

## Housing Adjustment Behaviors of Korean Elderly Immigrants Living in Affordable Housing

### Affordable housing에 거주하는 한인 노인 이민자의 주거적응행태

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#### Abstract

This study explores the daily life patterns and housing adjustment behaviors of low-income Korean elderly immigrants residing in affordable housing in the Chicago metropolitan area. Utilizing an intercultural perspective, the study focuses on identifying the immigrants' their cultural attributes of daily living and coping responses to residential misfits. These housing adjustment behaviors are classified into five modes consisting of residential mobility, structural adaptation, residential alteration, normative adaptation, and behavioral adaptation. Two-hour in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with 138 participants from 15 affordable housing complexes. Collected information includes demographic data, immigration experiences and cultural identity, daily life patterns, as well as housing evaluation and housing adjustment behaviors. The study results indicate that many research participants maintained their cultural attributes of daily living accumulated from past experiences (i.e. mostly based upon Korean cultural contexts), but also made adjustments as they complied with their aging body and new living conditions. This also reflects that immigrants' cultural needs are not limited to the use of language and ethnic goods, but are also embedded deeply in their daily life patterns to influence one's uses of the dwellings in a broader sense. All five modes of housing adjustment behaviors were observed with research participants within their residential settings. More importantly, normative and behavioral adaptations along with residential alterations occurred more simultaneously rather than sequentially when the respondents perceived discrepancy between oneself (i.e. including one's attributes, needs, and preferences) and his/her dwelling.

Keywords : Culture, Cultural Attributes, Daily Lifestyles, Coping Responses, Housing Adjustment Behaviors

주요어 : 문화, 문화 특성, 일상생활방식, 대처 방안, 주거 적응 행태

## I. Introduction

### 1. Research background

Incorporating cultural contexts into the provision of services and design of living environments for the elderly population is an increasing issue to consider with the growing immigration in the United States (Kim & Lauderdale, 2002; Shim & Schwartz, 2007; Yee, 2002). The actual numbers of elderly immigrants and their ethnic compositions in the U.S. are already showing rapid increases (He et al., 2005) with the projection of further increase by more than 600% from 5.7 million in

2000 to 36.8 million by the year 2050 (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). Elderly immigrants may experience more difficulties during their intercultural experiences as they tend to adhere more to their existing attributes of everyday life based upon their previous cultural contexts of the home country (Schwartz, 2006). Despite these growing needs, we lack practical knowledge for how cultural contexts can be used for providing better environments to support the needs of elderly immigrants as well as facilitate the adjustment to a new socio-cultural setting. This study seeks to explore this knowledge gap by examining the daily life patterns of Korean elderly immigrants residing in affordable housing with their residential settings in the United States. The purpose of the study is to identify dwelling needs and coping responses for accommodating those needs.

### 2. Context of study

This study is part of a larger project that explores the everyday lifestyles and residential experiences of low-

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이 논문은 2013년도 EDRA44 Providence 학술발표대회에 발표한 논문을 수정·보완한 연구임.

income Korean elderly immigrants residing in affordable housing in the Chicago Metropolitan area. The overall study seeks to construct a comprehensive understanding of the lifestyles of Korean elderly immigrants in close regards to their residential environments by identifying their daily needs (i.e. physical, psychological, and cultural ones), uses of dwellings, residential satisfaction, individual coping responses to residential misfits, and other factors influencing their overall residential experiences.

As the initial stage of data analysis, this article particularly focuses on coping strategies that immigrants use to adapt their living environments to their cultural daily life patterns (or vice versa). The paper examines immigrants' daily life patterns and uses of dwelling to first identify their characteristics and second identify coping responses and judgments of housing fit. The study focuses on the cultural aspects of perceiving residential misfits, performing daily activities, and using the dwelling to accommodate one's domestic needs. Therefore, the study results provide practical knowledge of how Korean elderly immigrants use their dwellings in close regards to their cultural attributes of everyday life. Thus, the cultural appropriateness of these residential settings will be evaluated.

## II. Research Framework

### 1. Theoretical framework

The study conceptually develops from Weisman's model of place (2001) but incorporates Rapoport's concepts of cultural variables (1980; 2001; 2008) to provide an intercultural perspective.

With his Model of Place, Weisman conceptualizes that

buildings, people, and the program are three components that converge to create a place experience while considering the issues of human needs and their uses of the built environment within the socio-cultural contexts of a given society. For him, it is the program (especially the *experiential program*) that connects buildings and people as a bridge as it derives from people's consensual expectations of place to effectively support the activities of its users. Expanding from his theory, the present study takes an intercultural perspective into account as it regards the cultural adjustment experiences of Korean elderly immigrants by and large (Fig. 1). This study postulates certain discordance levels between individual attributes (i.e. based upon Korean cultural contexts) and their residential settings (i.e. built in accordance with American codes and cultural contexts) in terms of their underlying socio-cultural contexts on which they were developed and constructed. In other words, the present study seeks to explore the residential experiences of Korean elderly immigrants through examining the interactive relations between individuals and his/her residential settings while considering the underlying cultural context for each component.

While Weisman's model serves as the basis for developing the overall conceptual model, Rapoport's notion of culture is applied for examining the daily lifestyles of individuals. As the notion and concept of culture is rather broad for examining its influences on people and their built environment, Rapoport subdivides culture into worldviews, values, lifestyles, and activity systems to examine the people-environment relations at an operational level (1980; 2001; 2008). Here, he indicates *life-styles* and *activity system* as the most feasible variables to

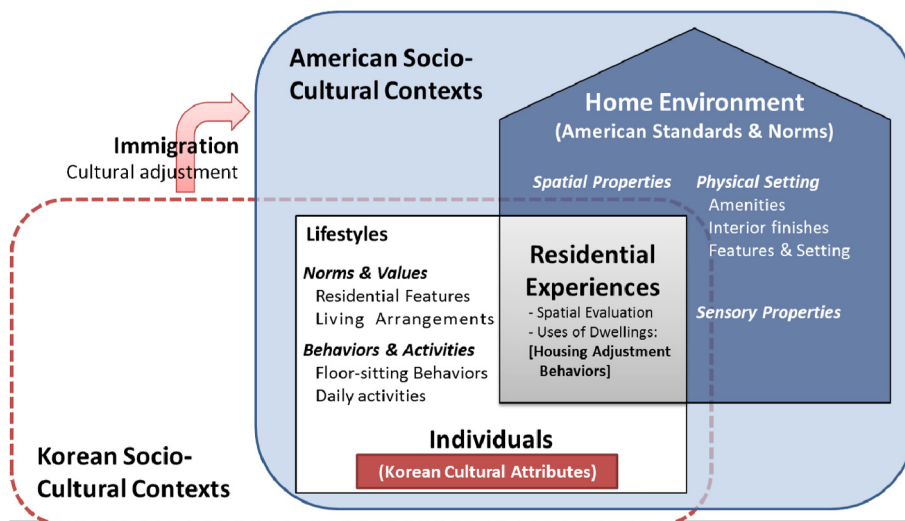


Figure 1. Conceptual Model Of Overall Study

discern: the former as the most useful criterion for defining group characteristics and the latter as the most specific expression of cultural manifestation (2001). Although his subdivision of culture is rather hierarchical and sequential to understand the interactive relations between culture, people, and built environment, it is useful for identifying the lower-level variables to understand their mechanism of influencing people’s daily lifestyles as well as their built environment. As regards, exploring the everyday lifestyles of Korean elderly immigrants, including their norms, values, and behavioral patterns, are the easiest to uncover and can led to a broader understanding of their place-experiences.

### 2. Conceptual framework

The overall project consists of multiple phases of data collection for examining the residential experiences of low-income Korean elderly immigrants. As an initial stage of data analysis, the current paper particularly focuses on exploring the relations between individual cultural attributes (i.e. derived from a meta-analysis of Korean houses) and the use of dwelling for performing domestic activities (see Fig. 2). Through this process, individual coping responses to residential misfits are identified and categorized into housing adjustment behaviors. Individual rationales for such adjustments are determined along with the items and props used for their adjustment behaviors (i.e. where, what, how, and why of housing adjustment behaviors).

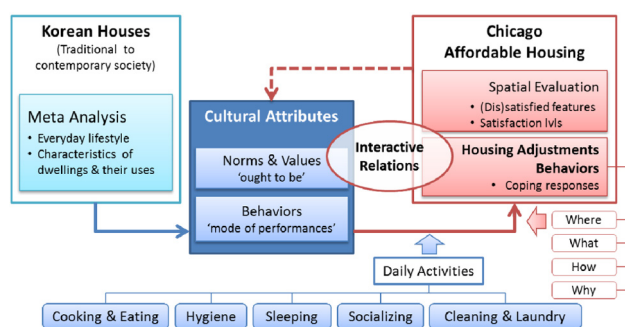


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Main concepts

The two main concepts utilized in the study are *cultural attributes* of everyday life and *housing adjustment behaviors*: the former closely interrelates with the everyday lifestyles of Korean elderly immigrants including their norms, values, and behaviors while the latter refers to individual coping responses to residential misfits.

#### 1) Cultural attributes

Cultural attributes are defined as the enduring norms and values, and customary behaviors that a person develops and embodies through accumulated past experiences. The study defines culture as the shared patterns of cognitions, values, and behaviors internalized and embodied through a period of time by its group members (e.g. Banks & McGee, 1989; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Parsons, 1949). As collective social product, culture is constantly being reproduced and reformed as it reflects the changing values, needs, and lifestyles of its group members. Concurrently, the cultural contexts serve as basal footing for socialization, thus influencing its group members to learn, develop, and internalize appropriate norms and values, and behaviors of a given society. Therefore, people from the same cultural milieu not only behave in similar ways but also shares similar mindsets and thought processes (Banks & McGee, 1989; Kim & Ruben, 1988; Lederach, 1995).

Among these cultural attributes, those embedded deeply in our everyday life become ‘taken-for-granted’ qualities as people constantly practice them on daily bases over a long period of time (Bourdieu, 1980; Csordas, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Pred, 1981). These internalized and embodied attributes of everyday life tend to be enduring in general (Shim & Schwartz, 2007), and are less likely to change unless it becomes necessary. However, every individual who relocates to new socio-cultural setting that is different from one’s own, needs to negotiate his/her existing attributes with those of the new culture (see Berry, 1997; Kim & Ruben, 1988; Shim & Schwartz, 2007). In this light, the present study seeks to explore how individual cultural attributes of everyday life interrelate with one’s daily lifestyles and uses of the dwelling in terms of satisfying and/or compensating for his/her daily needs.

#### 2) Housing adjustment behaviors

Individual coping responses to housing features are categorized with *housing adjustment behaviors*, adapted from Morris and Winter’s housing adjustment and adaptation model (1978). The original model develops from examining the complex decision making process of American families in response to their housing conditions. Morris and Winter argue that people evaluate their housing environments based upon the cultural norms and family’s orientations embedded in the social structure of its society. The environmental condition of a family becomes a deficit when it deviates from society’s standards and norms, and as rational human beings the family seeks

to maintain their equilibrium by resolving this matter. Therefore, the four modes of familial responses to housing deficits presented by them are residential mobility, residential alterations and additions, normative adaptation, and structural adaptation (see Table 1).

The housing adjustment behaviors in this study utilize the overall framework and concepts of Morris and Winter's model. However, considering the characteristics of research participants and their living conditions, some adjustments are made to its concepts and modes. First, dwellings are examined accordingly with individual subjective evaluations rather than objective standards and functional aspects. Second, considering the enduring aspects of behavioral patterns of performing daily activities, behavioral adaptation is added as the fifth mode of housing adjustment behaviors. Lastly, some concepts and notions are modified and adjusted in regards of research participants' characteristics and living conditions (Table 1).

Table 1. *Housing Adjustment Behaviors*

Modes of responses	Original definition	Adjusted definition
Residential mobility	Changing residence.	Changing residence b/w affordable housing.
Structural adaptation	Altering composition of family structure or power organization.	Changes of living arrangements occurred by relocation.
Residential alteration (& addition)	Changes or improvements made within/on structure. Actual enlargement of structure.	Residential modification w/o altering or changing original structure.
Normative adaptation	Alteration of family norms.	Changes of norms and values towards dwelling and residential features.
Behavioral adaptation	N/A	Changes of behavioral patterns for performing domestic daily activities.

### III. Research Methods

The study applied mixed methods of quantitative, qualitative, and photographic techniques for collecting and analyzing data sets.

#### 1. Meta-analysis of Korean cultural attributes

Meta-analysis of Korean houses was performed to identify the distinguishing characteristics of residential settings that correspond to the dwellers' "Korean way of life". For this analysis, published books, dissertations, and web-accessible documents<sup>1)</sup> that included journal and newspaper articles, reports, and webpages were screened and selected using search engines from the Architectural

Institute of Korea, National Assembly Library, AURIC, RISS, Naver Scholar, and Google Scholar. Common Korean house types from post Korean War to contemporary society<sup>2)</sup> were explored in relationship to the changing lifestyles of many Koreans over a period of times. The analysis also included contextual factors such as the socio-cultural, economical contexts, developments in technology, governmental policy, housing demands, and people's lifestyles of a given time period.

The characteristics of Korean houses identified from meta-analysis are floor-sitting culture provision, multi-uses of residential spaces, and features influenced by traditional notions including *Fengshui*, Confucianism, and folk beliefs. These features constantly appear in Korean houses through modified forms and means, and construct the cultural attributes of many Koreans in regards to their residential experiences. These three characteristics served as guiding topics for focus group meetings with elderly Korean neighborhood representatives to discuss and confirm the relevance and use of these features and address any issues of their residential settings prior to actual data collection. Based upon two focus group meetings and findings from meta-analysis, questionnaire items and open-ended questions were developed and modified to explore the daily lifestyles and residential settings of Korean elderly immigrants.

#### 2. Research participants

The residential setting for this study was limited to affordable apartment housing, subsidized by a government housing voucher programs. Therefore, research participants reflect low-income households<sup>3)</sup> and their residential settings are either one-bedroom or studio unit which are similar in sizes and spatial configurations. With this control over research subjects and their residential settings, individual uses of dwelling and their coping responses to residential fits/misfits were explored.

Chicago's Koreatown has been identified as one of the biggest ethnic districts where Korean businesses,

1) About 130 documents were selected using keywords including "(Korean/Modern) houses", "apartments", "(daily) lifestyles and/or activities", "changes", "history" and so forth.

2) Certain features of *Hanoak* (i.e. traditional Korean houses established in *Joseon* Dynasty) such as *ondol* and *daecheong-maru* were included to understand the rootedness and transmission of Korean floors from traditional to contemporary society.

3) This complies with the definition presented by HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) which refers to households with less than 30-50% of the median income of the region one chooses to live.

ethnic resources, and immigrants are concentrated (Kim, 1995). Although many Korean-Americans have moved into suburban areas in recent years, there is still a majority of elderly Koreans residing in and around (Yoon, 1991). Therefore, research participants for present study were recruited using quota sampling from both inner-city and suburban areas. Affordable housing list was obtained through local agency providing comprehensive social services to Korean American seniors at both locales. The list was updated after two focus group meetings with elderly Korean neighborhood representatives. Out of 44 affordable apartment complexes, 15 apartment housing with more than 20 Korean elderly households were selected to study. From these settings, elderly Korean neighborhood representatives and/or social workers were contacted to recruit one household per every five households to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted by interviewers who are both fluent in Korean and English, and all was conducted in Korean based upon research participants' requests.

### 3. Data collection

#### 1) In-depth interview

Two-hour in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted at each participant's home, enabling interviewers to have close observation of the participant's natural behaviors for performing activities, the interactions with residential features, and the current state of the residential setting. This method also created a natural and comfortable atmosphere for participants to share their personal thoughts on residential features and the dwelling. In addition, detailed photographs of dwellings were taken after each interview for further analysis. Collected information included demographic data, immigration experiences and cultural identity, daily life patterns of performing daily activities, and housing evaluation as well as housing adjustment behaviors.

#### 2) Demographic information

Demographic information included year and country of birth, gender, education level, and household income level. This data were collected to gather general information about the participants and to identify their potential influences on other variables such as cultural identity and housing evaluation (i.e. satisfaction levels).

#### 3) Immigration experiences & Cultural identity

The intercultural experiences and cultural identity of participants were gathered to identify their relations to one's daily life patterns, housing evaluation, and housing adjustment behaviors. Collected data included one's year

of and motives for immigration, overall experiences of cultural adjustments, and his/her cultural identity. Cultural identity was measured through two means of objective tool (i.e. an adapted version of the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale) and subjective identification by the participants themselves.

#### 4) Daily life patterns

Individual daily life patterns were explored regarding one's performances of everyday domestic activities within the residence. These activities included eating (i.e. both alone and with others), cooking, sleeping, bathing, cleaning house, doing laundry, and socializing with others at one's home. These daily life patterns were used as criteria for evaluating the dwelling and for examining their relevance to individual housing adjustment behaviors.

#### 5) Housing evaluation & Housing adjustment behaviors

As previously mentioned, participants were asked to evaluate their dwellings in regards to their performances of everyday domestic activities. Residential spaces including entry-space, kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom, and storages were evaluated using a seven-level Likert scale along with one's rationales for evaluation response. For housing adjustment behaviors, any changes occurred in one's residence and individual notions as well as behavioral patterns were inquired and explored through various means including interviews, observations, and photographs.

## IV. Research Findings

Research findings indicate that many participants maintain their cultural attributes of everyday life based upon Korean cultural contexts regardless of their social backgrounds, years of residency in the U.S., immigration experiences, and cultural identity. However, various modes and levels of housing adjustment behaviors are also observed as participants complied with their aging body, regulations as tenants, and limited means and resources for altering their dwellings.

### 1. Research participants

#### 1) Demographic information

Research participants consist of 138 Korean elderly households from 15 affordable housing: 78.3% are women (n=108), and their age range from 61 to 94 with a mean of 77.8 (SD=6.31). As low-income households, about 88% have annual income less than \$15,000 (n=122), and 99.3% have less than \$20,000. Participants'

education levels vary: 34.8% completed elementary school or less, 17.4% finished middle school, and 33.3% completed high school. Only 2.7% had degrees higher than college level.

#### 2) Immigration experiences & Cultural identity

Participants' years of U.S. residency range from 3 to 44 years ( $M=25.67$ ,  $SD=8.82$ )<sup>4)</sup> and 87.7% report that they live in the U.S. for more than 15 years ( $n=121$ ). Their motives for immigration are rather complex with multiple factors influencing their decisions. Primary motives often relate to family relationships: 44.2% immigrated for family re-union, 20.2% for children's education opportunity, 15.9% for economic opportunity, and 14.5% came to support grandchildren rearing.

The itemized scores of Dominant Society Immersion level (DSI) indicate participants' tendencies of adhering more to Korean cultural contexts across language, social interaction, media, and foods (Fig. 3). Participants mainly speak and understand Korean, have relationships with other Koreans, and prefer Korean media and foods over American options. This also corresponds to their subjective cultural identity of which 83.3% identify themselves as either Korean (63.8%,  $n=88$ ) or Korean-American with more Korean attributes (19.6%,  $n=27$ ). However, 90.6% report that they felt at home in the U.S. despite their cultural inclinations and other barriers to acculturation, mostly due to their reception of financial supports by the U.S. government.

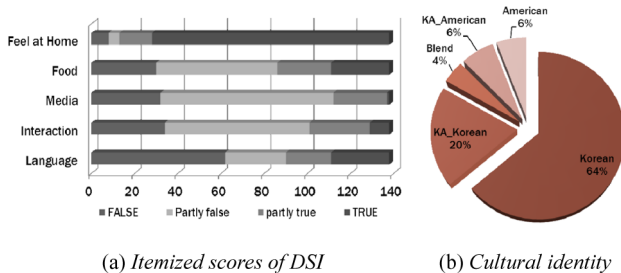


Figure 3. DSI Scores & Cultural Identity

#### 3) Daily life patterns & Use of the dwelling

Participants' daily life patterns and use of the dwelling also indicate their compliances with Korean cultural attributes. They use various props and items to support their floor-sitting behaviors and to use spaces with multi-purposes. In addition, residential features are

4) Participants were not screened by this factor to identify their relations to other variables such as cultural identity, housing evaluation, and housing adjustment behaviors.

modified at various levels to accommodate their daily needs and preferences.

All participants maintain both lifestyles of chair-sitting and floor-sitting cultures for performing domestic activities. For example, 68.1% ( $n=94$ ) of respondents prefer sleeping on beds than floors, and 60.9% ( $n=84$ ) use dining table for having meals. On the contrary, among those who do group dining in one's residence ( $n=73$ ), about 89% ( $n=65$ ) report that they use *gyojasang* (i.e. 교자상, a large Korean dining table designed for floor-sitters) for holding these events. In regards to this specific lifestyle, all participants maintain a shoeless lifestyle and floor-sitting activities in the residence for any occasions.

Residential spaces are used for multi-purposes rather than being exclusively reserved for their primary functions only. For example, the living room holds various activities other than its primary functions of socializing with others, resting, and having family times. It was used as an auxiliary space for extensive cooking (i.e. handling ingredients for kimchi, making side dishes, producing fermented soybean), and for special occasions such as holding ancestral rites and dining in large group. Some participants placed beds, mattresses, and Korean bedding pads in living room for individual rests. However, the multi-use of the spaces could also result from the apartment layouts of respondents (i.e. limited amount of spaces) and the efficient use of space.

#### 4) Influences of traditional notions

The influences of traditional notions on housing features also appear in participants' thoughts and their residential settings. Participants prefer housing unit with certain directional exposures and put extensive efforts into raising indoor plants. Approximately 56% report that window direction is important for receiving natural sunlight (47.8%,  $n=66$ ), and some even identify that they waited to get units facing southern or eastern directions. In regards to indoor plants, almost all participants (94.2%,  $n=130$ ) raise them with the average numbers of 10.4 plants ( $SD=6.48$ ). Some respondents report that they experienced minor conflicts with apartment manager indicating their violation of fire codes (i.e. blocking windows for emergency escape route with plants), but most respondents put great efforts on raising them.

*"Preferring southern direction is a distinctive feature of Koreans."*

*"In Korea you have courtyard (i.e. 마당), but not here. So I raise them like that."*

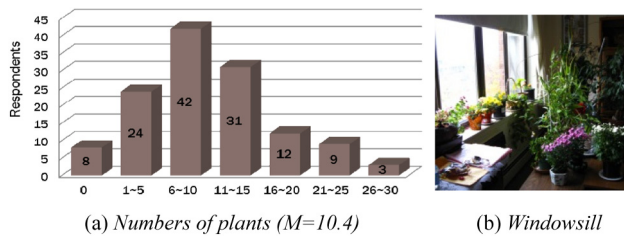


Figure 4. Indoor Plants

## 2. Participants' housing evaluation and satisfaction levels

As measured through quantitative methods, participants show remarkably high levels of satisfaction with their dwellings across each residential space and the overall unit (Fig. 5). There is no significant relations identified from inferential statistical analysis, but this may be influenced by the changed attitudes of respondents towards housing features (i.e. normative adaptation) and their gratitude for governmental support. This finding is supported by the qualitative analysis of the participants' housing evaluation. The most prevalent and frequent comments on positive residential features are governmental (financial) support, living near Korean neighbors, easy maintenance (i.e. convenience and good management), good surroundings (i.e. being close to nature and public services), and having Korean service coordinator within the building. Other comments relate to security, accessibility, and social events with other neighbors but few comments on building features. On the other hand, their comments on negative features relate more to building features in

Table 2. Satisfaction Levels of Residential Spaces (n)

	Frequency						n
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	
Unit	1	1	1	16	26	38	54
E	1	4	4	23	23	39	44
LR	1	2	2	18	23	48	44
BR	2	1	5	25	21	46	38
K	2	4	9	26	18	47	32
B	3	6	10	19	17	45	38
S	4	7	9	22	27	39	30

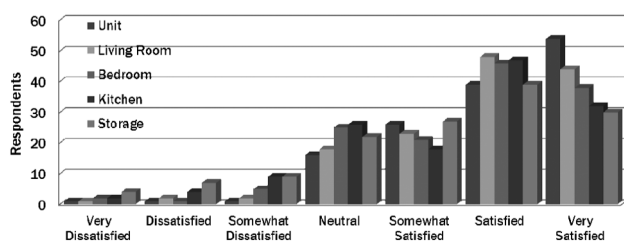


Figure 5. Residential Satisfaction Level

terms of their physical conditions. These include poor ventilation in common areas and hallways, lack of storage spaces, limited parking spaces, worn-out cabinets, and absence of (or small) community room for visitors.

Participants frequently report that “this is good enough” regarding one’s financial ability, physical capacity, life-stage, and living arrangements. This also reflects their normative adaptations towards housing features in terms of lowering one’s expectations with subsidized housing and being supplemented by governmental supports and being grateful for the services they received. This attitude could also relate to the number of years in residency for the current dwelling (M=9.89, SD=6.26). For example, some respondents report that they are already used to their dwellings and felt no inconveniences at all.

*“This is good enough for subsidized senior housing. You don’t expect fancy things when you move in here.”*

*“When you age... your greed gets attenuated. (...) This is good enough.”*

Respondents frequently report the merits of living close to other Korean cohorts within a Korean ethnic community, where they can access ethnic resources more easily. Along with their desires for independence from living with adult children, respondents indicate Korean neighbors as their new family members who provided both physical and psychological supports on a daily bases.

*“I don’t feel comfortable at my children’s house. Here is much better. (There is) no one interfering with your life.”*

*“I felt lonely when I lived in a single house. But here, you get many Korean neighbors. Now I feel like living.”*

*“Services are good. (...) We have many Korean neighbors, so we can hold on to one another.”*

## 3. Housing adjustment behaviors

All modes of housing adjustment behaviors are observed and indicated with research participants and their dwellings. While residential mobility and structural adaptation take place as participants relocated to current residences, other adjustment behaviors occur more simultaneously when they perceived misfits between themselves (i.e. including cultural attributes, needs, and preferences) and their residential settings.

### 1) Residential mobility

Respondents report that they played an active role for relocating to his/her current residence. About 92.0% (n=127) identify that either oneself or his/her spouse

decided on moving into affordable senior housing. However, due to language barriers and lack of information, they receive helps from their adult children, grandchildren, and ethnic social workers for searching and securing their current residences. This trend also reflects their desire for aging independently from their adult children.

*“I really wanted to be independent from my children. I needed a space for myself. So I told my son about how I felt and he helped me.”*

*“My friends said it’s not good to live with your children. They recommended applying for senior housing.”*

## 2) Structural adaptation

Most residents lived with their adult children during their early years of immigration. Some respondents report that they felt helpless regarding their alienated lives in the U.S. since they were dependent upon their adult children for financial and psychological supports, interpreter, driver, and so forth. For those who came to support rearing grandchildren even felt needless when the kids grew older and the role diminished. Therefore, as they become recipients of governmental supports and relocate themselves to affordable housing, structural adaptation occur with their living arrangements and power organization between other family members occurred.

## 3) Residential alteration

Residential alteration most frequently focused on flooring surfaces in close relations to supporting their shoeless lifestyles and floor-sitting behaviors. Almost all participants create transitional entry space using various mats and shoe-racks where they take off shoes or change into indoor slippers. They also pay tremendous efforts on preventing outside dirt coming inside one’s living unit and clean these mats regularly, up to several times a day.

Participants show different levels of maintaining their floor-sitting behaviors using various props and items. For example, floor coverings such as electric mats, blankets, bamboo mats, Korean mattress (i.e. 보료, fancy Korean mattress used as cushion), and area rugs are spread out all over residential spaces, especially in their living rooms. Their rationales for using additional floor coverings included: participants’ rejection to the unknown history of pre-installed carpets and their prickly feelings; easy maintenance; and adjusting body temperature throughout the season. These floor coverings are also used for demarcating boundaries within their residential spaces. Respondents also reported that they used electric mats and bamboo mats to reproduce *ondol* and *maru* features on carpeted floors to recreate their past experiences in

Korea (see Fig. 6). About 65% identify that they use electric mats (n=90), and 76.7% of them report that they used them either to support body heat or to alleviate pains caused by arthritis.

*“I hate carpets. I really hate stepping directly on it. It reminds me of how old and dirty it is.”*

*“I keep electric mat on 24/7 at its lowest level. It’s warm and good for elderlies.”*

*“(bamboo mat) provides coolness and it’s easy to clean. It’s good since you can wipe it off with gullae more often.”*



(a) Blankets & electric mat (b) Bamboo mats (c) Korean mattress (Boryo)

Figure 6. Various Floor Coverings In Living-room

Bathroom features are often modified with simple props and items to support personal hygienic behaviors in squatting and sitting positions. Respondents use wooden board and rods to provide additional spaces in their shower booths, tubs, and/or on walls for placing basins, washboards, and other items. They also hold other activities such as handling food ingredients, hand-washing small garments, and drying laundries here, and modify bathroom features accordingly (Fig. 7(a)). Lack of proper storage spaces is another issue triggering the participants to modify their residential settings. In order to compensate for insufficient storage spaces, respondents make additional spaces using provisional wooden boards and shelves, storage cabinets, and drawers at various locations (Fig. 7(b)). Lastly, windowsills are often modified in regards to raising indoor plants: respondents expand their windowsills using wooden boards, and put tables, chairs, and plant tops adjacent to them for placing more plants nearby (Fig. 4(b)).



(a) Altering bathroom (b) Installing storage shelves

Figure 7. Residential Alteration (Bathroom & Storage)



#### 4) Normative adaptation

Participants' attitudes towards their residential features and overall living conditions also indicate changes. As mentioned earlier, many respondents lower their expectations towards housing quality as they move into subsidized senior housing. They also show greater gratitude towards governmental financial supports and enjoy the trade-off of easy maintenance for their living environments (i.e. having managers, janitors, and others taking care of respondents and their dwellings). Participants also believe that having higher standards and demands for this type of housing is not appropriate at their life stage. However, some respondents also report that they were not in a position to make complaints due to concerns of being evicted. Accordingly, most respondents report remarkably high levels of residential satisfaction towards one's units and residential spaces (see Fig. 5)

#### 5) Behavioral adaptation

Behavioral changes often evolve from altering their floor-sitting behaviors, the cleaning of residential floors, and cooking patterns for making certain Korean foods.

In regards to floor-sitting behaviors, respondents report that they had to relinquish their past floor-sitting activities, due to their aging body and declines in certain physical movements. This rationale is often indicated as their primary reason for adapting to sleeping on a bed versus a mat on the floor. On the other hand, for those respondents who maintained floor-sitting behaviors indicate their uses of small props and items for supporting their behaviors. These items include various floor coverings, *soban* (소반, small portable tables), *gyojasang*, and *bangseok* (방석, sitting pad for floor-sitting). However, as mentioned earlier, all participants prepare their dwellings ready for floor-sitting behaviors at any occasion regardless of their waning ability in physical movements and preferences for a certain lifestyle.

*"I used to sit on floors a lot, but now my legs hurt.... I'll have to crawl all over to stand up from the floor."*

*"When you wake up in a bed, your body is already half way up. You just need to stand up to get up."*

*"As Koreans, there's time when you want to sit on floors, or when you have additional guests. Carpeted floors are not proper for those times."*

Participants also change their behaviors for cleaning residential floors. As many of them keep shoeless lifestyle and support floor-sitting behaviors, participants put greater efforts on keeping residential floors clean. For those who clean floors for themselves (n=96), about

68.8% (n=66) identify that they prefer wiping floors using *gullae* (i.e. 걸레, a rag used for mopping floors) in squatting or sitting positions rather than mopping in standing position.

*"My wife wipes the floor while sitting. Mopping in standing position is not good (clean) enough for her."*

*"Wiping the floor in squatting position is hard now. So I sit and crawl on my butt for wiping floors."*

Another prominent behavioral adaptation by the participants is altering the preparation of ethnic foods, such as soy bean paste (된장), *kimchi*, and Korean soups made with these ingredients. Respondents show great concerns of food odor but only 5% (n=7) report that they experienced some sort of conflicts with managers and other residents due to this matter. However, many participants report that they change their cooking patterns and use various items to eliminate food odor. These changes and efforts include dining outside or buying cooked foods, changing cooking time and methods (i.e. cooking when other neighbors went to bed at night and not re-heating foods), sealing door gaps to prevent odor going out to hallways, opening windows and using fans to force ventilation, lighting scented candles and perfumes, and burning orange peels or making coffee to disguise food odor.

## V. Conclusion

The study results indicate that many Korean elderly immigrants who participated in this study maintain their cultural attributes of everyday life upon Korean cultural contexts regardless of their social backgrounds, immigration experiences, and cultural identity. Therefore, their uses of dwellings for performing everyday domestic activities comply more with those of Korean culture. Despite their limited resources and restricted regulations as tenants of subsidized housing, individual endeavors for maintaining their cultural continuity of everyday life are observed through various housing adjustment behaviors. While residential mobility and structural adaptation take place as they relocated themselves to current residences, other housing adjustment behaviors have occurred more simultaneously as they negotiate their attributes of everyday life with their residential surroundings. In other words, when participants perceived residential misfits, they seek for alternatives by changing their behaviors and notions and/or modifying residential features concurrently. These adjustment behaviors may seem trivial and somewhat passive, but they play effective roles on supporting Korean

elderly immigrants in terms of adjusting to their new residential setting. They also contribute to one's development of place attachments as participants convert a mere physical space into meaningful home to oneself during the process.

The results also indicate that the changing trends and preferences of Korean elderly immigrants regarding their living arrangements and desires for independence from living with adult children. Participants indicate that they seek more supports from government, local ethnic agencies, and other Korean cohorts residing within the same community for fulfilling their needs rather than relying solely upon their adult children. It is highly likely that these supports (i.e. including financial, physical, psychological and cultural ones) and other social services have influenced their satisfaction levels with dwellings as they compensate for other negative features.

In the process of aging, culture can either function as barriers or as therapeutic resources based upon the way it is understood and utilized by the people including service providers, policy makers, family members, and even older adults themselves (Day & Cohen, 2000). The current study shows the cultural needs of ethnic minorities go beyond their uses of cultural artifacts, foods, language, and social media of a certain group. Individual cultural characteristics are deeply embedded in their daily life patterns, and thus impact one's uses of dwellings in many ways. Although individuals are able to adapt and negotiate their needs as active human beings, resources and alternatives are often sought from within one's cultural boundaries for many cases. In this regards, it is meaningful to understand how elderly minorities, such as Korean elderly immigrants, use their cultural contexts to accommodate their needs on daily bases. This will also provide comprehensive understandings of their daily lifestyles and needs at a practical level to reduce the gap among their actual needs, provision of services, and policies regarding this population group, and thus enhance their quality of life eventually.

The study has limitations in that it occurred with Korean immigrants who lived in subsidized housing who may lack resources to alter their setting. The population may not be generalizable to others due to these constraints. However, further analysis of data is required to further identify the patterns and the interrelations among factors influencing the residential experiences of Korean elderly immigrants.

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접수일(2013. 12. 27)

수정일(1차: 2014. 4. 3, 2차: 2014. 4. 21)

게재확정일자(2014. 5. 2)