RESEARCH ARTICLES

Professional Hispano-American Immigrants in South Korea: A Case Study of the Influence of Korean Mass Media on Generation Y Immigration Motivation

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Abstract. Contemporary Hispano-American immigrants on professional visas in South Korea who are not descendants of any Korean diaspora or emigrants, with no family historical, cultural, or ethnic ties to Korea, have chosen Korea over other countries that may be closer in location or easier to adapt to. This paper discusses how destination selection transcends mere economic factors, going beyond typical economic migration, specifically focusing on Generation Y and their construction of a meso-link between macro and micro conditions, where the origin point of interaction between foreigners and host society may be influenced by the consumption of South Korean mass media products. The role and influence of Korean mass media as an intercultural medium in contemporary Hispanic America, particularly among Gen-Y individuals, are evident. Moreover, by comparing this younger group with previous generations, it is clear that the influence of South Korean mass media cultural products is characteristic for Gen-Y in particular. The spread of interest in South Korean culture despite cultural, geographic, and linguistic barriers should be explained as a product of the Korean Wave and the rise of Web 2.0 in Hispanic America since the mid-2000s.

Keywords: *International immigrants, Korean Wave, Hispano-Americans, Migration motivation, Professional immigrants, South Korea*

1. Introduction

The number of people migrating internationally is increasing rapidly worldwide. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines international migrants as people who move to a country other than their original place of residence and reside there for at least 12 months, regardless of the reason

for migration or legal status.[1] In 2019, there were about 272 million migrants in the world (DESA 2019). Even countries that historically have had low rates of international immigration, such as South Korea (henceforth Korea) have seen an increment of foreign residents, generally coming since the early 1990s as migrant workers. As Choi (2017) noted, the number of immigrants in Korea more than tripled over the 20 years between 1997 and 2017. In 2019, 2,524,656 foreign residents were living in Korea.[2]

In the past decade, as the rate of immigration to Korea continues to increase as does the number of number of studies on immigrants performed by Korean researchers. Among Korean immigration researchers (Kim 2009; Choi 2017), an increased focus has been seen on socio-cultural conflicts and immigrants' experiences as they adapt to Korean society. In relation to Hispanic American immigration in particular Choi (2017) explored the cultural adjustment related experiences of Latin American professionals in Korea. Joo (2012) compared the adaptation of Latin American immigrants in Korea with those in Japan. However, previous research is currently lacking in two main fronts.

First, the research subject is often treated with an oversimplified definition of terms leading to inaccuracy. Hispanic America, as the term is used here, refers to the largest cultural area in the American Continent, including 18 countries[3] where Spanish is the most commonly spoken language[4]. Hispano-Americans as defined here are people belonging to these countries. The concept of Hispanic America has been used in classical historical and anthropological writings such as Urbanski (1978), and the reason for its adoption here is simply scientific accuracy. As Torres Martínez (2016) indicated, the commonly used concept "Latino(a)/Latin" or "Latin American" is a political construction that lacks scientific accuracy, as it relates to the linguistic concept that identifies languages that descend from Latin and their speakers, so it includes Italians, French, Portuguese, Spaniards, and even Romanians in Europe; further, in the Americas, it would also include Brazil although Brazil's main language

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[1] Although there is not yet an internationally agreed definition of 'migrant', the above definition is the most useful as implemented by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA 1998). According to this definition, long-term international students and long-term workers assigned for work are also immigrants. Refugees are termed involuntary migration and are a subgroup of immigrants.

[2] See the Korea Immigration Service 2019 report here (Korean Language):
http://viewer.moj.go.kr/skin/doc.html?rs=/result/bbs/227&fn=temp_1581918117248100

[3] Namely, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

[4] There are also indigenous minority languages in this area. These languages are often not rare—in Bolivia, Quechua and Guaraní are official state languages, in Ecuador, Quicha is commonly spoken, and Guatemala recognizes 21 Mayan languages.

is different from that of the other countries in the region. In addition, immigrants' self-identification and self-distinction should be borne in mind, as there is evidence that, for example, Hispano-Americans in Japan are driven in part by a desire to distinguish themselves from other foreigners (Piffaut Gálvez 2020). The evidence strongly suggests that is necessary to accurately describe this group, just as no one would refer to Koreans and Japanese together as simply Asians when speaking about them.

Second, the migration motivations of Hispano-Americans, specifically professional immigrants, remain unexplored. As the number of people from different backgrounds living in Korea increases, the motivations that led them to Korea are likely to continue to diversify. Here, migrant motivation is considered to be a psychological process that induces migration behavior and directs it toward certain goals. A motivation is established through the interaction of internal and external factors. The largest precedents in migration to East Asia from the Americas are that of Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians, who have been migrating to Japan since the 1980s. There is a rich corpus of previous research covering 30 years (Yamanaka 1996; Tsuda 2003; Sekiguchi 2005; Takenaka 2005; Maeda 2006; Tsuda 2022 among many others) that deals with the reasons that this group have had for moving to Japan, their expectations, and their experiences. It has been reported that many of them chose Japan as a destination not only for economic reasons but also to seek out their own identity and roots as Nikkei; descendant of the Japanese diaspora. However, few studies have focused on the immigration of non-descendants to East Asian countries. Non-Korean Hispano-Americans, that is, those who have no ethnic ties to Korea, a country that is geographically and culturally distant, might be expected to find immigration destinations that are socially and culturally closer to them. It is necessary to consider what motivations they may have for choosing Korea as a migration destination nevertheless.

Since the 2010s, migration studies have become increasingly interdisciplinary, drawing on other fields, such as media studies, and they have focused on immigrants' use of social media in their immigration process (Mcgregor & Siegel 2013), the media-based construction of migration situations (Viola & Musolff 2019), and, the relationship between the media, its products, and immigrants, demonstrating the impact of media on immigration acceptance and motivation (King & Wood 2013). Moreover, the study of professional immigrants deepens our understanding of diverse migration processes in the first part of the 21st century, which is an era of global networks and transnationalism (Colic-Peisker

2010; Cranston 2016). Therefore, this article will examine the motivations of Hispano-Americans to choose Korea as their migration destination. Specifically, this study explores professional non-Korean Hispano-Americans (henceforth Hispano-Americans) residing in Korea to clarify the influence of Korean mass media on immigration motivation.

2. Research Method[5]

Data collection was performed using qualitative and in-depth interviews (Taylor et al. 2015) combined with a questionnaire survey (Mellenbergh 2008). First, exploratory interviews were performed to identify the experiences of the subjects regarding their immigration. From this, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted on the specific topic of their personal motivations. From these research data, a questionnaire survey was constructed to cover all themes that arose in the interviews. The first exploratory interviews were conducted from June to October 2021, and the follow-up, in-depth qualitative interviews, questionnaire surveys and final analyses were conducted between March and October 2022. At the moment of research, subjects were living in the five most populated provinces of Korea, namely Gyeonggi-do, Seoul, Busan, Gyeongsangnam-do, and Incheon. The questionnaire survey and interviews were in Spanish, and selected quotations were translated by the author to present the argument here. Interviews were conducted online as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

As illustrated in Table I, a total of 28 subjects participated in this study. of whom 21 were Generation Y, also known as Millennials (henceforth Gen-Y), 57.1% were male and 42.9% female. The subjects were all around 30 (27–34) years old. They were joined by a separate, smaller group of seven middle-aged individuals (aged 45–54 years old), of whom 57.1% were male and 42.9% female. All the participants were first-generation professional immigrants and non-Korean Hispano-Americans living for at least 3 years in Korea who had a residence status that allowed them to work. According to their occupational and educational background, all of

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[5] This study is part of a project of wider scope regarding Hispano-Americans immigrants in East Asia, and simultaneous research on immigrants living in Japan and China is currently being implemented. Furthermore, the questionnaire survey was created by transcribing the results obtained in qualitative interviews with the informants, coding the distinctive words and classifying the codes into operationalizable categories that relate to previous works in this area. For example, in Table IV, "the divisions of mass media" and "others" were created using post interview coding. The battery of questions presented in this paper match those of the Japanese and Chinese cases for ease of comparability.

them were professional immigrants. Most (92.9%) had graduated from the university, but some (7.1%) were graduates of vocational schools.

Table I
Overview of Participants

	Nationality	Age	Sex	Educational Level	Occupation	Years of Residence
Generation Y Group						
#1	Chile	28	Female	University graduate	Spanish teacher	4
#2	Mexico	29	Male	University graduate	IT engineer	5
#3	Peru	28	Female	University graduate	Office worker	3
#4	Peru	34	Male	University graduate	Translator	6
#5	Chile	34	Female	University graduate	IT engineer	7
#6	Mexico	32	Female	University graduate	Spanish teacher	6
#7	Argentina	31	Male	University graduate	IT engineer	5
#8	Ecuador	31	Male	University graduate	Musician	5
#9	Mexico	27	Male	University graduate	Mechanical engineering	3
#10	Colombia	31	Male	University graduate	Physical trainer	4
#11	Guatamala	31	Female	University graduate	Translator	5
#12	Paraguay	29	Male	University graduate	Mechanical engineering	5
#13	Honduras	27	Female	University graduate	Office worker	3
#14	Honduras	29	Female	University graduate	Office worker	4
#15	Mexico	29	Male	Vocational school	Automotive technician	4
#16	Costa Rica	28	Male	Vocational school	Cook	4
#17	Mexico	30	Female	University graduate	Spanish teacher	4
#18	Peru	31	Male	University graduate	Mechanical engineer	5
#19	Venezuela	28	Female	University graduate	Dance instructor	3
#20	Paraguay	33	Male	University graduate	IT engineer	5
#21	Mexico	32	Male	University graduate	IT engineer	5
Middle-Aged Group						
	Nationality	**Age**	**Sex**	**Educational Level**	**Occupation**	**Years of Residence**
#22	Mexico	45	Female	University graduate	Marketing	13
#23	Argentina	47	Male	University graduate	Engineer	12
#24	Argentina	45	Female	University graduate	Pharmacist	12
#25	Chile	46	Male	University graduate	Consultant in export company	14
#26	Mexico	50	Female	University graduate	Consultant in export company	16
#27	Peru	54	Male	University graduate	Business owner	17
#28	Peru	47	Male	University graduate	Cook	12

Finally, as this research is being conducted from Kyoto University in Japan, it follows the Code of Ethics of the Japanese Sociological Society (JSS)[6]. The objective and scope of the research were explained to all subjects, as well as how their privacy would be protected before their consent was obtained.

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[6] The purpose and content of this code can be found (in Japanese) at: https://jss-sociology.org/about/ethicalcodes/.

3. Results

First, this section will illustrate the survey results on the respondents' motivation to leave their home country and their choice of Korea as a destination. Then, the influence of Korean mass media within Hispano-America will be discussed. Here, the relationship of Gen-Y individuals with Korean mass media is understood through the participants' subjective understanding as shared it via interviews. Then, a comparison with immigrants from the previous generation is presented to highlight their differences. Finally, this section will explore the characteristics of the process by which a relationship between Hispano-Americans and Korea is built.

3.1 From emigration motivation to choosing South Korea as a destination

Immigration can be described by push-and-pull factors. For these types of models, the push factors are regional factors that push people from a starting point, and pull factors are the ones that attract people to a destination (Ishikawa 2013). Through our questionnaire, Hispano-American participants were asked to report the push factors that prompted them to leave their home country and move to Korea. Double answers were allowed to create a hierarchy of primary and secondary reasons. This allowed for nuance in the participants' responses and subsequent analysis, results were classified into categories and summarized in Table II.

The primary emigration reasons were mainly in the economical category (71.4%). These were "Employment dissatisfaction," describing working in jobs unrelated to their education, and "Economic instability," including having poor prospects for promotion and a poor balance between wages and work requirements. Thus, the main reasons for leaving their homelands were unsatisfactory job prospects in their home countries, wage instability, and anxiety over employment sustainability. This was followed by reasons within the socio-cultural category (21.4%), concentrated on seeking to improve their quality of life and leaving behind "Crime and violence,"[7] building a family (marriage), and social networking (job relocations in their case). Another less common group of reasons involved political issues (7.1%).

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[7] Crime and violence were separated from political violence according to the subjects' definitions. Crime and violence are defined simply as illegal acts committed by citizens. Political violence was defined as violence or coercion by governments and their law enforcement agencies.

Table II
Personal Reasons for Leaving Home Country

Reasons for Leaving		Primary		Secondary	
		#	%	#	%
Economic	Employment dissatisfaction	10	35.7%	5	17.9%
	Economic instability	9	32.1%	5	17.9%
	Unemployement	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Poverty	1	3.6%	0	0.0%
Socio-Cultural	Crime and violence	1	3.6%	1	3.6%
	Job relocations	2	7.1%	0	0.0%
	Marriage	1	3.6%	0	0.0%
	Interest in living abroad	2	7.1%	16	57.1%
Political	Political instability	1	3.6%	1	3.6%
	Political violence	1	3.6%	0	0.0%
	War	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

The most common secondary personal reason was "Interest in living abroad" (57.1%). Many of those who chose "Interest in living abroad" as their main secondary reason chose "Employment dissatisfaction" and "Economic instability" as their primary one. The logic seems to be reversed between primary and secondary reasons, such that "Employment dissatisfaction" and "Economic instability" appeared to be associated with an underlying desire to live in a different culture and having international experiences. Conversely, most of those who chose the more serious reasons, including poverty, crime, political instability, and political violence, as their primary reasons (14.3%), took "Employment dissatisfaction" and "Economic instability" as their secondary reasons, meaning that these immigrants experienced more serious issues than economic ones, expressing more serious reasons to leave.

The analysis of these data prompt the question why our subjects did not choose to migrate to the countries in the Northern Hemisphere that are culturally closer and could be easier to adapt to, such as Europe or the United States in particular. In Table III, the personal reasons for choosing Korea present an overwhelming change in motivation, to an extent that may seem irrational at first glance. While personal reasons for leaving the country were mostly associated with the economic category, the dominant reason for choosing Korea was "Interest in Korean culture." Furthermore, most of those who had more serious problems and reasons to emigrate also chose "Interest in Korean culture" as their secondary reason. This suggests a deeper logic underpinning the decision to go across much of the globe to reach faraway Korea instead of finding a way to a nearby country that

is culturally closer and easier to immigrate to and that would provide equally attractive benefits. The only question remains as to why and how interest in Korea arose in these individuals.

Table III
Personal reasons for choosing Korea

Reasons	Primary		Secondary	
	#	%	#	%
Career advancement	0	0.0%	4	14.3%
Economic stability	2	7.1%	8	28.6%
Higher standard of living	0	0.0%	7	25.0%
Interest in Korean culture	21	75.0%	5	17.9%
Safe and secure society	1	3.6%	4	14.3%
Marriage	1	3.6%	0	0.0%
Job relocation	2	7.1%	0	0.0%
Political stability	1	3.6%	0	0.0%

To clarify these questions, it is necessary to know what process led to these immigrants' interest in Korea as a country, society, and culture, especially as they were not descendants of the Korean diaspora and had no familiar ties with the country. Table IV presents the medium of contact with Korean culture divided into primary (the first encountered) and secondary products. The dominant primary medium of contact with Korean culture was Korea mass media as a category (75%), with the clear leader in this category being the subcategory of Korean pop music, commonly known as *K-pop* (71.4%). The remainder (25%) fall under the category of "others," including literature, education, and Korean martial arts. The most frequent secondary mediums of contact were Korean television series, known as *doramas* (50%). The category of Korean mass media received an even higher percentage, an overwhelming 92.9%. Undoubtedly, Korean mass media had a great influence on the respondents' approach to Korea and subsequently on their decision to select Korea as a destination.

Table V presents the respondents' age of first exposure to Korean culture through its mass media products. First contact during teenage years was overwhelmingly prominent (78.6%). Experiences during essential character formation stages, such as adolescence, often influence life choices, possibly even such large decisions as the choice of a migration destination many years later. This teenage contact was only true for late Gen-Y individuals, and those who had their first contact over 30 years old were members of the older previous generation. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Table IV
Contact medium with Korean culture

Mediums		Primary		Secondary	
		#	%	#	%
Korea mass media	K-pop	20	71.4%	1	3.6%
	Dorama	1	3.6%	14	50.0%
	Movies	0	0.0%	2	7.1%
	Animation	0	0.0%	2	7.1%
	TV Shows	0	0.0%	2	7.1%
	Games	0	0.0%	1	3.6%
	Manhua (comics)	0	0.0%	1	3.6%
	Documentaries	0	0.0%	3	10.7%
Others	Literature	3	10.7%	2	7.1%
	Education	3	10.7%	0	0.0%
	Household	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Korean Martial Arts	1	3.6%	0	0.0%

Table V
First exposure to Korean culture

Age	#	%
Under 10 years old	0	0.0%
10–20 years old	22	78.6%
21–30 years old	0	0.0%
Over 30 years old	6	21.4%

There were no significative differences between male and female or between nationalities.

3.2 Korean mass media influence in Hispanic America

This section will explain macro-level conditions in the Hispanic American region regarding Korean mass media and how they are related to the relationship the subjects of this study built with this country on the micro-level of decision-making. For comparison's sake, information on a subgroup of middle-age immigrants was collected as well.

3.2.1 Generation Y encounters Korean mass media

Although no single classification standard exists, in Hispano-America, Gen-Y is used to refer to those born between 1984 and 1996, the generation that experienced the early stages of digitization in the IT revolution (Novella et al. 2018). This generation tends to prefer digital devices while still showing an understanding of analog instruments in daily life (Serres 2014). This is also a generation that has

experienced the diversification of media that grew from the IT revolution. The primary subjects in this study, around 30 years old, belong to late generation Y.

As Min (2017, 2019) notes, Korean popular culture reached Latin America in the early 1990s, mostly through television programs, such as dramas, animations, and documentaries. The Korean Wave (Hallyu), which brought Korean media to much of the world, only began around 2010 and mostly attracted adolescents. This period is sometimes called Hallyu 2.0, a concept coined to describe the development of the Korean Wave in parallel with Web 2.0 (Jin 2012), indicating the emphasis on user-generated content and usability of Web 2.0, which played in favor of the spread of the Korean Wave as fans were freed to seek out and obtain these products even if they did not form part of the hegemonic mass media in their own home countries. Thus, social networking sites (SNS) and user-generated content (UGC) were at the center of this new wave. At this point, the focus shifted from television programs to Korean pop music and, to a lesser extent, video games and animation products (Jin 2015). The specifics of the absorption of the Korean Wave in Hispanic America are interesting because, despite the similarities with the Korean Wave in other regions, Hispano-American K-pop fandom used SNS and UGC appropriate Korean popular culture as a subculture within their respective home countries in a way that stands out from the reactions of other countries (Han 2017). It should be noted that in adverse economic and geographic conditions, Hispano-American fans were motivated to use SNS and UGC to access their products of interest, such that the cultural products spread widely through illegal downloads, as the monetary value of the products outstripped many people's ability to pay (Choi 2014).

Furthermore, previous research on fans of Korean mass media in the region has revealed a significant point regarding the spread of Korean mass media for the generations influenced by them. The appeal of Korean mass media products in Hispanic America was that they played the role of a symbolic referent representing values of respect and resilience now considered to be in decadence in the hegemonic Hispanic American culture (Flores Yapuchura 2013); simultaneously, Korean media allowed Hispanic American consumers to build a renewed image and meanings around Korea, making it an idealistic realm, as most would not have the opportunity to go there (del Pilar Álvarez 2013). In this way, for Gen-Y Hispano-Americans in Korea, Korean mass media acquired a sense of familiarity in the last 15 years, before they arrived in the country. The way that Korea came up as a candidate destination for emigration when thinking concretely about international emigration is reflected in the following testimonies.

"From adolescence, I was addicted to *doramas*. I started to take an interest in their country and started watching more series (drama and animation) about everyday life. I think I've been listening to K-pop and watching *dorama*s for a long time. I think during the late 2000s it was easy to get music and such, of course illegal downloads (laughs). I really didn't need a job change, I had a good one but I had this impulse to actually get here, to live in Korea. It's funny how you get attached to a country you don't actually know." (#1) (Female, 28, Chile)

"I was fourteen or so when a friend of mine came to school with this new musical group called "Girls' Generation" (SNSD), I got hocked. We started listen more and more, but it was all in secret because at that time K-pop was seen as girly, or gay if you were male. After that, we started watching more Korean movies too. Now that I think about it, I am here probably thanks to that friend. That's why I became interested in South Korea, because of my love for Korean music and style. I studied IT related field, so going to the US would be easier. That's what I was told by family and friends when I told them about my plans, my crazy adventure as they said. I was really not interested is the US and studying English was something I did to help in my job and to help me get here, it was kind of difficult because I was studying something I didn't really care about. [...] I think for many of us (Hispano-Americans in Korea), it's more about our attraction to South Korea than the actual necessity to leave our countries, or even our hemisphere." (#2) (Male, 29, Mexico)

For Gen-Y Hispano-Americans, Korean mass media products became the foundation of their interest in this different culture. The international rise of the Korean Wave in the context of Web 2.0 functioned as a socio-cultural background for these immigrants during their adolescent years. In the Hispanic American region, the internet not only opened the way for Gen-Y to reach out to Korea's pop culture but, as previous research has revealed, it further spread the idea of fandom despite linguistic, cultural, and geographic remoteness.

3.2.2 An older generation

Because this research focuses on Gen-Y immigrants in Korea, it is natural to ask how this generation of Hispano-Americans differs from previous generations of immigrants in the country, in terms of their relationship with Korean mass media. To clarify the differences in experience between generations, the narratives of middle-aged Hispano-Americans living in Korea were examined. Using the abovementioned categorization, they would be late Generation X, as born between 1965 and 1980.

"I don't know much about K-pop, they all look the same to me. I like some tv shows but only that." (#22) (Female, 45, Mexico)

"I'm not interested in K-pop, when I've seen TV shows I don't even know half of the people in there. I like the movies in any case." (#23) (Male, 47, Argentina)

"My image of younger immigrants is that they are big fans of all that (Korean mass media), they seem a bit weird to me (laughs)." (#24) (Female, 45, Argentina)

"I learned about Korea because I liked martial arts, I practiced judo for many years, but one day I encountered Hapkido and began to be interested in Korea. Then, for work I had the chance to be sent here... it was all circumstantial." (#25) (Male, 46, Chile)

"In my company I got the opportunity to came to Korea, and finally I liked what I saw here, I even married a Korean man." (#26) (Female, 50, Mexico)

"I met a Korean woman who was working in a company in Peru, we finally got married and I came here. Since I didn't know anything before, she taught me the first things about Korea." (#27) (Male, 54, Peru)

"When I was about 30 years old, I saw some documentaries about Korean food and that's where I started to get closer." (#28) (Male, 47, Peru)

Differences with Gen-Y's experience arise in reference to socio-cultural and structural conditions. For most of the older generation, Korean media became familiar only after they arrived in the country, and the variety of products they knew or cared about seems to have been reduced, and the influence of mass media on immigration motivation was inconsequential. In Table III, the primary personal reasons listed for choosing Korea they selected were mostly for any other category than "Interest in Korean Culture," with two for job relocations, one for marriage, two for economic stability, and one for a safer society, meaning that six of out seven were not much invested in the country and its culture and society until their 30s. Interest in Korean mass media seems to have been viewed as an odd hobby from their perspective. When members of this older group were children or adolescents, the range of options for media consumption was much narrower, as reflected in Table V, in which all members of this age group responded "over 30 years old" as their age of first encounter with Korean culture. It should also be noted that respondents in this age group came into contact with Korean culture through means outside of mass media (Table IV).

3.3 Building the Hispano-Americans-South Korea relationship

In international migration studies, it is attractive to immediately link macrostructural factors to individual decision-making, but it is necessary to discover and understand meso-level links between these conditions (Higuchi 2002). As noted, in East Asia, the most prominent example of immigration from Hispanic America or

the Latin American region in general is the case of Nikkei moving to Japan. Higuchi (2002) explains that, when Nikkei immigrated to Japan, a system of mediation organizations-agencies (斡旋組織/*assen-soshiki*) was established both in South American countries and in Japan, and this system played the role of a meso-level link, promoting the immigration of Nikkei to Japan, or, in other words, influencing individual decision-making in favor of macrostructural economic factors. According to Higuchi (2002, 565), "thinking that isolated individuals will migrate is unrealistic, and it is difficult to actually migrate unless there is some sort of social network connecting the place of origin and the destination of the migration." This historical background is still reflected today in the current geographical and workplace distribution of Nikkei in Japan. However, Korea lacks this historical background in relation to the Hispano-American region, and an increasing number of people are migrating to Korea on their own and without the help of mediation organizations-agencies, including these Hispano-Americans. This case study describes the existence of a new medium that takes the place of a meso-level organizational connection. The fact that Gen-Y Hispano-Americans who have no family, ethnic, or historical ties decide to migrate to Korea indicates the existence of a relationship with Korea that has developed over the course of years for each individual before they left their countries for the first time. Gen-Y research subjects were found to be receptors and consumers of Korean mass media. They, as consumers, willingly and positively received new cultural products.

This somewhat one-sided relationship evokes the concept of "soft power," referring to the capacity to gain support, understanding, and empathy through a country's culture, political values, and the attractiveness of its policies without the application of coercive force (Nye 2004). Korean mass media has succeeded in capturing the hearts and minds of a group of people in the Hispano-American region, literally on the other side of the world and with no common cultural background. The immigrants built emotional connections with Korea by themselves through their consumption of, and approach toward, this foreign culture that seemed to give meaning to their decision-making and courses of action. This emotional aspect of the decision-making is also reflected in the subjects' narrations below.

"For many of us *K-pop* have been an integral part of our lives since teenage years. I was part of a fan group in Argentina, then here (in Korea), I have even had good conversations with other Hispanic people about *K-pop* and how they also have been hooked since 2007 or so. You could even say that for us, *K-pop* and then doramas were a refuge from everyday life. Most of us had a very positive image of Korea

before coming here, more interesting, more of a nicer, safer country than the U.S."
(#7) (Male, 31, Argentina)

"Each person leaving their home country expects to end up in a better place. If you
ask any of us, you can tell that each of us had a vision about what kind of life we
would have in Korea. Mostly a better one. We have been thinking positively about
Korea for a long time before we came, even before we even knew if we could make
it here. In Mexico some people make fun of us, for liking Korean music and stuff, but
look who made it, who lives better now? (giggles)" (#9) (Male, 27, Mexico)

These Hispano-Americans saw the country as an attractive destination and
then forged ties to it through an idealized image despite the geographical and
cultural distance between them. This is reflected in their affection for Korea and their
positive bias toward this country. This may indicate a positive impact both on
immigrants and on Korea. It could be argued that a positively minded immigrant with
affection for the host society is in a better position for integration than an immigrant
driven by straightforward considerations of mere economy. Nevertheless, on the
other hand, there are also negative aspects. It could be that the greater the
expectations and hopes born from emotional attachment, the greater the possibility
of disappointment and subsequent depression.

Immigrants internalize their feelings and attitudes toward Korea and then
decide to immigrate; that is, the individual begins by unilaterally building a
relationship with the country and then actively constructing its meaning and
directionality of actions, all before migrating. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have
depicted this kind of individualization as the individual freedom of choice regarding
each person' own live, a characteristic of contemporary human beings. Therefore, is
only natural that there is also a process of individualization within international
migration, meaning that the freedom of choice expands to motivations and
migration destination, irrespective of the cultural background of the home country.
The motivation of immigrants and the actions that they take are reflected in their
individual narratives, and likewise, this individual-personal narrative is an essential
part of their drive to action. The subjects of this study received a certain message
through the Korean mass media. they took it from outside themselves and made it
their own, and they later constructed a significant narrative that gave meaning to
their choice of destination. Other needs and concerns in this context become
secondary, and the reason for leaving the home country may not be inherently
connected to the destination selected. However, these concerns and needs are
intertwined with the migration narrative, reinforcing that narrative and its
personalization, thus justifying the process.

Furthermore, the subjects of this study are consumers of Korean media products. Then, as contemporary consumers consume products of popular culture, they may have come to recognize themselves through these narratives and the images constructed around specific products (Canclini 2012). In addition, this immigrant group also shared the meanings and symbols of a certain popular culture and its products, as well as common consumption habits. Then, the components of idealized media products were consumed, and a narrative about South Korea as a desirable migration destination developed. In this case, these immigrants can be distinguished by their specific interests within the Korean media, although the superiority of *K-pop* and *doramas* as a primary medium of cultural contact is very clear.

Other significant internal distinctions appeared between generations; these differences may have arisen from consumer market conditions and its development across generations. To understand Korea's visibility in the Western Hemisphere in general and in Hispanic America in particular, it is essential to consider the enormous influence of Korean mass media. In the Hispano-American cultural sphere, Korea had a sense of being a distant, largely unknown country, although since the mid-2000s and 2010s, the arrival of the Korean Wave has aroused interest in cultural exchange with South Korea and the Korean language, as learners and applicants to the Korean Language proficiency test (TOPIK) has been increasing since that period (Min et al. 2019). It is possible to compare Korean media with the products of its regional neighbors China and Japan. China's self-made image has not yet made a strong positive connection with the local public, and it does not seem to be circulating as successfully as their Korean counterparts. This may be one of the reasons that a sense of distance and a critical eye toward China is common to this day.

For its part, Japan has been successfully promoting an attractive image through media for years (Piffaut Gálvez 2020). Without their breakthrough in mass media and at least a decade of cultural outflow, Korea might be considered as irrelevant, strange, and unknown as China may still appear to be. Moreover, the results of this study show how individual media consumption that is promoted by the current internet-digital age permeates newer generations irrespective of nationally and what was being broadcast on television there. Ultimately, through the consumption of a wide variety of mass media products related to popular culture, the subjects of this study came into contact with a culture that was different from the dominant culture in their own countries, and from that experience, they constructed and strengthened their own meaningful narratives.

Understanding migration from the perspective of immigrants themselves and analyzing it at various levels beyond the typical migration push-pull factors, it is essential to understand contemporary and emergent individualized migration processes. In the cases discussed in this piece, the lines between consumer and immigrant analysis are seen to become thinner; The evidence would suggest that individualized consumption individualizes motivation, and simultaneously, through daily acts of consumption and exposure over many years, the constitutive elements for shared decision-making with strangers arise naturally.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, based on empirical survey data on personal reasons and motivations for immigration, the background of the structural conditions between the Hispano-American cultural region and Korea in terms of mass media and its products was analyzed, and subsequently evidence suggested the necessity of a connection between the structural conditions of this migration and immigration motivation on a personal level. The survey results and analyses of the structural conditions produced the following observations.

First, push-and-pull model perspectives concisely account for personal reasons for leaving their countries, while focusing on the economic migrants that prioritize economic needs. However, the mechanism for selecting destinations that are geographically and culturally distant has not been satisfactorily explained. Here, it was found that the personal reason for choosing Korea as a destination may largely be due to the influence of the Korean mass media. Second, by comparing the development and influence of Korean mass media in Hispanic America between subjects of Generation Y, as well as a subgroup of the previous generation, it was found that a generational gap exists between the two generations, such that the older generation is motivated by different life situations that are not related to mass media. Finally, it was found that a connection is symbolically, emotionally, and individually built by immigrants themselves toward Korea that directly links macrosocial conditions and individual decision-making at the microsocial level; this meso-level connection appears as idealistic narratives born from media consumption habits. These characteristics indicate how pre-migration structural conditions are transformed into motivational prerequisites. A transformation takes place through the subject's interpretation before immigration, uncovering an interaction between mass media products and individual decision-making.

The relationship between Korea as a destination and Hispano-Americans in their countries does not require a meso-level brokerage network system to facilitate immigration. This contrasts with earlier historical migrations, as the delocalization brought about by the internet has permeated everyday life. Likewise, if immigrants have different assumptions and are looking for different things in relation to their individualized media consumption, then their real-life experiences after migration will also differ, and they will need to be explored as particular cases.

This paper focuses on a selection process for migration destination that transcends economic factors and also transcends typical economic immigration; in such a case, the starting point of interaction between foreigners and the host society will be different. By constructing a framework enabling an understanding of the influence of Korean culture through its mass media since the mid-2000s on the life narratives of immigrants, an explanation that goes beyond mere economic factors can be provided, while clarifying the motives of Hispano-Americans in Korea and their particular migration in relation to the macroconditions of their countries of origin. This is not to deny the role of more classical factors in determining immigration destinations, however this research is dealing with a particular immigration process in contemporary times, as well as the particular circumstances between particular countries, namely, between Korea and the countries of the Hispanic American region in the twenty-first century. According to these results, not only should the research perspective on international migration be diversified, but also the image of specific immigration phenomena within Korea.

Finally, as this study is framed inside a wider scope of research on Hispano-Americans immigrants in East Asia, a parallel set of studies are underway on Hispano-Americans living in Japan and China. Based on the mechanism between immigration motivation and mass media as explained in this paper, future articles will adopt analyses using a symbolic anthropology and sociological standpoint on the idealized image of the host country-society and its effect on migration experience as described by immigrants themselves.

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