The Social Construction of Ethnic Identity and Rights – the case of Koreans in China

Peter J. Peverelli, China Research Centre, Fac. of Economics & Business Administration, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Introduction

This paper intends to rethink the notions of ethnicity and human rights in the framework of social constructionist organization theory.
In 2007, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The declaration describes their 'rights to build political, economic, and social systems, and participate in economic and traditional activities'. It was adopted by a majority of 143 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine). According to Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 'The Declaration establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world's indigenous peoples.' (OHCHR, 2016).
The first cue a constructionist will notice in the quoted statement is the definite article 'the' in the term 'the world's indigenous peoples'. Language plays an essential role in the way people make sense of the world. In English, the language selected for the document, the use of the definite article indicates that its authors believe that there is an objective reality in which the indigenous peoples of the world are clearly defined. The same applies to their rights, i.e. the rights that come with their being indigenous peoples.
This simple observation already gives us ample ammunition to pinpoint the flaws in such a perception. First of all, the construction of any concept automatically constructs its opposite. The construction of the notion of indigenous peoples, thus simultaneously creates the notion of non-indigenous peoples. So, what are those non-indigenous peoples and what are their rights? The Declaration fails to address those issues. This paper will try to fill that gap by redefining ethnicity and the notion of rights derived from ethnicity from a social constructionist perspective.
Although more relativist definitions of 'ethnicity' (Fearon e.a., 2000; Valdez, 2013) and 'human rights' (Donelly, 2011; Gregg, 2011; Zwart, 2012) do exist, positivist perceptions continue to be the mainstream, in academia and even more so in the political arena. In both contexts, people seem to be preoccupied with determining what ethnicity is and then fiercely defend the own position as the only truth. Every day the media are fraught with news of ethnicity-related conflicts, often of a violent nature, with people dying in defence of their ethnicity. Ethnicity is frequently mentioned as a factor playing a role in many of the less pleasant aspects of life: discriminatory legislation, unfair distribution of wealth, biased historiography in textbooks, and more. People put their feet down and do so more strongly, as the other side shows no sign of willingness to make concessions. Many academics involved in such conflicts tend to feel obliged to support the party of their preference with academic discourse. Academics and political activists thus become close allies, mutually reinforcing their position.
Ethnic strife is the order of the day in many parts of the world and measures by governments to deal with those issues are often criticised by opponents as violating

the rights of the people involved. As ethnicity is not based on codified legislation, the rights people claim on the basis of their ethnicity is usually referred to as (part of) human rights. Human rights is another term with a heavy emotional loading and the combination of human rights and ethnicity forms an explosive cocktail.
If the academic world wants to play a more active role in breaking that vicious circle, it is imperative to put down the positivist thinking and adopt more relativist perspective. In this paper I intend to make a first step towards a relativist approach by redefining ethnicity and ethnic rights from a social constructionist point of view.
In the social constructionist perspective, people who see ethnicity as a cause for violent conflicts and those who accuse attempts to quell such conflicts by governments as violations of human rights are reifying ethnicity and human rights respectively. Their views are based on a fixed perception of these terms and anyone with a different view must therefore be wrong. The aforementioned UN declaration is an example of such reification. We can break open these reifications by proposing a model in which all definitions are regarded as, literally, equivalent, i.e. in which all definitions are right in their own social context.
The Social Integration (SI) model of social constructionist organization theory is an academic model that pairs high explanatory power of human behaviour with extreme simplicity. Moreover, it integrates the emergence of social structure with people's making sense of the world, and can show how one and the same person can hold different views about the same topic in different social contexts.
This paper does not include an extensive review of the existing social constructionist literature on ethnicity or human rights. The core issue of this text is to explore how the SI model can contribute to academic and political discussions on ethnicity and human rights.
The structure of the paper is as follows. In the following theoretical section, I will first present a concise outline of the SI model. Then I will try to apply the model in on the ethnicity and human rights by analysing a number of real life cases. In the concluding section will try to formulate a number of propositions for further study.

A Social Constructionist view on ethnicity

A theory of Social Integration

SI theory was developed by a group of researchers at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. It is based on Karl Weick's organization theory (1979, 1995) and enriched with concepts from postmodern philosophy, in particular Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (Van Dongen e.a.. 1996), and concepts derived from psycholinguistics (Peverelli, 2000; Peverelli & Verduyn, 2012). In this theory, people in their quest to make sense of the world and their role in it form social-cognitive groups, i.e., groups of people (i.e. social) bound by a shared view on reality (i.e. cognitive). The latter does not refer to the entire reality, but only to the part of reality related to the main theme on which the group is constructed. Membership of social-cognitive groups is the source of social identity. A mini-case will help operationalise this.

A neighbourhood bridge club

A neighbourhood bridge club is constructed in the world of bridge and will therefore make sense of the (its) world from a bridge perspective. Moreover, strongly embedded in the neighbourhood, its world outlook will also be affected (delimited) by the local perspective. This mini-case involves three social-cognitive groups:

- *Bridge*: a large worldwide group of people playing bridge, from hobbyists to professionals. Bridge players are used to operate in small teams with partners you have to trust completely. It is impossible for all members to know all others; hence the social cohesion in this group is low.
- *Neighbourhood*: a relatively small group, linked to a part of a town. The boundaries of neighbourhoods are not fixed, but the group members usually intuitively know them. In some neighbourhoods, all members may know one another, but that is rare. The sensemaking is different in each neighbourhood and the delimitation of a neighbourhood is often linked to 'our type of people'. The social cohesion is relatively strong.
- *Neighbourhood bridge club*: a small group with a specific number of members, the information of whom is kept by one of the members. Members will typically know all others, though some better than others. They will play bridge at specific times and places and will not easily miss an occasion to play. The social cohesion is very strong.

Belonging to a social-cognitive group is referred to as 'inclusion'. People are included in a large, theoretically indefinite number of groups. This is referred to as 'multiple inclusion.' This simultaneously means that people have as many social identities as they have inclusions. The number of inclusions is theoretically indefinite, but in practice a single person's span of attention can handle a limited number, typically the most salient ones at a given moment. Two or more social-cognitive groups are regarded as connected if there they have at least one common member. Common members are the conduits through which ideas from one group can be introduced to another.

Social-cognitive groups are not fixed entities, but a product of ongoing social interaction between people. People facing a similar task will construct a common view on that task and their roles in it through a process of sensemaking in ongoing social interaction. In the initial stage, these will be small groups in which all members frequently interact about that specific topic. Many such groups dissolve once the occasion for their initiation disappears or, phrased differently, when the actors stop making sense of the theme. However, some themes become sticky and the social–cognitive groups start attracting more members. At a certain moment, the group members, as well as people outside the group, become aware that they form a group. They are given names and once the frequency of interaction is regular enough, even the location of that interaction can become fixed (e.g., playing bridge every Tuesday evening in the local Community House).

When interacting in a certain social–cognitive group, people can access cognitive aspects from other inclusions. This typically happens, when group members fail to reach an agreement on a certain issue. One or several members can then imagine if that issue could be solved in another inclusion and once found, try to apply that solution in the current inclusion. This can lead to the emergence of a new social–cognitive group. For this reason, multiple inclusion is regarded as the motor of organizational and societal change.

Conflict is a core term in the SI model. Conflicts are divided into cognitive or functional conflicts and social or dysfunctional conflicts. People with different views on reality are bound to conflict on various issues and such a conflict is deemed necessary for healthy ongoing social interaction. When a cognitive conflict escalates in a social conflict, in which people stop interacting, e.g. by blocking certain

perceptions, it is no longer possible to exchange ideas, which is the end of all organizing processes, hence referred to as dysfunctional.

An SI approach to ethnicity

One theme on which people frequently interact is ethnicity. The earliest humans were nomads, but once they started to settle down in one place, herding cattle and growing crops, they would be born, grow up, and live their life, in that same region. They started perceiving that region as an inherent part of what they are. This location-bound identity, often including a local way of speaking, including a name for that region, shared rituals, clothing, etc., could be thought of as the precursor of ethnic identity and the notion of culture. Such a tribe may also grow a feeling of entitlement to that territory, a right to live there.

As long as tribes would stay in their own territory, the local identity would mainly function as a basis for social cohesion. The moment members of different tribes would start interacting on conflicting issues, like the 'right' to use a well, their respective local identities could be incorporated in the conflict. This would intensify the perception of the own local identity and could be marked as the birth of ethnicity. That ethnic identity could be so strong, that it would no longer be associated with a specific location. A tribe forced, for whatever reason, to leave its region of origin could literally take along its ethnic identity on its quest for a new location. Here is another mini-case, this time adapted from real life.

Early colonisation around the Mediterranean

When the various Greek city states started to found colonies along the Mediterranean coast, often based on existing trade relationships, most of these colonies adopted the ethnic identity (culture) of the colonists. The Greek felt superior over the locals and most locals reciprocated that perception by their easy submission. However, the Greek had to compete with a few other colonial peoples, like the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, and later the Romans. One region could be occupied by a certain nation, only to be conquered by another a few years later. However, the Greek language remained an important lingua franca for the Mediterranean zone. The other peoples, even the Romans who became the masters of the entire region for centuries, were not so chauvinist about their ethnic identity, that they could not recognise strong points of others. In terms of the SI model, a Roman merchant living in Syracuse switching between Latin and Greek was enacting multiple ethnic inclusions; this in spite of the violence that is usually associated with 'conquering' one another's territory.

Case study – Korean ethnicity in China

In this section, I will describe a real life case that involves ethnicity and (human) rights linked to it.

The story

The case is derived from my earlier publication on the Tumen River Development Zone (Peverelli, 2009). This is an industrial zone including territory from China, Russia and North-Korea, supported by the United Nations. That region had seen a number of wars, before this peaceful multinational zone was founded. Japan invaded Korea in 1910 and then occupied a large part of North China, known as Manchuria. Japan installed an ethnic Chinese puppet nation Manchukuo in 1932, which was

presented to the rest of the world as a sovereign state, but de facto was a vassal state of Japan. At that time, Korea was already a complete colony of Japan (Tamanoi, 2000). Koreans were regarded as Japanese subjects. A large number of impoverished Korean farmers settled down in the border region Jiandao (presently called Yanbian) in the first half of the 20th century, until the capitulation of Japan in 1945. Official Japanese documents from that period show that this settlement was actively stimulated by the Japanese government partly as a means to prevent too many Koreans from settling in Japan, but also to strengthen the influence of Japan in Manchuria by increasing the number of 'Japanese subjects' in that region (Park, 2000). To prevent this, the Chinese authorities regularly struggled with the Japanese military leaders in Manchuria over the citizenship of the Koreans in Jiandao to prevent the Korean settlers taking on a Japanese identity (Park, 2000).

A large part of the Korean émigrés, however, remained in China after the end of the war. They formed the basis for the considerable Korean population in China's Jilin province.

The open multi-ethnic life in Japan-occupied Manchuria of that time is attested by a personal recollection of the daughter of Russian émigrés who lived in Harbin (a key city in Manchukuo; presently capital of Heilongjiang province) for a number of years (Bakich, 2000). Most Russians, however, were not able or willing to accept Chinese citizenship like the Korean settlers, and left after the China recaptured Manchuria. The Koreans re-identified themselves as part of the local population. While Russian and Japanese settlers almost completely disappeared, when the Chinese took over control after the Japanese surrender, the Korean settlers staid on. During Japanese control, they were ethnic Koreans, but Japanese citizens. During Chinese control, there became Chinese citizens while remaining ethnic Koreans.

The ethnic Koreans in Yanbian have lived in peace in the new Chinese environment since the foundation of the PRC. After the economic reforms of the early 1980s, many of them have set up business in various cities in China. Especially, after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South-Korea, they founded businesses catering to the growing South-Korean expat community in Beijing, like restaurants or karaoke bars. I have separately spoken with a number of employees of such businesses about how they perceived their Korean ethnicity. Their replies were unanimous: they perceived themselves as primarily Chinese citizens (*zhongguoren*), and then as ethnic Koreans (*xianzu*).

Another development following the normalization of the Chinese – South Korean relationship was the influx of South Korean nationals settling in China on a semi-permanent basis. The largest group came to China as employees of South Korean corporations, but when their assignments were completed, many preferred to stay on in China, using the contacts they have made to start their own businesses. Others have moved to China on their own after becoming unemployed, using their savings to open small restaurants or shops catering to the Korean community. As their children needed education in Korean, Korean schools have been established in several Chinese cities, employing South Korean teachers (Kim, 2007; Wenhua Ribao, 2007). Some of those children have already continued their education at Chinese universities, as they are able to follow lectures in Chinese, and set up businesses of their own, following their parents' example (Liu e.a., 2011).

The Yanbian Koreans have come into the international limelight due to North-Korean refugees who were able to merge 'naturally' into the local Korean society. Many stay on illegally, while others seek Chinese citizenship (Chosun Ilbo, 2011). Some of them are able to escape to South-Korea with the organised aid of above-mentioned Chinese

ethnic Korean networks. While the Chinese government officially does not approve this help to North-Korean refugees, it also does not actively oppose it. Refugees who get caught are repatriated to North-Korea. A Chinese PhD student of mine who was born and raised in Yanbian has shared an interesting story about a ruse used by local police to distinguish North-Korean Koreans from Chinese Koreans: knowledge of Chinese. They will regularly address Koreans, in particular in public transport, in Chinese. Those who are unable to reply in (proper) Chinese are arrested as suspected refugees. This indicates that ethnicity is regarded as a sensitive issue in the region. Randomly asking Koreans to show their ID could arouse irritation that could easily evolve into ethnic conflict. By using a natural trait of Chinese Koreans, knowledge of the national language, as an indication of citizenship, the local police avoid such problems.

Analysis: the social construction of Korean identity in China

Now we can attempt to retell this story in terms of the social construction of ethnicity and related (human) rights.

The story starts with the Japanese colonizing Korea and founding the puppet state of Manchukuo. This points at a different perception of Korean and Manchuria by the Japanese government, respectively as ‘part of Japan’ and ‘foreign land with which we need a friendly relationship’. Searching for the grounds for this variation exceeds the scope of this paper. It will suffice to point out this difference. A result of this move was that Koreans gained Japanese citizenship, with all the rights that came with it, including the right to settle in any part of their country. Apparently this was perceived as undesirable, and when many poor Korean farmers started looking for an alternative location, the Japanese government referred part of them to Jiandao region of Manchukuo. The government of Manchukuo agreed to that resettlement, as it would agree to all suggestions from Japan. One result of the resettlement of the Korean farmers was that their Japanese citizenship changed to Chinese. They used the rights that came with being Chinese citizens to request the help of the Chinese bureaucracy in case of conflicts with the Japanese occupying forces. However, when the same ethnic Korean Chinese citizens developed conflicts with the Chinese bureaucracy, they would invoke the rights of their (original) Japanese citizenship to seek help from the Japanese.

The SI model can help clarify the complex relationship between ethnicities and citizenships with the notion of ‘inclusion’. People can easily enter an inclusion, but leaving it is much more difficult. Once you have become socialized into the sensemaking belonging to an inclusion, thus gaining the social identity that is attached to it, that identity becomes part of your repertoire of identities, part of what you are. When a person changes one job for a another, it e.g. means that you are no longer entitled to certain rights that come with that job, in particular the salary, but you will remain familiar with the ways people make sense of the world in that social context, and will usually retain social contacts with (some of) the colleagues. Back to our case, the Koreans who resettled in Manchukuo retained their Japanese inclusion, even though they ceased to be Japanese citizens. In case of conflicts with the Japanese forces, they would invoke the rights that came with being Chinese citizens, while they would invoke the rights pertaining to their Japanese inclusion (‘former Japanese citizenship’) in case of conflicts with Chinese officials. The Jiandao Koreans thus had three region-related inclusions

Inclusion	Core meaning
Korean	ethnicity
Japanese	former citizenship
Chinese	citizenship

Table 1: inclusions of the Korean settlers in Jiandao

This same issue also poses a fascinating example of the social construction of ethnicity-related rights. Both Chinese officials and Japanese officers were inclined to honour the requests for help from the Korean settlers on the basis of their recognition of their rights. In other words, the rights claimed by the Koreans became a social reality due to the positive reaction of the other parties. If A requests B to help on the basis of a certain right and B agrees to help, this means that B recognizes that right. This is the social construction of that right. Back to our case, the Koreans stand out as the party with the most rights. Chinese farmers in the same region, e.g., were unable to claim help from the Japanese military.
In the situation after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Yanbian Koreans, using the new name of the territory, repeated their quick adaption to the new political situation. Their Japanese inclusion became inactive. The 'former citizenship' was already much weaker that 'active citizenship', and in the new political parlance the Japanese were the evil occupants that had been defeated. Their Chinese inclusion remained the same: 'active citizenship', though it was now citizenship of the PRC instead of Manchukuo. Their Korean inclusion intensified due to the policy of the PRC to position itself as a multi-ethnic state. To continue our model, the Yanbian Koreans now had two region-related inclusions:

Inclusion	meaning
Chinese	citizenship
Korean	ethnic minority

Table 2: inclusions of the Yanbian Koreans

As Chinese they are entitled to all rights that Chinese citizens have. As an ethnic minority they enjoy a number of additional rights, like the right to use their own language, have their own festivals, wear ethnic costumes and other expression of ethnicity. While the Japanese did not oppress such expressions, they were never defined as rights by the Japanese government. As a result, the Korean inclusion became considerably more intense in the new China.
The ethnic identity of ethnic Chinese changed as well due to the new policy. The existing term Han, originally the designation of the first long dynasty and hence adopted as a general designation of 'Chinese', was adopted as the term for the ethnic identity of Chinese. Table 2 can be modified for ethnic Chinese citizens of the PRC as follows:

Inclusion	meaning
Chinese	citizenship
Han	ethnic majority

Table 3: inclusions of ethnic Chinese

When the Chinese government announced fundamental economic reforms in the early 1980s, a process was started in which groups of individuals set up local informal business networks. Nee & Opper (2012) analyse how the more successful of such informal organisations gained official recognition and were then institutionalised by the national government, thus forming the basis of the rapid growth of the Chinese economy in the past few decades.
The Yanbian Koreans, as Chinese citizens, embraced the increasing economic freedom. Combined with the ethnic Korean inclusion they forged tight Korean business networks in various Chinese cities outside Yanbian and Jilin province. The Korean nature of these business networks became even more prominent, when South Koreans poured into China for business or leisure, after China and South Korea opened diplomatic relations. The South Koreans, though having a different citizenship, shared the Korean ethnic inclusion with the Chinese Koreans. While still recognising their Chinese inclusion as the locus of their citizenship, their being ethnic Koreans became equally influential to their behaviour. Chinese Koreans gained inclusion in South Korean social groups through the ongoing social interaction with South Koreans. These Korean networks started attracting South Koreans with various backgrounds to settle in China and become part of those networks. South Koreans holders of a foreign resident permit, also enjoy certain rights that casual South Korean visitors cannot. Their repertoire of inclusions is slightly different.

Inclusion	**Core meaning**
Korean	ethnicity
South Korean	citizenship
Chinese	Place of residence

Table 4: inclusions of South Korean residents in China

In recent times, that strong Korean inclusion played a crucial role in the assistance to refugees from North Korea. The latter may be citizens of North Korea, but are ‘one of us’ in the ethnic context. That combination of strong ethnic identity, the nation-wide Korean business network and the relation with South Korean networks enable many North Korean refugees to find their way to South Korea. A number of refugees also have been absorbed in the Yanbian community, and even become Chinese citizens. They differ in terms of rights the can derive from their various inclusions. Those who legally switch to PRC citizenship can enjoy all rights that come with that citizenship. Those who opt to stay illegally forsake those rights. Both groups will still retain their North Korean inclusion, but then as ‘former citizenship’, like the Korean farmers who resettled in China during WWII (see Table 1). The Chinese authorities once more play a supportive role in the social construction of such networks. While officially opposing the entrance of North Korean refuges, the authorities refrain from taking strong measures against the Korean networks in China that enable the refugees to escape. Such measures would harm the national policy towards ethnic minorities, which is regarded as one of the basic pillars of the PRC.

Conclusions

The social construction of ethnicity proceeds in two major stages. During the first stage, people who live in a certain region for a number of generations start making sense of that region as an inherent part of what they are. It becomes a regional inclusion and hence a source of social identity. In the second stage, they start

interacting with people with other regional identities. When during that interaction, the peoples recognise one another's regional identity, those identities evolve into ethnic identities. Ethnic identities are stronger than regional identities, as they include an emotional aspect. Inter-ethnic interaction can be violent (war) or peaceful (trading), but the former will construct stronger emotional attachment.

People with a mature ethnic identity will retain that identity, even when they move, or are removed, from their region of origin. It can continue to play a role in their actions, at times even a major role. However, from a social constructionist perspective, we note that sensemaking in relation to the ethnic identity often changes in that process. It can lead to a reification of ethnicity, decreasing access to other points of view. Regional identities were further complicated with the construction of the notion of the sovereign state. These issues lie beyond the scope of this paper, but need to be noted, as they play a role in our case.

Rights related to ethnic or other regional identity are constructed in the general process of the social construction of ethnicity. People will typically first construct the right to live and enjoy the resources of 'their own' land. Once the ethnic identity is mature, it will include a perception of the right 'to be who we are' and to express that in various ways, like speaking the own language or performing the own rituals.

As all constructs are products of social interaction, the exact meaning of a certain ethnic identity and its rights can, and usually will, be different in the interaction with different others. E.g., I perceive my Dutch identity differently during interaction with Germans than when interacting with British. Although I have learned German in school, I prefer to speak English with Germans, as I am more confident in that language. Occasionally, a German will ask me if I speak German. My reply then is negative, as I believe Germans have no right to even suggest that I may converse with them in German. Most British will not even ask me if I can speak their language and will initiate a conversation in their own language. I hardly ever make a remark about that behaviour, so in my interaction with British I acknowledge their right to address me in their mother tongue.

Koreans developed their ethnic identity on the Korean peninsula. Although the national borders as we know them now have been fixed only recently, the 'Korean region' can be fairly well defined. The main part of the old land that is presently part of another state is Kando, now known as Yanbian, China. Koreans had to interact in various ways with big neighbours almost continuously; in historical order: Chinese, Russians and Japanese. Chinese culture has had a tremendous influence on the Koreans, as it had on the Japanese, much like the influence of Greek culture on the peoples around the Mediterranean. Contacts with Russians started when the region that is now known as Primorsky was purchased by Russia from China. However, influence was little until the region split in North and South Korea. The Japanese influence also started late, but was intense, with the colonisation of the entire Korean region by Japan. From a social constructionist perspective, one nation conquering another is not a social construction, as it does not take place in ongoing social interaction. This conclusion is reinforced by the decision to regard Koreans as Japanese citizens, thus decreasing the right of Koreans 'to be themselves'. Koreans answered that behaviour not by reciprocating the violence (they would not stand a chance), but by strengthening their ethnic perception ('the more you do not want us to be ourselves, the more we will be ourselves').

Interestingly, this did not lead to a reification of the own identity among Koreans. Poor Korean farmers who resettled in China (Manchukuo) were able to note the advantages of getting the most out of the Japanese occupation forces and the local

Chinese officials by interaction with both groups in different ways. In terms of our model: they enacted two Korean identities: a Japanese-Korean identity and a Chinese-Korean identity. The positive result of that behaviour was that the Yanbian Koreans had no problem in adapting to the new situation after the proclamation of the PRC. The PRC government showed a remarkable insight in the game of multiple ethnic identities by making ethnicity a core part of the construction of the new China. The PRC was the first nation in that region to formulate (institutionalise) rights pertaining to ethnicity. Yanbian Koreans therefore had even more rights than their Han neighbours living next door. They enjoyed the rights that came with being PRC citizens and those belonging to their Korean ethnicity.

When Chinese citizens were given considerably more freedom in engaging in economic activities around 1980, the Chinese Koreans joined the other Chinese with equal enthusiasm. However, the resulting business networks had a Korean aspect stemming from their Korean ethnicity. That aspect few consequences in the beginning, but became a major asset, when the South Korean business people came to China after the normalisation of the relations between China and South Korea. The existing Korean infrastructure probably also surprised the South Koreans at first, but with that same agility to adapt that seems to be part of Korean culture, a large number of South Koreans were attracted to China.

Back to the border region of Yanbian, the existence of a Korean ethnic group in that region facilitated refugees from North Korea to find a safe haven in the local Korean networks. Some found a niche to set up a new life, even applying for PRC citizenship. Others used the nation-wide Korean business network to escape to South Korea. That is a dangerous route, but the fact that it keeps working is an indication of the strong social cohesion of that network.

Also in this respect, the Chinese authorities' handling of the matter shows considerable consideration for ethnic issues in an effort not to escalate the inter-ethnic relations. The Korean networks are a source of prosperity for the nation as a whole, and that prosperity is a good showcase of how an ethnic minority in China can thrive by using ethnic identity to create wealth. Keeping that intact is apparently more important than catching a few North Korean refugees. The Chinese government likes to refer to its ethnic policies as 'pragmatic'. In term of social constructionism, the actions of the Chinese government related to the North Korean refugees keep all inclusions of the people involved intact, thus facilitating healthy ongoing social interaction. That could be a proper academic definition of 'pragmatic'.

Limitations and future research

This paper proposes a new way of understanding ethnicity and the rights that stem from it. The case of the ethnic Koreans in China, however rich, does not justify claiming that we have formulated a complete model. The findings of this paper need to be applied to a large number of cases in different contexts. It will be interesting to compare the Chinese Koreans with other ethnic minorities in China and analyse the differences. Other interesting cases will be the new sovereign nations in Eastern Europe, where ethnic strife and violence have become a core problem. Just to mention one intriguing question: how has the political creation of Kosovo as region separate from Serbia has affected the social construction of ethnicity in that region? Is the Serbian ethnic identity of Kosovar Serbians and Albanians different from that in Serbia and Albania? Is there something like a 'Kosovar identity'? The answers will be of great value for policy makers.

References

Bakich, O. (2000) 'Emigré identity – the case of Harbin', in T. Lahusen (Ed.): *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space and Identity*, SAQ, Vol. 99, No. 1, pp. 51–73.

Chosun Ilbo (2011). *More N.Koreans Apply for Chinese Citizenship*, 2011-01-07, accessed 2016-08-26.

Donelly, J. (2011) The Social Construction of International Human Rights. In *Relaciones Internacionales*, núm. 17, junio de 2011. http://www.relacionesinternacionales.info/ojs/article/download/304/264.pdf, accessed: 29-08-2016.

Fearon, J.D. & Laitin, D.D. (2000). Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity. In: *International Organization*, Volume 54 / Issue 04 / Autumn 2000, pp 845-877.

Gregg, B. (2011). *Human Rights as Social Construction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kim, S. J. (2003). The economic status and role of ethnic Koreans in China. *The Korean diaspora in the world economy*, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Special Report 15, pp. 101-127.

Liu, T., Tong, L. & Wei, B. (2011). *An Yaohan: A Student Entrepreneur*, Renmin University Summer School assignment.

OHCHR (2016). *Homepage of the The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, (http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx; accessed 14/8/2016).

Nee, V. & Opper, S. (2012). *Capitalism from Below – Markets and Institutional Change in China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Park, H.O. (2000) 'Korean Manchuria: the racial politics of territorial osmosis', in T. Lahusen (Ed.): *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space and Identity*, SAQ, Vol. 99, No. 1, pp.193–215.

Peverelli, P.J. (2000). *Cognitive Space - A social cognitive approach to Sino-Western cooperation*, Delft: Eburon.

Peverelli, P. (2009). The Tumen River Project - sensemaking in multiple contexts: in: *International Journal of Chinese Culture and Management*, Vol. 2, No.4 pp. 308 - 321.

Peverelli, P.J. & Verduyn, K. (2010). *Understanding the basic dynamics of organizing*, Delft: Eburon.

Tamanoi, M.A. (2000) 'A road to "a redeemed mankind": the politics of memory among the former Japanese peasant settlers in Manchuria', in T. Lahusen (Ed.): *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space and Identity*, SAQ, Vol. 99, No. 1, pp.163–189.

Valdez, Z. (2013). Ethnicity Is A Social Construction Too. In: *Racism Review*, Feb. 22, 2013; http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2013/02/24/ethnicity-is-a-social-construction-too/; accessed: 29-08-2016.

Van Dongen, H. J., W. A. M. de Laat, and A. J. J. A. Maas. (1996). *Een kwestie van verschil (A matter of difference)*. Delft: Eburon.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. London: Sage.

Wenhua Ribao (2007). "到了中国就不想回国 在华韩国人激增 (After arriving in

China, they don't want to go home; number of South Koreans in China increasing sharply), 2006-04-01, accessed 2016-08-26.
Zwart, T. (2012). Using Local Culture to Further the Implementation of International Human Rights: The Receptor Approach. in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 34 (2012) 546–569.