall Asians immigrating to the United States. In fact, it was not until the late 1800s when Koreans started immigrating to the United States.⁸ In context, immigration from Asian countries to the United States can be traced as early as the 1700s with a small portion traceable even earlier than that.⁹ Korean immigration to the United States is a relatively new phenomenon.

Korean immigration to the United States is commonly divided into three waves: the First Wave (1903-50), the Second Wave (1951-64), and the Third Wave (post-1965).¹⁰ Prior to 1903, less than one hundred Koreans

6. “Korea” is used here to refer to individuals from South Korea. Though immigration from North Korea to the United States may be possible, it is safe to say that most, if not all, scholarly research of Korean immigration to the United States pertains to individuals from the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea.

7. Peter T. Cha, *Ethnic Identity Formation and Participation in Immigrant Churches*, in *KOREAN AM. & THEIR RELIGIONS* 154 (Kwang Chung Kim et al. eds. 2001).

8. LUCIANO MANGIAFICO, *CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS: PATTERNS OF FILIPINO, KOREAN, AND CHINESE SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES* 77 (Praeger Publishers, 1988).

9. William S. Bernard, *Immigration: History of U.S. Policy*, in *HARV. ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AM. ETHNIC GRP.* 486 (Oscar Handlin ed. 1980).

10. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *Korean American Religion in International Perspective*, in *KOREAN AMER. & THEIR RELIGIONS* 3 (Kwang Chung Kim et al. eds. 2001).

immigrated to the United States, most of which were students who eventually returned back to Korea.¹¹ Early immigration to the United States was greatly influenced by the desire to escape Japanese colonialism.¹² During 1895-1910, Korea suffered from a weak internal government while being slowly dominated by Japanese influence.¹³ After China lost the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, Japan formally annexed Korea as a colony and held control until 1945. During Japanese colonialism, Korea was depleted of its food crop and natural resources as a result of fueling a forced industrial revolution.¹⁴ Additionally, Koreans were denied formal education and restricted from labor and job opportunities beyond menial tasks.¹⁵ As conditions became increasingly worse for Koreans, liberation and independence became increasingly desirable. As a result, immigration to the United States stood at the forefront of the suffering Korean people as a land of opportunity and independence.

The first two waves of Korean immigration brought a relatively small group of Koreans into the United States. The First Wave of Korean immigrants arrived in Hawaii on January 13, 1903.¹⁶ This group consisted of less than one hundred individuals, primarily men, who were recruited to labor in the sugar plantations.¹⁷ By May 1905, Korea sent nearly 7,000 individuals to Hawaii, still mostly men.¹⁸ By the end of 1905, Korea ceased immigration to Hawaii due to complaints surrounding harsh labor practices.¹⁹ The Korean government under Japanese colonialism additionally prohibited immigration to Hawaii primarily to encourage Japanese labor while curbing Korean independence and strengthening Japanese control.²⁰ During this time, many Korean laborers in Hawaii fled to the United States mainland seeking better economic prospects in railroad construction, fisheries and mines.²¹ In 1907, all immigration stopped due to an amendment to the 1907 Immigration Act which gave President Theodore Roosevelt the

11. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8.

12. Jane Hong, *The Origins and Construction of Korean America: Immigration before 1965*, in A COMPANION TO KOREAN AM. STUD. 3 (Rachel Miyung Joo & Shelley Lee, eds. 2018).

13. Kevin Y. Kim, *Empire, War, Globalization, and Korean America*, in A COMPANION TO KOREAN AM. STUD. 52 (Rachel Miyung Joo & Shelley Lee, eds. 2018).

14. GARY Y. OKIHIRO, THE COLUMBIA GUIDE TO ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY 38 (Columbia University Press, 2001).

15. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 14.

16. *Id.* at 78.

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

20. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 9.

21. Lee Houchins & Chang-su Houchins, *The Korean Experience in America, 1903-1924*, 43 PAC. HIST. REV. 555 (University of California Press, 1974).

power to exclude Koreans from migrating from Hawaii to the United States mainland.²²

Commonly known as the “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” President Roosevelt agreed with the Japanese government to restrict further labor migration from Korea to the United States.²³ In 1907, Secretary of State, Elihu Root, further declared that Korean passports will no longer be recognized in the United States; only passports issued by the Japanese Foreign Office would be recognized.²⁴ By 1917, the Immigration Act of 1917 barred entry to West, South, and Southeast Asians.²⁵ Then in 1924, the Immigration Act of 1924 completely barred immigration from all Asian countries, including Korea.²⁶ The Act established a nationality quota based on two percent of the foreign-born individuals residing in the United States in 1890.²⁷ Because Koreans did not begin immigrating until the early 1900s, their immigration quota was incredibly small. By 1932, the population of Koreans in Hawaii dwindled to approximately 442 individuals.²⁸

In 1948, the newly minted Republic of Korea forbade immigration to the United States on the grounds that it needed the population for internal economic growth and imminent defense against the newly minted Democratic People’s Republic of Korea—North Korea.²⁹ It would take almost twenty years for immigration from Korea to the United States to start again. The Second Wave of Korean immigration was set off by the Korean War in the early 1950s.³⁰ Though immigration to the United States was still banned, Korean women (via marriage) and children (via adoption) found alternative methods of migration. Approximately 6,423 Korean women became “GI brides” to American soldiers.³¹ Approximately 5,348 orphaned Korean children were adopted by American families.³² Adoption migration can be traced back to Bertha and Harry Holt, two American Evangelical Christians that began an adoption service in 1955.³³ Lastly, around 5,000

22. *Id.* at 556.

23. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 14, at 182.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 19.

26. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10.

27. RONALD TAKAKI, STRANGERS FROM A DIFFERENT SHORE 209 (Penguin Books, 1989).

28. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8, at 78.

29. *Id.* at 81.

30. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10.

31. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10.

32. *Id.*

33. Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora and the Korean War*, 8 J. OF ASIAN AM. STUD. 277, 279 (John Hopkins University Press, 2005). Bertha and Harry Holt began the adoption service after seeing dozens of abandoned babies in South Korea. *Id.* A year earlier, the South Korean government created an agency to place Korean children for

individuals came to the United States either as refugees or students.³⁴ Though little is known about these particular students, American missionaries had an active role in recruiting these students and sending them to the United States in hopes of spreading Christianity.³⁵

The Third Wave of Korean immigration started with the abolishment of the 1924 Immigration Act by means of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, commonly known as the Hart-Cellar Act.³⁶ Prior to that, Korea, in 1962, formally established the Office of Emigration within its Department of Health.³⁷ Between the new political changes and Korea's policy of "forced modernization" under President Park Chung Hee's dictatorial regime, the floodgates for Korean immigration to the United States were finally wide open.³⁸ By the end of the 1960s, immigration to the United States increased almost fivefold; by the end of the 1970s, it would increase almost eight fold.³⁹ Though a singular reason for immigrating out of Korea does not necessarily exist, the lack of economic opportunities for impoverished rural, middle-class population held significant weight.⁴⁰ Koreans who subsequently came to the United States, thus, were disproportionately middle class.⁴¹ Others came into the United States under family reunification provision or "kinship-based chain migration."⁴² As of 2014, Korean immigrants make up around 8.5% of the overall Asian immigrant population in the United States.⁴³ However, since 2010, Korean immigration to the United States have been steadily waning.⁴⁴ This decrease in migration can be attributed to the existence of fewer incentives to immigrate to the United States.⁴⁵ Improved economic and political conditions in South Korea have effectively slowed down immigration; the South Korean government, in fact, has been attempting to

oversea adoption. *Id.*

34. Kwang Chung Kim et al, *supra* note 10.

35. Rebecca Y. Kim, *Migration and Conversion of Korean American Christians*, in THE OXFORD HANDBK. OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS 193 (Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian eds., 2014).

36. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 10.

37. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8, at 81.

38. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 10.

39. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8, at 80 (individuals immigrating from Korea to the United States, 1950s: 6,231, 1960s: 34,526, 1970s: 267,638).

40. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 10.

41. *Id.* at 11.

42. *Id.* at 13.

43. Jie Zong & Jeanne Batalova, *Asian Immigrants in the United States*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (Jan. 6, 2016) <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/asian-immigrants-united-states>.

44. Allison O'Connor & Jeanne Batalova, *Korean Immigrants in the United States*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (Apr. 10, 2019) <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/korean-immigrants-united-states>.

45. *Id.*

attract return migration.⁴⁶

As of 2017, there are approximately 1,887,914 Korean-identified individuals living in the United States making them the fifth largest ethnically Asian community.⁴⁷ The social characteristics of Korean Americans have varied throughout time, though, a commitment to education, a drive for economic achievement, and adherence to a strong work ethic has been consistently used to describe this community.⁴⁸ Indeed, these characteristics may be shared among many Korean individuals; however, characteristics defining an entire ethnic group is rarely definitive. There is, however, one characteristic that surely defines the Korean American community—that characteristic is their religion. Specifically, their identity as Protestant Christians.

III. THE MAKINGS OF A KOREAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN

Korean immigrants establishing and attending churches can be traced to the First Wave of immigration to Hawaii.⁴⁹ Protestant Christian missionaries had a significant influence in sending some of the earliest Koreans to the United States.⁵⁰ Within the first few years of settling in Hawaii, seven churches were established near the Hawaiian plantations.⁵¹ Korean churches were even found on the United States mainland as early as October 1905.⁵²

But why was the Protestant Christian church so prevalent in the Korean American community? Part of this answer lies within the historical religious makeup of Korea prior to immigration to the United States. The other part of this answer lies within the significance of the Protestant Christian church's influence on the early immigrant community.

Historically, modernization brought Christianity to the Korean peninsula.⁵³ Prior to the introduction of Christianity, religious Koreans practiced a mix of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism.⁵⁴ When the

46. *Id.*

47. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, ASIAN ALONE OR IN ANY COMBINATION BY SELECTED GROUPS (2017) <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml>.

48. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8, at 83.

49. *Id.* at 79. “No sooner had the first group of immigrants arrived in HI than they organized their own churches, where they regularly held services.” *Id.*; *see also*, Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 9.

50. MANGIAFICO, *supra* note 8, at 77-78.

51. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 9.

52. *Id.* (Korean Methodist Church of San Francisco held its first service in October 1905).

53. *Id.* at 7.

54. *Id.* at 6.

Korean government entered into a formal treaty with the United States in 1882, it opened its doors to American, Canadian, and Australian Protestant missionaries.⁵⁵ Missionaries quickly became confidants to Korean kings and queens, thus, allowing them to open Western-type schools and hospitals.⁵⁶ These schools were responsible to the growing class of reformist politicians that would eventually shape modern Korea.⁵⁷ Additionally, these missionaries practiced reaching out to lower class individuals and communities with love and care, a type of interaction that was mostly foreign to Koreans.⁵⁸ The mix of compassion, education, and modern healing all led to a powerful relationship between Protestant missionaries and the Korean people.

These Protestant missionaries were integral in sending Korean laborers during early immigration to Hawaii.⁵⁹ Many new converts were told that Hawaii represented a “haven of peace and plenty.”⁶⁰ This steady influence from the Protestant missionaries, along with the general lack of available work due to Japanese colonialism, paved the way for early Korean immigration to the United States. Protestant Christianity was ultimately seen as a “positive, modernizing force” by Koreans.⁶¹

Christianity was additionally attributed as a “force of national liberation.”⁶² When the United States finally abolished the bar of Asian immigrations in 1965, Korea shifted to an export-orientated economy.⁶³ During this time, Koreans saw the United States as a liberator from Japanese colonialism, a savior of the Korean War, and a symbol of a modern Christian nation.⁶⁴ Protestant Christianity thus became a significant force behind Korean modernization and a bridge to the United States. Currently, around thirty percent of Koreans in South Korea identify as Protestant Christian, making it the largest religious group in South Korea.⁶⁵

Protestant Christians in Korea have always been disproportionately represented by the middle class.⁶⁶ This was true even when Koreans started to immigrate more frequently post-1965. As mentioned above, immigration to the United States attracted mostly middle-class individuals seeking better

55. *Id.* at 7.

56. MICHAEL BREEN, *THE NEW KOREANS* 67 (St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. TAKAKI, *supra* note 27, at 54.

60. TAKAKI, *supra* note 27.

61. *Id.*

62. *Id.*

63. Jeeyun Lee, *Toward a Queer Korean American Diasporic History*, in *Q & A: QUEER IN ASIAN AM.* 188 (David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom eds., 1998).

64. *Id.* at 190.

65. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 9.

66. Jeeyun Lee, *supra* note 63, at 195.

economic opportunities. Because a majority of middle-class Koreans were Protestant Christians, almost half of the Korean immigrant community in the United States identified as Protestant Christians.⁶⁷ The Korean middle-class community further brought a substantial number of professionals and highly educated individuals.⁶⁸ This paved way for an increase in business enclaves in the United States upon arrival.⁶⁹ Because a large group of Korean immigrants were previously middle-class, this implicated a certain class privilege within general American society. It is reasonable to see that Korean immigrants were labeled as “hard workers” and “model minorities” with their relatively successful existence within the middle class. However, this was only because they were already part of the middle-class in Korea.

Visa programs, such as the R-1 Religious Worker visa, provided Korean pastors and church employees an additional avenue of migration.⁷⁰ The other half of Korean immigrants that were not Protestant Christian prior to arriving in the United States eventually became Protestant Christians because the church satisfied important social and communal desires.⁷¹

To many Korean immigrants, the church was more than a place of worship. Churches were places of community building where immigrants could discuss a wide array of issues, everything from economic concerns, difficulties in being an ethnic minority, and, even, desires to break free from Japanese colonialism.⁷² Some Koreans even considered being fervently involved in the church as a means to directly oppose the Japanese because Japan had previously rejected Christianity.⁷³ Some churches even provided social aid, legal aid, and English language classes.⁷⁴ Being a part of a church was a way to establish community in a new land.⁷⁵ It was an opportunity to create a new ethnic identity with comrades reminiscent of the homeland. The church became a place where stranded Korean migrants could develop a new sense of national identity, both individually and collectively.⁷⁶

Needless to say, the church was “the center of the Korean community.”⁷⁷ It became a place where cultural and ethnic identity inevitably intertwined with religion and dogma. Korean Protestant churches

67. Rebecca Y. Kim, *supra* note 35, at 195.

68. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 14.

69. *Id.*

70. *Id.*

71. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 15.

72. TAKAKI, *supra* note 26, at 192.

73. BREEN, *supra* note 56, at 155.

74. *Id.*

75. *Id.* at 190.

76. TAKAKI, *supra* note 27, at 279.

77. *Id.* at 290.

became a beacon for psychological support and solace.⁷⁸ Some researchers even go as far to say that non-Christians were highly likely to stay in a Korean American church purely for its social benefits.⁷⁹ For the Korean immigrant, the Protestant Christian church was a place where neither cultural differences nor the lack of English proficiency mattered. This effectively created a strong, yet insular community of likeminded individuals. Korean immigrants did not need to seek other “American” churches.⁸⁰ Currently, Asian Americans are more religious than any other ethnic or racial group in the United States.⁸¹ Further, 61% of Korean Americans currently identify as Protestant Christian.⁸²

What happened to the other religions? Though Catholicism could be traced further back than Protestant Christianity, it is currently practiced by only 10% of Korean Americans.⁸³ Some have attributed this stunted growth to the lack of Korean language-based services. Catholics, unlike Protestants, did not switch from Latin-based services to Korean-based services until the late 1960s.⁸⁴ Buddhism is currently practiced by 25% of Koreans, in America it is practiced by only 5%.⁸⁵ Korean American Buddhism is not well supported due to the overall lack of organizational structure.⁸⁶ Additionally, most Buddhist monks are non-English speaking and not college educated making it difficult for popularity in the United States.⁸⁷ In terms of Confucianism and Shamanism, traces of these two religions still exist within the structure of Korean Protestant Christianity. Confucianism gave way to a highly patriarchal familial structure which exists within the contexts of the

78. Jerry Z. Park & Kenneth Vaughan, *Sacred Ethnic Boundaries: Korean American Religions*, in A COMPANION TO KOREAN AM. STUD. 390 (Rachel Miyung Joo & Shelley Sang-Hee Lee eds. 2018).

79. *Id.* at 392.

80. Kwang Chung Kim & Shin Kim, *The Ethnic Roles of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States*, in KOREAN AM. & THEIR RELIGIONS 75 (Kwang Chung Kim et al. eds. 2001).

81. FUNK ET AL., *supra* note 4 (Asian American church attendance is at 76% versus the 64% average).

82. *Id.*

83. *Id.*; see generally, Breen, *supra* note 56. Roman Catholicism can be traced in Korea back to 1784 to one scholar named Yi Seung-hun. *Id.* Yi was baptized by a French priest in Beijing and subsequently sought to convert his family and friends. *Id.* For the next eighty years, early converts were persecuted, even executed, by the King because Catholicism went against traditional Korean Confucianism practices. *Id.*

84. *Id.* at 68.

85. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 18.

86. Eui-Young Yu, *The Growth of Korean Buddhism in the United States, with Special Reference to Southern California*, in KOREAN AM. & THEIR RELIGIONS 225 (Kwang Chung Kim et al. eds. 2001)

87. *Id.*

Korean American family and church.⁸⁸ Shamanism gave way to a general belief of spiritual forces; a belief that perfectly fits within the boundaries of Christian doctrine.⁸⁹

IV. THE POLITICAL LEANINGS OF A KOREAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN

Alexis de Tocqueville, a 19th century French social observer said that “religious communities impart visions of the common good that support democratic participation.”⁹⁰ Since the establishment of the early Korean Americans Protestant Christian church, politics have been intrinsically intermeshed with religion; essentially, there was no separation of church and state.⁹¹ These churches have become far more than places of worship for the Korean community in the United States. For many, the Korean church will be an integral part of one’s life for a majority of his or her existence.⁹² It is inevitable that these institutions will more or less influence the way the Korean American community will act politically. Social motives, as a result of the church’s influence, carry strong religious undertones.⁹³

As mentioned above, around 61% of Korean Americans identify as Protestant Christians.⁹⁴ Among those, 76% attend church regularly; the average among all Americans who attend church regularly is 64%.⁹⁵ Further, a study in the early 2000s held that around 44% of Korean American Protestant Christians considered themselves to be “theologically conservative.”⁹⁶ This translates to Korean American Protestant Christians most likely prioritizing church and the teachings of the church over things like economic justice or even charity.⁹⁷ Simply put, the Korean American Protestant Christian community is one of the most religious community in the United States.

The Korean American Protestant Christian community tend to live their faith quietly.⁹⁸ Their quiet faith, however, oftentimes reflect politically

88. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 15.

89. Kwang Chung Kim et al., *supra* note 10, at 8.

90. ELAINE HOWARD ECKLUND, *KOREAN AMERICAN EVANGELICALS: NEW MODELS FOR CIVIC LIFE 6* (Oxford University Press, Inc 2006).

91. Rebecca Y. Kim, *supra* note 35, at 192.

92. ECKLUND, *supra* note 90, at 194.

93. Kwang Chung Kim & Shin Kim, *supra* note 80, at 88.

94. FUNK ET AL., *supra* note 4.

95. *Id.*

96. Kwang Chung Kim & Shin Kim, *supra* note 80, at 85 (33% considered themselves as moderates and 23% considered themselves as liberal).

97. *Id.* at 86.

98. *Id.* at 87.

conservative values. In the past, these “theologically conservative” Korean American Protestant Christians considered nontraditional sexual relations as evil behavior.⁹⁹ Further findings revealed a strong adherence to traditional views on marriage; marriage is reserved for one cis-gendered man to one cis-gendered woman.¹⁰⁰ A more recent study showed that around 65% of Asian American Protestant Christians discourage homosexuality.¹⁰¹

In a rare occurrence, the Korean American Protestant Christian community’s politically conservative values were, for once, openly seen in one of the earlier battles for same-sex marriage equality in the United States—the battle surrounding California’s Proposition 8 (Prop 8). On May 15, 2008, just a few months prior to Prop 8, the California Supreme Court deemed that a ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional.¹⁰² By June 2, 2008, the “California Marriage Protection Act,” Prop 8, qualified to appear on the November 4th ballot.¹⁰³ According to the California official voter information guide, Prop 8 would effectively eliminate the right for same-sex couples to marry by amending the California Constitution.¹⁰⁴ On November 4, 2008, Prop 8 passed by a margin of 52-48; California voters decided that marriage would be reserved between only a man and a woman.¹⁰⁵

According to a study conducted by Asian Pacific American Legal Center after the November 2008 election, 54% of Asian Americans supported the passage of Prop 8.¹⁰⁶ Korean American voters, unlike other ethnic communities, widely supported Prop 8 by a significantly wide margin.¹⁰⁷ The study further determined that religiosity was a determining factor for those in favor of Prop 8.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, the Korean American Protestant Christian leadership framed same-sex marriage as a potential moral threat to children because it would effectively normalize a deviant practice.¹⁰⁹ Children,

99. *Id.*

100. *Id.*; “Cis-gendered” is defined as an individual whose gender expression matches one’s sex assigned at birth.

101. FUNK ET AL., *supra* note 4.

102. *Proposition 8*, U. OF CALIF., BERKELEY, INST. OF GOV. STUD., (2019) <https://igs.berkeley.edu/library/elections/proposition-8>.

103. *Id.*

104. *Proposition 8*, VOTER INFO. GUIDE (2008) <http://vigarchive.sos.ca.gov/2008/general/title-sum/prop8-title-sum.htm>.

105. U. OF CALIF., BERKELEY, INST. OF GOV. STUD., *supra* note 102.

106. *Data Released Showing That Asian American Voting on Proposition 8 Significantly Influenced by Age, English Proficiency and Religiosity*, ASIAN AM. ADVANCING JUST. (Jan. 22, 2009) <https://www.advancingjustice-la.org/media-and-publications/press-releases/data-released-showing-asian-american-voting-proposition-8-significantly#.XcoTdDJKjOR>.

107. *Id.*

108. *Id.* Conversely, those who “never” attended religious services were more likely to oppose the passage of Prop 8. *Id.*

109. Joseph Yi et al., *Same-Sex Marriage, Korean Christians, and the Challenge of Democratic Engagement*, 51 *Soc.* 415, 417 (2014).

according to these leaders, would be indoctrinated by immoral practices at schools.¹¹⁰

In the future, Korean American Protestant Christians are expected to become more involved in American civic life.¹¹¹ Their civic actions are ultimately tied with their identities as citizens.¹¹² To many, one's identity, even one's core values, is tied to the tenets of the Protestant Christian church: the Bible, sinful human nature, absolute moral standards, and an overall quest for improving the common good.¹¹³ At first glance, it is hard to see the Korean American Protestant Christian community supporting LGBTQ rights. LGBTQ rights need to become an inherently Christian right, both morally and spiritually. Considering the conservative nature of this community, imagining a society where Korean American Protestant Christians fully support LGBTQ individuals seem unreachable.

However, unreachable does not translate to impossible. There is always a margin of hope. Even though Korean American voters supported the passage of Prop 8 by a relatively large margin, 46% of Asian Americans desired to support same-sex marriage.¹¹⁴ The same study found that if individuals did not attend religious services, supporting same-sex marriage increased to 71%.¹¹⁵ As mentioned above, religiosity was a major factor in supporting Prop 8. If one is not influenced by the Korean American Protestant Church, he or she is more likely to support same-sex marriage. In turn, without the church, one is statistically more likely to support LGBTQ rights.

V. THE SECOND GENERATION KOREAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN

Amy Sueyoshi, an Asian American Queer studies scholar, attributed the Asian American community's reluctance to take on sexuality issues to the presumption that Asian Americans, as a whole, are culturally conservative.¹¹⁶ It is easy to conclude based on perception and societal observation that the Korean American community is culturally conservative; statistics further support this notion. The danger of such presumption is believing that Korean Americans and, in turn, Korean American Protestant Christians are highly unlikely to support LGBTQ rights in any form. Korean American Protestant

110. *Id.*

111. ECKLUND, *supra* note 90, at 8.

112. *Id.* at 6.

113. *Id.*

114. ASIAN AM. ADVANCING JUST., *supra* note 106.

115. *Id.*

116. Amy Sueyoshi, *Queer Asian American Historiography*, in OXFORD HANDBK. OF ASIAN AM. HIST. 269 (Echiro Azuma & David K. Yoo eds. 2016).

Christians, however, are not entirely precluded from supporting LGBTQ rights. The same Pew Research Center study mentioned above clearly distinguished foreign born individuals from native-born individuals that discourage homosexuality.¹¹⁷ Native-born individuals were actually less likely to discourage homosexuality than foreign born individuals.¹¹⁸ In analyzing the potential support for LGBTQ issues, it is vital to focus on the potential of second-generation Korean American Protestant Christians.

It is practically undisputed that the Protestant Christian church plays an integral role within both the immigrant and native-born Korean American community. To them, the church is both a social and political location.¹¹⁹ Surprisingly, however, second generation Korean Americans are steadily leaving immigrant churches.¹²⁰ This phenomenon is commonly known as the “silent exodus.”¹²¹ Second generation Korean Americans seek to leave the church because it holds a different significance than their immigrant parents. To an immigrant parent, the church was oftentimes a home-away-from-home. It was a place where one could find individuals who spoke their own language and who carried similar struggles. The second-generation Korean American community did not necessarily need these attributes because they were being assimilated through school, peers, and society-at-large where they quickly learned English and inevitably understood the mainstream American culture.

The culture and society that surround second generation Korean Americans plays a critical role in identity formation.¹²² Because this generation inevitably is enmeshed in an entirely different culture and society than their immigrant parents, they are constantly seeking to create their own unique identity. Some researchers attribute this phenomenon as the “pendulum swing” theory where second-generation Korean Americans swing between Korean and American ethnic identities depending on periods of development and personal societal needs.¹²³

This quest to establish a new identity is further incorporated into a desire to find a new Christian identity, one that is separate from the immigrant Korean American church.¹²⁴ To some, this translated to being more integrated with the broader, non-Korean American community rather than

117. FUNK ET AL., *supra* note 4.

118. *Id.*

119. Anthony Yooshin Kim & Margaret Rhee, *Toward Queer Korean American Horizons: Diaspora, History, and Belonging*, in A COMPANION TO KOREAN AMER. STUD. 548 (Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee eds. 2018).

120. Cha, *supra* note 7, at 155.

121. *Id.*

122. *Id.*

123. Cha, *supra* note 7, at 154.

124. ECKLUND, *supra* note 90.

being insulated within the Korean American community.¹²⁵ Newer Korean American Protestant Christians churches even include, at times, a wider inclusivity of other Asian American ethnic groups and, for some, non-Asian American ethnic groups.¹²⁶ To a very small, but important, minority, finding a new Christian identity involved being accepting and welcoming to LGBTQ people.

In 2015, Los Angeles, California, held the largest Korean American community compared to any United States metropolitan areas.¹²⁷ In 2016, Liz Lin co-founded the “Progressive Asian American Christians” (PAAC) in Los Angeles.¹²⁸ Lin, who identifies as a feminist Asian American who cares about racial justice and LGBTQ rights, was one of those second generation Asian Americans who was finding her identity outside of the immigrant church. PAAC is made of mostly Chinese and Korean American individuals who share this sentiment. Through this organization, second generation Korean American Protestant Christians have spoken out against the older generation’s reluctance in supporting LGBTQ rights. One of those people who has been speaking out is Sam Chung, a Korean American pastor who left the Korean American immigrant church after volunteering at an AIDS hospice. Another person, Daniel Lee, a provost at a large seminary in Pasadena, attributed his support for PAAC as a response to the current influx of white nationalism, sexism, and xenophobia coming out of the Trump administration. PAAC currently has over six thousand members spanning across twenty cities.¹²⁹

Orange County, California holds the second largest Korean American community in the United States.¹³⁰ According to a 2017 article, 45 Protestant Christian churches in Orange County welcome LGBTQ members, but fewer than a dozen of those churches are Asian American churches.¹³¹ One of these churches, Epic Church in Fullerton, California, started after a second generation Korean American woman, Grace Lee, came out to her congregation as being queer. After that, Epic Church began seeing their

125. Rebecca Y. Kim, *supra* note 35, at 199.

126. *Id.*

127. *Koreans in the U.S. Fact Sheet*, PEW RES. CENT. (Sept. 8, 2017) <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-koreans-in-the-u-s/> (approximately 333,000).

128. Josie Huang, *Asian American, Christian, Progressive and Lonely. Is There A Church For You?* LAIST (May 9, 2019) https://laist.com/2019/05/09/asian_american_christian_progressive_church.php.

129. *Id.*

130. *Demographics and Citizenship*, KOREAN AM. COAL. <https://www.kacla.org/census-demographics-and-citizenship.html> (last visited Nov. 25, 2019). Los Angeles County holds the largest Korean American population in the United States. *Id.*

131. Jeong Park, *Are Asian-American Churches in Orange County Slowly Shifting their Stance on LGBTQ Relationships?* ORANGE CTY REG. (Nov. 21, 2017) <https://www.ocregister.com/2017/11/21/asian-american-christians-shifting-slowly-on-sexuality/>.

LGBTQ members as a “gift” that makes their church “better, richer, and more compassionate.”¹³² Individuals from Epic Church attributed the immigrant community’s distaste for LGBTQ rights to a general misunderstanding of how LGBTQ identities fit into traditional ideas of gender and hierarchy. It is common for LGBTQ individuals to feel alienated from the churches they grew up in. They ultimately these churches to seek communities that not only understand LGBTQ issues, but value LGBTQ people.

The two examples above clearly show the possibilities surrounding second generation Korean American Protestant Christians. However, these LGBTQ affirming churches did not occur randomly. In both instances, second generation Korean Americans who either affirmed LGBTQ rights or were themselves LGBTQ identified paved the way for more affirming churches. Thus, it is vital to stress the importance of being exposed to LGBTQ issues and individuals. As the second generation Korean American Protestant Christian community continue leaving their immigrant churches, establishing LGBTQ individuals as “neighbors” only strengthens their possibilities in becoming supporters for LGBTQ rights.

VI. PATHWAYS TO LGBTQ RIGHTS: HOW TO CONNECT A COMMUNITY SEPARATED

Starting in 2017, immigration to the United States from Korea began to decrease.¹³³ Better political and economic conditions in Korea along with improved business opportunities waned any remaining incentives for leaving Korea.¹³⁴ This decrease in immigration can directly translate into an inevitable shrinking of the immigrant Korean American Protestant Christian church. It is, thus, tempting to simply ignore the immigrant Korean American church and further concentrate on establishing the growing, second generation Korean American church regarding the future of LGBTQ rights.

However, it is fundamental that proponents of LGBTQ rights seek to bridge the gap between these two communities to prevent the Korean American community from responding similarly for future LGBTQ issues. On one side, there is the LGBTQ community. On the other side, there is the Korean American Protestant Christian church; specifically, the Korean Americans who identify as theologically conservative. The chasm that exists between these two communities may seem, at times, vast. Because Asian Americans are generally perceived to reluctantly take on issues of sexuality, studies on the intersection between these two communities are limited.

132. *Id.*

133. O’Connor, *supra* note 44 (by 2017, Korean immigration to the United States decreased by 37,000 since 2010).

134. *Id.*

However, history has proven that Asian Americans have actually been at the forefront of LGBTQ rights. LGBTQ Asian Americans have existed in recorded history as early as the mid 1800s.¹³⁵ Some of the first LGBTQ individuals recorded in history were immigrant men from China and Japan who worked as sex workers in Alaskan canneries around the late 1920s.¹³⁶ In the mid-1950s, LGBTQ Asian Americans were involved in fighting for LGBTQ civil rights. Rose Bamberger, a Filipina woman, along with other lesbian women, started the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian civil and political rights group in the United States.¹³⁷ Later in the 1960s, Crystal Jang, a queer Chinese American, fought for women students to be allowed to wear pants at the City College of San Francisco.¹³⁸ Then during the 1970s and 1980s, queer Asian American women powerfully represented the LGBTQ community using art and literature. Amongst others was Korean American Willyce Kim who was the first published lesbian woman.¹³⁹

During the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, Asian American organizations, such as Asian American Recovery Services in San Francisco and the Asian AIDS Project, formed to specifically assist Asian American individuals living with HIV/AIDS.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California was at the forefront of hosting conversations to mobilize other Asian American groups, communities and organizations to fight against AIDS.¹⁴¹ Further, the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) became a key stakeholder in fighting AIDS while recruiting other Asian American communities to support LGBTQ rights.¹⁴² The JACL would continue to fight for other LGBTQ issues such as same-sex marriage. Other Asian American organizations, since then, has formed to fervently fight for LGBTQ rights, including, but not limited to: Asian, Pacific Islander Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (API PFLAG); Asian and Pacific Islander Equality Los Angeles and Northern California (API Equality-LA & APIENC); and the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA).

History proudly displays that Asian Americans, including Korean Americans, are entirely capable of supporting LGBTQ rights. It is, however, important to be strategic in the methods used to bring Korean Americans into

135. Amy Sueyoshi, *Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History*, in *LGBTQ AM.: A THEME STUDY OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, & QUEER HIST.* 4 (Megan E. Springate ed., 2016).

136. *Id.* at 6.

137. *Id.* at 12.

138. Sueyoshi, *supra* note 135, at 15.

139. *Id.* at 21 (Willyce Kim published *Eating Artichokes* in 1972).

140. *Id.* at 25.

141. *Id.*

142. *Id.* at 33.

becoming allies and supporters. Below, are two strategies that can be used to potentially connect these separated communities—coalition-building and “democratic deliberation.”

A. Coalition-Building

Coalition-building has been practiced by many progressive spheres; it is not a new strategy.¹⁴³ It can mean something different to whoever defines it. One researcher describes coalition-building as a means of reconciliation between sites of contestation.¹⁴⁴ Essentially, coalition-building between two communities focuses more on the differences that exists among the communities rather than the similarities. Each community will inevitably carry distinctive identity traits. The goal of coalition-building is to acknowledge those distinctive identity traits while simultaneously discovering the location of common political goals. This subtle shift in framing allows different parties to focus more on political gains rather than being stuck on identity politics. Coalition-building makes it possible to no longer assume that a uniform identity is required for two, potentially polar groups to work together.¹⁴⁵ When utilized correctly, coalition-building celebrates differences.¹⁴⁶ Further, when two communities finally find a common political goal, trust between those groups is assumed rather than built.¹⁴⁷ There is no time to build trust because it is needed as a prerequisite in furthering a common political goal.

A recent example of successful coalition-building can be found in Utah between LGBTQ rights activists and the Church of the Ladder-Day Saints (LDS church).¹⁴⁸ There, the two groups jointly agreed on protecting discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in both employment and housing by adding sexual orientation and gender identity in Utah’s antidiscrimination laws. The LDS church desired clarification on exemptions for religious institutions and protections for religious expressions. The LGBTQ community desired general civil rights protections. Both sides agreed that general protections for LGBTQ individuals were needed. Both sides also desired to negotiate issues in “a spirit of goodwill and respect.” The common

143. See generally Vera Miao, *Coalition Politics: (Re)turning the Century*, in Q & A: QUEER IN ASIAN AM. 65 (David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom eds., 1998).

144. *Id.* at 66.

145. *Id.*

146. *Id.* at 72.

147. *Id.* at 73.

148. See generally Dennis Romboy, *LDS Church, LGBT Advocates Back Anti-Discrimination, Religious Rights Bill*, DESERETNEWS (Mar. 5, 2015), <https://www.deseret.com/2015/3/5/20560075/lds-church-lgbt-advocates-back-anti-discrimination-religious-rights-bill>.

political goal of gaining further protections for each respective community while respecting each other's presence created a coalition that in turn made way for LGBTQ protections.

The starting point for any successful coalition-building is discovering what, in fact, is the common political goal shared among polarized communities. Though this paper does not seek to provide specific strategies on how to find such political goals between the LGBTQ community and the Korean American Protestant Christian church, it attempts to clarify the political goals each side currently holds. It should be a goal for future studies on LGBTQ rights and the Protestant Church to help create an effective strategy in finding these common political goals.

A recent study showed that the prevailing narrative for Korean American Protestant Christians, in regard to LGBTQ issues, is that their autonomy is being threatened.¹⁴⁹ According to this study, Korean American Protestant Christians felt persecuted for their traditional beliefs on sexuality and marriage.¹⁵⁰ Further, Christian colleges and even state governments were apparently fearful of losing autonomy in order to cater to LGBTQ individuals. It should be noted that this narrative regarding LGBTQ issues is different than the moral narrative surrounding LGBTQ individuals as morally corrupt individuals.¹⁵¹ This is not, however, an indication that the Korean American Protestant Christian church do not carry any moral attitudes against the LGBTQ community. Additionally, according to another study, the Korean American Protestant Christian community felt unable to freely express their religious views in public in fear of being labeled as "anti-gay bigots."¹⁵²

The current political goals for the LGBTQ community has not changed much. The LGBTQ community simply desires the same rights and protections afforded to heterosexual individuals.¹⁵³ Though specific issues, such as same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," may have been successfully fought for (same-sex marriage) or against ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell"), the notion that equal rights for LGBTQ individuals are needed still exists today. For example, employment discrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming individual still occur daily. Trans and gender nonconforming individuals are not included in federal antidiscrimination laws. Additionally, trans people cannot serve in the United States military.

149. Joseph Yi et al., *Evangelical Christian Discourse in South Korea on the LGBT: The Politics of Cross-Border Learning*, SYMPOSIUM: SEX & CONTROVERSY 3 (2017).

150. *Id.* at 2.

151. Sueyoshi, *supra* note 116, at 269 (people with same-sex attraction were commonly seen as pedophiles and criminals).

152. Yi et al., *supra* note 109, at 6.

153. *See generally* SUSAN GLUCK MEZEY, *BEYOND MARRIAGE: CONTINUING BATTLES FOR LGBT RIGHTS* (2017).

The political goals for the LGBTQ community is simply to acquire civil rights and protections that they do not currently have.

An important detail, though, is how the LGBTQ community frames their political goals. Back in 2000, Judy Han with other progressive Korean Americans formed Korean Americans for Civil Rights (KACR) to fight against an early attempt to prevent LGBTQ rights.¹⁵⁴ KACR fought to push back against California's Defense of Sexual Responsibility Act which would prevent public entities from "endorsing, educating, recognizing, or promoting homosexuality as acceptable, moral behavior."¹⁵⁵ Han emphasized the importance of framing the LGBTQ community's political goals as a "righteous campaign for civil rights" that concerned all community members.¹⁵⁶ This small, but vital, detail in framing was important because the then opposition, the Korean American Protestant Church, believed that LGBTQ rights were a "special interest" and a "plea for tolerance of an otherwise unpalatable 'lifestyle'."¹⁵⁷ KACR expressed a far more imperative political goal than simply a "lifestyle" choice.

B. "Democratic Deliberation"

One of the lessons surrounding the formation of the second generation Korean American Protestant Christian community is that exposure to different peoples and communities will assist in forming a new, Christian identity, separate from the ideals of the immigrant church. The churches that are currently supporting LGBTQ individuals could not have happened without the influence and presence of real, LGBTQ people—Korean American Protestant Christian LGBTQ individuals. To many Korean American immigrants, LGBTQ individuals are fundamentally invisible.¹⁵⁸ This can be attributed to an overall lack of dialogue between Korean Americans and their Korean American LGBTQ counterparts.¹⁵⁹

The concept of "democratic deliberation" essentially translates to bringing together two communities without the pressures and fears of being attacked. Joseph Yi, a political scientist who studies LGBTQ Korean American Protestant Christians, describes this process as an integral part of

154. Judy Han, *Organizing Korean Americans Against Homophobia*, 25 SOJOURNER 1, 4 (2000).

155. *Id.* at 1.

156. *Id.* at 4.

157. *Id.*

158. Anthony Yooshin Kim & Margaret Rhee, *Toward Queer Korean American Horizons: Diaspora, History, and Belonging*, in A COMPANION TO KOREAN AM. STUD. 534, 542 (Rachael Miyung Joo & Shelley Sang-Hee Lee eds. 2018).

159. *Id.*

compromise and cooperation between contentious communities.¹⁶⁰ “Democratic deliberation” is a vehicle for highly educated individuals to attempt to find common ground rather than aimlessly debating. Yi mentions this tool’s importance during conversations around Prop 8. “Democratic deliberation” was useful in creating spaces where the most vocal conservatives could express their concerns without fears of being retaliated as “anti-gay” bigots. The most vocal progressives could, in turn, voice their support of LGBTQ issues without fears of losing their jobs or support from the ethnic community. Hypothetically, by creating a venue for safe conversation to find common ground could pave ways for finding common political goals. “Democratic deliberation” goes hand in hand with ideas surrounding coalition building.

The tenants of “democratic deliberations” could potentially be used in smaller, more intimate settings to benefit LGBTQ Korean American Protestant Christians. Countless LGBTQ individuals, including Korean Americans, choose not to publicly identify as LGBTQ to their immigrant parents because it may affect familial bonds. According to a study by the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA) and the Human Rights Campaign, six out of ten Asian and Pacific Islander American individuals were raised by immigrant parents.¹⁶¹ The study further mentions that many LGBTQ Asian American youth feel indebted to their parents because of their oftentimes arduous journey immigrating to the United States from their home countries and their even more difficult efforts in raising an immigrant family.¹⁶² To the Korean American LGBTQ individual, disappointing family is even more critical because of Confucianist and Christian patriarchal pressures focusing on the familial unit.¹⁶³ Same-sex sexuality inherently conflicts with the idea of a traditional Korean family. Coming-out as LGBTQ is a huge burden on Korean American immigrant families.

Korean American immigrant parents could benefit from hearing the experiences of LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ individuals, especially children of Korean American immigrants, could benefit in candidly expressing their concerns and experiences as LGBTQ Korean Americans. Conversations that would come out of this deliberation should carry the same protections for each party. Deliberations would serve the dual purpose of safely exposing immigrant parents to the larger LGBTQ community while creating means to

160. Yi et al., *supra* note 109, at 7.

161. Nat’l Queer Asian Pac. Islander All. & The Hum. Rts. Campaign, *Coming Out: Living Authentically as LGBTQ Asian and Pacific Islander Americans*, HRC 14 (2018), <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-living-authentically-as-lgbtq-asian-and-pacific-islander-america>.

162. *Id.*

163. Anthony Yooshin Kim & Margaret Rhee, *supra* note 158, at 540.

find some common ground. Of course, there is always potential for deviation due to the very intimate and oftentimes sensitive nature of talking among family members. What is most important, though, is the unveiling of Korean American LGBTQ identities to a community that was, and currently is, overwhelmingly blind to it.

VII. CONCLUSION

The extent of studies existing within the intersection of Korean American Protestant Christianity and LGBTQ rights is relatively trivial. Asian American studies, in itself, is relatively new. But, when Asian Americans studies cross with LGBTQ studies and now religious studies, mainstream representations along with research is far too lacking.¹⁶⁴ Amy Sueyoshi, an Asian American scholar, says that she can count the number of Asian American LGBTQ scholars with one hand.¹⁶⁵ Prop 8 may have been one of the first and potentially the only case study in which Korean American Protestant Christians and their attitudes for or against LGBTQ rights have been documented. Predictions on how this community will respond to future LGBTQ issues and the strategies on how to influence their positive support is at most an educated guess. There is still integral work to be done.

Implications from this work goes beyond the United States. Progressive LGBTQ organizations in Korea have been taking cues from the United States since the 1980s.¹⁶⁶ Korea has since started annual queer festivals and declared employment discrimination and military bans against same-sex couples unconstitutional. In 2011, Seoul city government passed a provision that protected LGBTQ teens and, in 2016, a Seoul court heard lawsuits in hopes of recognizing same-sex marriage.¹⁶⁷ It is reasonable to speculate that Korean nationals will look to the actions of Korean Americans Protestant Christians for future LGBTQ issues—the very near future of LGBTQ rights.

Until then, Korean nationals, current Korean Americans, and even the larger Asian American Protestant Christian community can look to the small, yet essential, group of Korean Americans in history who bravely embraced both their Korean and LGBTQ identities. Individuals like Willyce Kim, Merle Woo, a prominent Asian American lesbian performer, and Don Choi, a gay Korean American soldier who was a leader against the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, are among the few who have paved the way for the future

164. See generally David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom, *Q & A: Notes on a Queer Asian America*, in *Q & A: QUEER IN ASIAN AM.* 1 (David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom eds. 1998).

165. Sueyoshi, *supra* note 116, at 267.

166. Joseph Yi et al., *supra* note 149, at 2.

167. *Id.*

of LGBTQ rights within the Korean American community.¹⁶⁸ Resources like the “Dari Project” are collecting and sharing stories and artwork of LGBTQ Korean Americans.¹⁶⁹ Even national events such as KQTcon, a conference catered to the Korean American LGBTQ community, exist to build bridges between these separated communities.¹⁷⁰

Korean immigrants set foot on American soil, among other reasons, to seek economic stability, start families, and find freedom from an oppressive regime. It is not entirely far-fetched to see LGBTQ individuals seeking the same. Hopefully, it is not entirely far-fetched to see Korean Americans supporting LGBTQ individuals in the near future.

168. Sueyoshi, *supra* note 135, at 2.

169. Suevon Lee, *Chronicling the Lives of LGBT Korean Americans*, CHARACTER MEDIA (Mar. 27, 2013), <https://charactermedia.com/march-issue-chronicling-the-lives-of-lgbt-korean-americans/>.

170. KQTcon: A National Conference for Queer and Trans Korean American, FACEBK., <https://www.facebook.com/kqtcon/> (last visited Mar. 1, 2020).
