

Lives of Old Women of Korean Nationality in Beijing : A Case of One Dance Team¹

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Abstract

The article explores the leisure lives of eleven old women of the Korean nationality and their families in Beijing through in-depth interviews. Among these senior Korean women, the lives of the pensioners are more independent than those who are dependent on their children and who have their permanent residential registrations in the countryside.² Most of the interviewees are responsible for doing housework and caring for their grandchildren. Only a few husbands share such responsibilities once they are retired and returned home. These women have lost their support network in their hometown once they moved to Beijing. They feel lonely in Beijing as few of them could communicate in their familiar ways with their adult children. Because of their identity in Korean language and nationality, their social network often is confined to a group of the Korean background. So the dance team, totally composed of Korean women, has become their most important support network in Beijing. Watching Korean TV shows and reading magazines are the main activities in their leisure time besides dancing the traditional Korean dance.

Key words

elderly women of Korean nationality, family life, leisure time, dance team

Introduction

More than one hundred million people in China will reach 65 years old and above, 7.7 percent of the total population, by the end of 2005, indicating that the Chinese population is aging fast (National Bureau of

¹ I appreciate the help of the eleven participants and the dance team.

² Because of an existing hierarchy between rural and urban areas in China, a person registered as a permanent resident in cities or the countryside means that s/he will hold a very different status. A person registered in cities will enjoy obviously more public resources and higher prestige. Since registered permanent residence in Beijing ranks the highest in the hierarchy, some people owning the identity will look down to the others who do not own it.

Statistics of China, 2006). The National Bureau of Statistics of China found out that the sex ratio of the people aged 60 years old and above is 95.7:100 (Female=100) and women in the 60s and over are 3,180,000 more than men according to the sampling survey of the national population on November 11, 2005 (Jiang & Yang, 2009). The number of elderly women is rapidly increasing so that the tendency of feminization of the aged has arisen.

As far as the aged population is concerned, some studies placed focus on elderly women (Jia, 2007; Jiang & Yang, 2009; Li, 2003; Tan, 1996; Wu, 2008; Xu & Wang, 2005; Zhang, 2006; Zhang, 2008). Among these researches, a few explored the situations with the elderly women in Beijing, Zhe Jiang Province, An Hui Province and He Nan Province (Cui, 2007; Huang, 2007; Jiang & Wang, 2005; Zhi, 2004). Most of these studies have, however, paid attention to such issues as the dual structure of urban versus rural areas, regional characteristics and social stratification, and few are focused on ethnic differences among the elderly women.

Nationality is a category which should not be forgotten in the study of the elderly women because their different living situations have been complicated by not only education, career experience, social status and regional disparity, but also ethnicity. So the plurality of nationalities among the elderly women has to be highlighted. This article will explore how some elderly women of Korean nationality in Beijing have lived a life with Korean characteristics: how gender, nationality and migration affect their lives, and how they have actively constructed their lives with the factors affecting their lives.

The Research Method and the Participants

In-depth interviews were conducted in July and August 2009 with eleven elderly women of Korean nationality in Beijing, six of whom were members of one dance team composed of elderly women, who were introduced to me by an acquaintance. Using semi-structured interviews, which allow interviewees to talk freely, I visited the homes of these women and talked with each for as long as three hours in Korean. The interviews were then recorded and transcribed with their consent.

Table 1 presents the basic data of these women in pseudo names in

order to protect their privacy.

Table 1
Research Participants

Name & age	Education	Marriage & children	Career	Their relatives in Beijing	Housing	Other (hometown & the time of their migration to Beijing)
Li Zhenji, 73	Junior high school	Her husband died in 1988; three sons	Peasant, Pre-chief of women' committee in her village	The oldest son and his wife	Top apartment of 180m ²	Liaoning Province, 1989, the member of CPC
Xu Aishun, 60	High school	Her husband is a businessman in Beijing, one son and one daughter	Peasant, Pre-barefoot doctor, pre-citizen-managed teachers, pre-worker and vice-manager of a township firm	Her husband and the son's family	Top apartment of 170m ²	Jilin Province, 1989, the member of CPC
Yu Meizi, 73	Graduate, studies for two years in Japan	Her husband retired, two daughters	Engineer	Her husband	Publicly-owned apartment of more than 70m ²	Heilongjiang Province, 1960, retired in 1993, the member of CPC
Xu Zhenshu, 74	Technical secondary school	Her husband retired as a cadre, one son	Teacher of primary and middle schools	Her husband	Top apartment of 203m ²	Jilin Province, 1993, the member of CPC, retired in 1990
Che Jinnv, 71	Technical secondary school	Her husband died in 1996, one son and two daughters	Teacher of primary and middle schools	Her son and his wife and daughter	Apartment of more than 100m ²	Jilin Province, 2005, the member of CPC
Li Zhenyu, 70	Junior college	Her husband retired, two daughters	Primary school teacher, worker, lab assistant	Her husband	Publicly-owned apartment of over 80m ²	Heilongjiang Province, 1959
Zheng Yumei, 73	Primary school	Her husband died in 1974, three sons and two daughters	Peasant, waitress, nursery maid	Her son and grandson	Renting apartment of 79m ²	Heilongjiang Province, 2001, Christian
Cui Jinzi, 81	Primary school	Her husband died in 1970, one son and one daughter	Worker, waitress	Her son's family	Publicly-owned apartment of over 70m ²	Jilin Province, 1981, a member of the CPC
Piao Mingshu, 62	Junior high school	Her husband died in 1987, one son and one daughter	Peasant, part-time worker of a kindergarten	Her daughter's family	Apartment of over 100m ²	Jilin Province, 2001
Jin Aizi, 66	Primary school	Her husband died at 58, one son and two daughters	Peasant, the owner of a general store	By herself	Apartment of over 90m ²	Jilin Province, beginning round trip between Beijing and Jilin Province since 2001
Yan Jingshi, 63	Junior college	Her husband retired, one son and two daughters	Primary school teacher	Her husband and her daughter's family	Apartment of 120m ²	Heilongjiang Province, 2006, retired in 1996

Their Living Situations and Problems They Face

The Characteristics of These Elderly Korean Women in Beijing

More than seven thousand people of Korean nationality lived in Beijing in the 1990s compared to only 3,734 in 1982, the majority of whom were college students and civil servants until the beginning of 1990s and most whom had registered permanent residence in Beijing. Many more Korean people have migrated to Beijing since the reforms and the opening-up³. According to official statistics, the number of Korean people living in the Wangjing area in Beijing has reached more than 10,000 while Rui's (2009) research has shown that this number is over 30,000. Obviously, the number of Korean ethnic people living in Beijing will be greater when the Korean people living in other parts of Beijing are also counted.⁴ Many of them have no registered permanent residencies in Beijing although they live there.

Only three have registered permanent residency status in Beijing among the eleven interviewees. Yu Meizi is the only one who has acquired the status by resorting to her own merits because she was assigned to work in Beijing after graduating from college. All the other women migrated to Beijing by following their husbands or children who started to work there. This means that they are not the household heads but the dependents. As a result, they have no acquaintances or friends except their family at the beginning of their migration.

They had to adjust to the lives in the metropolis for the spatial transfer, especially for those who had lived in the countryside for a long time prior to their movement to Beijing. Li Zhenji recalled that she had to start to drink milk and eat bread instead of taking rice for breakfast in order to go along with her son and daughter-in-law, which was difficult

³ According to the research of X. Z. Zheng in 1997, the migratory tendency of Korean nationality is to migrate to cities from the countryside, to large and medium cities from towns, and to the south of Shanghai Guan from the traditional residence in Northeast China. The number of Korean ethnic individuals who have migrated from their traditional residence in the Northeast to the south of Shanghaiguan and engaged in secondary and tertiary industries has reached 200,000, a number that has added to 1/10 of the population of Korean nationality in China (Zheng, 1999).

⁴ For example, only five live in the Wangjing area among the 11 interviewees.

for her at the start. Moreover, they also have to adjust to the old age, which have brought many difficulties. Xu Zhenshu and her husband traveled around Beijing by bus, bringing with them their homemade meals while visiting parks so as to understand how elderly people in Beijing live their lives. They then entered into the community college for the elderly people, joined the dance team of their community made up of mostly Han Chinese nationality and got to know more people.

Families of These Elderly Korean Ethnic Women

Financial Resources.

According to the statistics of “The health survey of Chinese elderly people” in 2005, one significant difference between elderly women and men (Zhou, 2007) is that more elderly women depend on their children. Only eleven percent of elderly women have their pensions in contrast to 32 percent of the elderly men. The ratio of wives depending on their husbands is three times those of the husbands depending on their wives. So far as Beijing is concerned, 57.49 percent of the elderly women live off their own pensions, while 84.31 percent of the elderly men do the same (An, Jiang, & Wang, 2005).

Six interviewees have their pensions and the other five do not because pension is related to one’s employment history. The six interviewees once worked in state-funded operational units, such as schools and factories, through which they receive medical insurance and pensions to cover their everyday cost after retirement. Their children will provide them with financial support if necessary. But the elderly women who have long been farmers in the countryside do not have pension or medical insurance because of the dual structures of urban and rural division in the Chinese system.⁵

These elderly women have to depend on their children as they have no other source of income. By contrast, the elderly women who have

⁵ At present, the medical insurance has been set up locally in China, and some elderly people at age 60 and over can receive a certain sum of support. But elderly women have less chance to benefit from this insurance program as they have migrated away from their hometowns. About 65 percent of urban and 99 percent of rural elderly women do not have medical care, most of whom have not bought commercial insurances (Yao & Mi, 2005).

their own income do not need to depend on their children as they are financially independent. Li Zhenyu said that “I definitely satisfy by my living since I receive my pension every month even I spend all of my money for the month. I don’t need to worry about money and can buy anything I want.” Piao Mingshu, who depends on her child, told that her daughter offered RMB 5,000 when she was in the hospital for the cerebral thrombosis treatment in 2004, apart from RMB 500 which her daughter and son-in-law offer her every month to cover her costs. She has joined the dance team and said that she needs to pay RMB 200 per year for the membership fee as there is no way to take part in any activities without money. As shown by the above examples, these elderly women would have higher satisfaction with their own independent income than those without it. But the situation will change if the elderly person’s children have successful careers. For example, Li Zhenji had been a farmer for years until she moved to Beijing. Although she has no pension, she has a rich son, who is the richest among all the sons of the elderly women in the dance team. Her son donated RMB 5,000 to the dance team in case that she was discriminated against for her background in the countryside. “I have high prestige in the dance team. Although many grannies in the team don’t know my name, they know I’m the granny whose son has donated RMB 5,000.”

The education of some of these elderly women has been impaired as a result of their native family’s poverty and gender-based discrimination. Jin Aizi discussed that her mother died early when she was 13 years old. Although she has two older brothers, she had to take up all the housework since she was the oldest daughter. She managed to finish her primary school despite her family’s opposition. In other words, her life was influenced by the traditional gender-based division of labor dictated by patriarchal values as she had to bear all the housework even when she was still a young girl. Yu Meizi recalled:

My mother had to borrow money for my school and the villagers gossiped her for borrowing money to pay for a valueless girl’s education. My mother cried at home after she heard of it……My father did not think highly of women and scolded my mother for often going out (to borrow money) at night. My

mother was reproached outside and inside home (crying).

She luckily finished college with her mother and sister's persistent support. There were 12 young people who passed the entrance examination of the college in my hometown and only two were girls. The number of girls was as few as in her class in the college. Patriarchal values and practices in the family that discriminate against women have put women at a disadvantage in access to education. As a result, many women experienced unequal treatment in their lives and careers. Among the six interviewees who have pensions, four of them were primary school teachers and the other two, Yu Meizi and Li Zhenyu, once worked in academic institutions. Moreover, most of these elderly women have not advanced in their careers as highly as their husbands simply because they were busy with housework and caring for the children. As a result, their pensions are less than their husbands.⁶

Housework.

All of the interviewees do housework. Yu Meizi said all the burden of housework fell on her alone although she also had a paid job outside the home and graduated from the college as her husband did. She points out that the men of Korean nationality commonly regard that it is wives who should stay at home and finish all the housework. But during the two years that she was sent to attend training in advanced studies in Japan at the end of the 1980's, her husband took charge of all the housework. In fact, her husband not only boiled water but also served coffee during the interview. He even cooked the lunch for us. The husband of Li Zhenyu does not cook. He is therefore always a little dissatisfied when Li goes out to dance for he has nothing to eat but kraut and catsup soup.

Every interviewee looks after the grandchildren. Her son has enough money and the daughter-in-law is willing to hire a nanny to do cleaning and cooking, but Li Zhenji would like to do housework as long as her health is OK. She takes charge of the housework and the hired nanny does housecleaning once a week.

⁶ Although the couple of Li Zhenyu worked in the same institute, Li's pension is RMB 2,500 each month, far less than her husband's at 3,700.

On the other hand, the traditional gender division of housework has changed somewhat although it still works. Some husbands returned home after retirement. For example, the husband of Xu Zhenshu was not accustomed to staying at home day after day for he had been busy with work as a leader of a work unit for years before retirement. He has learnt to do cooking following the example of some men of Han Chinese nationality since moving to Beijing. Some people in the dance teams of Han Chinese nationality asked if he was able to cook and he said yes. They reminded him that “Cooking means not only to do rice but also do dishes.” He laughed when he relayed that conversation to me. Besides learning to cook, he added, he has been liberated from the pressure of local public prejudice since moving to Beijing. He recalled that he had to covertly bucket water at dark in order to avoid people from laughing at him in Yanbian, the city where his family lived when he was a youth. At present, he and his wife, living in the top apartment of 202m², share housework and the hired nanny does housecleaning once a week. He is in charge of wiping the floor and his wife, Xu Zhenshu, does the cooking. He take the bus to the market to buy traditional Korean food if he is free. Occasionally, he cooks, too.

These elderly women have internalized the traditional values in the gender division of labor and they are willing to take charge of housework alone although their husbands have returned home and learnt to do housework by following some examples of Han Chinese men. For instance, Yan Jingshi said, while she was discussing the changes she had to make since retirement, that she had to study *Zhouyi* (周易), a traditional Chinese classical writing, until after midnight because she alone was responsible for caring for the children and grandchildren. She asked her husband, who is good at handwriting, to use good table and room, or even live in the quiet suburb so as to improve his handwritings. As for herself, all the burden of housework has fallen on her. One conclusion to be drawn from these above examples is that the women have internalized sex stereotypical expectations and that they work hard to shoulder more housework.

Communication in the Family.

The census in 2000 enumerates that 32.25 percent of women age-60-

years and over have lost their husbands, by contrast, only 14.04 percent of men at the same age lost their wives (An, Jiang, & Wang, 2005). Six of the eleven interviewees have lost their husbands and they informed that many elderly women of Korean nationality have the same experience.⁷ The lonely widows have contact mostly with their children and the members of the dance team in their everyday lives. But their children are busy with work and spend little time with their mothers. Li Zhenji said that there are only three persons at home, namely, her, her son and the daughter-in-law since her grandson is studying abroad. Her son is busy with work and playing golf at the weekends so he only talks for five minutes with her every day. She can get a little more time with her daughter-in-law, who is also busy with work and social activities, but the time is far from enough. Cui Jinzi also said that she is the only person at home most of time. In spite of her son and daughter-in-law who are filial, the conversation between her and them is so few. She usually watches her favorite TV programs aim her room and her son dose the same in the sitting room, when her daughter-in-law surfs the net.

When I asked them to whom they will talk if there is something upsetting them, most of interviewees said that they would keep to themselves and speak to nobody. They would not talk to the children, either, to keep the latter from worrying. Only Che Jinnv and Li Zhenyu, who have daughters, said that they would talk with their daughters. Xu Zhenshu said that she would grumble a little with her husband.

Although their children are highly filial and respect the interviewees for the children were brought up by the value of filial piety and usually support them with money but not with the time of heart-to-heart talk. They can get enough money and do not worry about material life but they feel lonely since they have lost their friends or relatives after moving to Beijing from their hometowns especially for those women who had lived in the countryside for most of their lives. Zheng Yumei complained that "(I) always stay at home, boring……there is nothing to do except watching TV……There is always by myself at home. I hope to return my hometown."

⁷ The life expectancy of the Korean nationality in China is 66.92 years old. Women average 70.14, in comparison with men at 63.7 (Gu, 1996).

Their Leisure Lives

Their Usual Leisure Activities

Watching TV at home is the most common activity in their everyday lives. They like Korean TV drama series for the same language and ethical traditions. Most of them find it difficult to speak Chinese and can't express themselves in Chinese as clearly as in their mother tongue. Yu Meizi said: "I would never speak Chinese unless I have learned it. For example, I once mistook 'let's go and have a bath' (洗澡去吧) as 'let's go to washing face' (洗脸去吧) during my college life. So I went to a room to wash my face but could not find my friends. I realized my mistake until they returned from the bathroom (laughing). So I hardly understand Chinese." She always kept silent during the meetings when she began to work in Beijing because she could not fluently speak out her ideas in Chinese. Our interview was in Korean although she would habitually speak out a little Chinese, which she could still not speak fluently by then. The elderly women from Yanbian have experienced more linguistic obstacles, especially from the villages of Yanbian. Piao Mingshu said that "The Korean nationality is far more than Chinese in Yanbian, so it's Korean but not Chinese that I often speak. I will feel afraid as soon as I see Chinese.....I will not speak in Chinese unless being asked." So they prefer Korean TV programs to Chinese ones. Cui Jinzi often watches both Chinese and Korean TV programs shown by Chinese TV stations. She said that she "can understand the half of either. But the Korean TV play serials are easier to understand." Zheng Yumei told that her daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter often bought Korean DVD so she often watched them. She would sometimes buy more after all of them have been watched. Many members of the dance team said that all of them like Korean TV play serials so much that the new Korean DVD will go the round among the members.

The interviewees demonstrated that they share certain Korean ethnic identity. Most of them have been to North Korea and South Korea. Che Jinnv said that the countries they would visit are just North Korea and South Korea for these are the places that their "grandparents once lived." As far as the other countries, she said that it is enough to look at the

landscape on TV. Zheng Yumei said that all the other family members have been to North Korea except her. Most of the interviewees have relatives in North Korea and South Korea and in recent years some of their relatives who live in China have been to South Korea to work. Therefore, their leisure time has been connected by their activities that are distinctly Korean.

These women also read books and magazines in Korean, such as *Yonbian Yeosong* (Yanbian Female), *Ronyon Segye* (World of the Aged) and others on healthcare. They often play poker and mah-jong, besides cards sometimes. Piao Mingshu, who lives in the Wangjing area, indicated me that there are a lot of elderly women of Korean nationality in her community and they have set up an organization, whose members often play *Hwatu* card or go outing together in the springtime. Xu Aishun often plays mah-jong, goes shopping and visits the parks with elderly women of the Han Chinese nationality since there are few families of Korean nationality in her community. The only one or two families of Korean nationality are made of young people, who are busy with work, so there is no social interaction between her and them. The other interviewees have no social interaction with the Han Chinese nationality except Xu Aishun and Yan Jingshi. It is no wonder that, according to some people who have lived in Beijing for years, neighbors of the Han nationality in the same building seldom contact each other. Even if they are workmates before retirement, they chat only for a while together at dinner in the New Year's Day and the Spring Festival.

Xu Zhenshu and Che Jinnv have been to the community college for the elderly. They have regarded it as the channel to enrich themselves and get to know new friends. By contrast to the classmates' get-togethers sponsored by the elderly women who have graduated from high school, junior college and colleges, the women only finished the primary or junior middle school never organize it or connect with their classmates.

Most of them go outing a lot. For example, they have been accompanied by their children to visit the parks and have seen tourist sights in and outside of Beijing at the beginning of their stay in Beijing. Moreover, many of them have traveled to some famous places in China, Korea and Japan. Cui Jinzi has traveled to North Korea, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Japan. She, who is 81-years-old and, describes the neatness of North and South Korea, the playboys in

Thailand, the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as the Fuji Mountain in Japan. These travels have both broadened her views and enriched her life.

The Elderly Women and Their Dance Team

There are some organizations of Korean nationality such as the Dance Team of Xi Yang Hong, composed of the minority of the people in the Zhong Guan Cun area (Xu & Jin, 2009), the Glee Club of Arirang, composed of the old people of Korean nationality. The latter has developed into a club of over 120 members and the membership has recently reached 200 (Xu, 2007). People of Korean nationality in Beijing often organize activities including an athletic meeting of Korean nationality once every two years, at the Evenings of the Spring Festival each year, and the activities for the aged at the Chongyang Festival (a Chinese holiday proper for the aged). These elderly women are very active in the activities.

The Activities of the Dance Team.

The elderly women of the dance team, whose main dance is the traditional dance of Korean nationality, usually practice twice a week and more if there are important activities or competitions. They do not often rest even on the weekends. Because of lack of resources, they have to raise money and find the exercise room by themselves. For example, the backbones of the team often donate money to buy a recorder and drums. Sometimes they will help the poor members to buy the traditional dress of Korean nationality, which is needed for the performance. The husbands of Xu Zhenshu and Li Zhenyu set up the cheering squad for the dance team, which is composed of the husbands of the elderly women in the dance team. If there is a male role in the dance, they will join in. They will accompany the members of dance team if they need to go on trips for performance or competitions.

Xu Zhenshu has booked the elderly exercise room in her community centre for the team to practice. Che Jinnv mobilizes her granddaughter and step-son to choreograph, choose songs and teach. In line with the themes of their dance pieces, the dance team designs proper dance moves

and costume. All of the members devote themselves to making their costumes both beautifully, appropriately and economically.

They are so happy and united regardless of the high or low education, whether or not they have registered permanent residence in Beijing, are rich or poor. The deep sisterhood bond among them has become clear.⁸ Xu Aishun, who is a little younger than Li Zhenji, calls the latter as her “sister.” It’s noticeable that they call the others directly by their names instead of whose mother or whose grandmother, which means they are the independent subjects, not affiliated to somebody.

The members of the CPC in the dance team are very strict to themselves. Xu Aishun said that “There are seven members of the CPC besides me among the 16 members of the dance team. I always go to the exercise room earlier in order to clean it……After all, I have sworn to the CPC so I will try my best all the time.” Li Zhenji emphasized the membership of the CPC when she introduced the teammates to me. All of the members of the CPC are warm-hearted and very friendly. Most of the backbones of the dance team are the members of CPC, who become prestigious through their excellent qualities of being a member of CPC. They are active agents so they always volunteer their services for the dance team.

Every interviewee hopes to be happy for the rest of her life and nobody wants to be oppressed or fall in troubles in the dance team. The name of the dance team has just been changed for the members are dissatisfied with the former captain, so they quit the former team individually and reorganized the team. The team spirit has increased in the dance team so that they willingly obey the team. If their other personal activities contradict with the ones of the dance team, the latter will be placed at first.

The dance team is so important for the members that they do not know what to do when the team takes a break and hope that it would organize activities as early as possible. Compared to the dance team made

⁸ Li Zhenyu’s husband keeps contacts with the people who have registered permanent residence in Beijing, but cannot be chummy with elderly men of Korean nationality who moved to Beijing. By contrast, Jin said that “We (the members of the dance team) are chummy with the migrants. Most members of the dance team are recent migrants except three members who have registered permanent residence in Beijing.”

of Han Chinese nationality, this dance team of Korean nationality is different in that the former is composed of people living in the same community and have access to their exercise room given by the Residence Committee of the community. Most of the dance team members of Korean nationality live in different communities and do not register as the permanent residence in Beijing, so they have no access to a permanent exercise room.⁹ The exercise room they use then is rented.

The Significance of the Dance Team.

The dance team is extremely important for the members. All of dance team members expressed that they would be dressed beautifully and do makeup such as wearing lipstick when they are together. On other days when they are not together, they would be sloppy all day, dressed badly, hair not combed, if they stay at home all day. They have become younger, more energetic and healthier since they joined the dance team. All of their children, therefore, support them to participate in the dance team.

By now, the dance team has become the important social support network for its members. Li Zhenyu said that they sometimes learn how to cook from each other and that whoever brings her delicious homemade meals, others will learn it from her. Besides studying and practicing the dance, they also talk about the lives they have had, such sharing which helps and encourages each other. When some women join in the dance team in order to forget the sorrow brought by the death of their husbands, the members will encourage them to move on and help to reduce the sadness.

Eating lunch and playing poker games together become the common leisure activities besides dancing, all of which have increased friendship and team spirit. These women have expressed that they very much look forward to having lunch together and they have lunch at a nearby restaurant paid individually if they do not bring their homemade meals. Sharing recipes and knowledge about health is often the main topic when

⁹ According to Li Yuzi, there is a regular community college for the elderly besides a ballroom where most of the frequent goers are elderly. There however is not an established public place for the elderly in Yanbian.

they eat and meet together. They also share information about which hospital helps new migrants better. If someone in the dance team is to take her physical examination, many others will follow. They often celebrate fellow member's birthdays and other occasions worthy of celebrating. Gradually, the dance team has become the most important social support network for its members.

These elderly women have lived a very colorful life in Beijing and have many chances to contact with the outsider world through their organization of the dance team. Besides the activities organized by the sub-district, district and municipal administrative offices in Beijing where they take part in, the dance team has taken part in activities held as far as in Mudanjiang (a city in Heilongjiang province), Yantai (a city in Shandong province) and Hong Kong, and they have even been to South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia. Not only do they have many chances to go aboard but also have won many awards.

These women have increased their confidence and broadening their horizons through the dance team. Che Jinnv proudly told me that

When we are performing our dance at the Tian'an Men Square before the beginning of the Olympics, one foreign reporter, who is very tall, interviewed me. My face has been shown in the TV program of the Beijing TV station. Every member of the dance team is very proud for their performance at the Tian'an Men Square. They are very happy and feel themselves "useful," younger and more energetic although the dance is exhausting and costly.

As elderly women, most of them have been constrained in many ways by endless housework and the caring for other family members. They not only have to routinely repeat the housework again and again but also need to establish accord between housework and everything else they do. Moreover, they have to answer demand from every direction at home and prepare to be disturbed to drop what they are doing at any time. But they still try to change and search for ways to make their lives better. In the end they find their solution in the dance team. They have shared together many good times that they forget the troubles and pressure as

well as the repeated housework in their everyday lives. The activities of the dance team offer not only the social interaction they need, but also help them increase their ability to do housework, such as how to cook more delicious and nutritious dishes, do exercise but also make friends.

Conclusion

Being an ethnic minority, female and aged, the elderly women of Korean nationality who participated in this interview could have been disadvantaged. They would be more easily confined in a group of Korean nationality because of their minority status and inability to communicate eloquently in Chinese. However, they continue to try to contact other nationalities and people in other countries. For example, the children of six interviewees are married with people of the Han Chinese nationality and from Japan. They have realized the shortcomings and merits of the Korean culture and other cultures. One of such cases is that of Yu Meizi, whose son-in-law is a Han Chinese, finds out that, "Han Chinese men care about women.....Men of Korean nationality are unwillingly to enter the kitchen, but some men of the Han nationality are different and are willingly to do so, including my son-in-law who is a cadre." Li Zhenyu adds that her son-in-law is a male chauvinist although he is a man of Korean nationality. She regrets now that she should have not insisted on her daughter marrying to a man of Korean nationality. Although they have realized that women are oppressed by patriarchy and that some of their patriarchal ideas have changed, the concept that a woman should be a dutiful wife and loving mother is still rooted in their minds. That women should be chaste is still widely accepted among them. Only Piao Mingshu one of the six widowed interviewees admits that she has once thought about remarrying and cohabited with someone whom she is no longer befriendedwith. All of the other widows refuse to remarry although their husbands died many years ago.¹⁰ They point out that it is unnecessary to remarry for they are old and they have sons. Zheng Yumei, who was only 38 years old when her husband died, said that she

¹⁰ Among the old women of Korean nationality, 47.35 percent of the women 60-64 years old and 76.20 percent of the women over 65 years old have lost their husbands, who die earlier than their wives, according to the 4th National Census in China (M. S. Cui, 1999).

didn't remarry, but the others who are familiar with her said that me that she did once remarry. This indicates that she is unwillingly to talk about it because she has felt embarrassed by her being "unchaste."

Compared with people of the Han nationality, Che Jinnv said that

Elderly women of Korean nationality have faced more difficulties.....What a rapid improvement the Han nationality have achieved! Some Han Chinese people collectively practice phonation, teach songs and conduct chorus. All of them are free..... They once worked at the Central Chorus and volunteer their services after being retired. Nobody of the Korean nationality has such ability.

It is perhaps true that there are not such excellent and adequate human resources among people of the Korean nationality compared to the Han nationality. Such inadequacy has affected the lives of these elderly women.

Women in their sixties still have many dreams. Xu Aishun wishes to buy a car and travel around the country. Piao Mingshu hopes to learn everything such as Chinese, the musical instruments and so on. By contrast, the women in their seventies have to dance less for the arthritis and other illnesses. Cui Jinzi, who is 81 years old, tells the area where she can walk about and has become smaller and smaller so that she has to stay at home for most of time in case her children will worry about her safety. She tells that she likes to do farming and plant the vegetables in her piece of land, which is located in the suburb of Beijing. She is reluctant to talk about her gardening in details as she regards working at her age an embarrassment, which could lose the face of her children. In other words, the attitude towards labor restricts the lives of the elderly women.

The difficulties facing these elderly women include the ones which the aging population of China, not just those of the Korean nationality, should try to resolve. For the elderly women of Korean nationality in Beijing, lacking the basic facilities such as the exercise room is the biggest difficulty. Although there are many NGOs of Korean nationality, most of them have paid their attention to the situations with poor college

students and have not paid attention to the lives of elderly women. This author's opinion is that the governments, enterprises and NGOs should collectively try to work out ways to deal with the problems before the elderly women. Hence the following suggestions are proposed:

1. The governments, enterprises and NGOs should collectively provide exercise rooms for the elderly women of Korean nationality in the Wangjing area.
2. Both the college students of Korean nationality in Beijing and the ones of the Han nationality who study Korean should be encouraged to volunteer in their spare time to chat with and do housework for the elderly women of the Korean nationality, who live alone or feel lonely. Realizing that there are so many merits the younger generation should learn from elderly women, such as the good habits of diligence and frugality, the strong will to overcome the difficulties and the quality of willingly helping others. The social support network should be encouraged between the elderly women and volunteers of young college students as well as the white collar workers.
3. The governments, the enterprises and the NGOs should collectively recruit volunteers and open a lot of classes that are free and cultivate interests of the elderly, such as singing, playing music instruments, working with computers and speaking Chinese in order for the elderly women to have chances to enrich and improve themselves.

Through these ethnographical study, the living conditions and the problems of elderly women of Korean nationality in Beijing, have been learned and highlighted and based on these findings, suggestions have been made. Although the study has been a pioneer in the research of elderly women of Korean nationality, it is limited in its representation, especially considering that there are 74.8 percent of the elderly people of Korean nationality living in the countryside (Huang, 2003). Therefore, these women of Korean nationality living in Beijing can only reflect the lives of elderly women of upper-middle class. More in-depth studies are needed to provide more comprehensive pictures of the lives of the elderly women of Korean nationality. Besides, more studies also are needed to compare the situations of elderly people between sexes and nationalities.

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