

# Murder, Buses, and Seafood: Improving Chinese Integration on South Korea's Jeju Island

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## Abstract

Jeju, a semi-tropical island off the coast of South Korea, has welcomed Chinese investment and tourism to improve its economy and reinforce its semi-independent status from the mainland. However, increasing crime, rising property prices, and a general lack of integration of Chinese migrants into island life have led locals and mainland Koreans to worry that Jeju is losing its identity. The self-governing province faces the dilemma of reducing access at massive economic cost or protecting the natives' livelihoods and accepting Chinese tourism and migration. This research hopes to contribute to the ongoing debate about the pros and cons of migration, with a focus on the long-term Chinese residents of Jeju Island in an attempt to discover what is preventing their effective integration and whether the Jeju government is missing a simple solution. Findings show the most mentioned inconvenience Chinese residents face is a lack of cultural understanding, second to limited public transportation, and, thirdly, poor verbal communication. If these problems were solved, Chinese residents would find integration easier, the impact of tourism would be diluted, and the economic benefits of Chinese access to Jeju would be more evenly disseminated.

**Keywords:** Migration, Integration, Tourism, Economics, Jeju

## Purpose

South Korea's Jeju Island is a microcosm of the modern world that has experienced both the benefits and unintended consequences of globalization and multiculturalism. Precipitated largely by the economic need to increase the flow of trade and capital, Korea has incentivized foreigners, especially from China, to contribute to and invest in the Jeju economy notably via tourism or as permanent residents respectively. Unfortunately, the growing number of Chinese visitors and immigrants was met not without some controversy. In fact, negative perceptions associated with the increase in Chinese tourists have been intensified by high-profile media coverage of antisocial behaviors committed by the few and even created a backlash against the Chinese immigrant community at large. By investigating the causes of problems that arose as a byproduct of the mass-movement of people to the relatively small Jeju Island, this research aims to reveal areas for further study in larger contexts.

As the first group of foreigners to settle in Jeju, Chinese nationals with Korean residency currently face a multitude of problems that limit their integration into the island life. Discovering and implementing an effective integration of Chinese residents will not only reveal potential solutions to the problems caused by Chinese tourism, many of which seem to be exacerbated primarily by the inability to bridge the cultural divide, but also improve their overall quality of life. Moreover, understanding the problems faced by Chinese nationals when attempting to integrate into Jeju society will help Korean citizens to maximize the economic benefits of long-term Chinese immigrants wishing to coexist in the island.

In summary, identifying and developing solutions to the problems faced by Chinese residents in Jeju will 1) raise awareness among Korean citizens and Chinese residents alike to help avoid and resolve issues surrounding high levels of Chinese tourism, 2) promote mutual

economic gains afforded by Chinese immigration, and 3) serve as a general guideline in other societies experiencing problems associated with high levels of immigration.

## **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this paper is that permanent Chinese residents in Jeju face problems as the first group of foreigners to settle on the island but are ignored because of the high-profile issues surrounding Chinese tourism and the lack of experience in integrating foreigners into Jeju society. Uncovering the long-term residents' problems will create an opportunity to find solutions with the associated benefits as described in the purpose section above.

## **Background**

### **Jeju Island**

Jeju is a semi-tropical Island of 713 square miles, 80km off the south coast of the Korean peninsula. It has a permanent population of 605,000 but welcomes over 15 million tourists every year (Oh, 2016). Famous for being an extinct volcano and having an abundance of seafood and sunshine, Jeju has always been a popular destination for South Korean tourists and retirees (Jeju Provincial Government, 2018). In recent years, however, the self-governing province has promoted international tourism through visa-free travel and immigration by offering Korean residency to investors in land and business. Both campaigns have attracted a huge number of Chinese nationals, attracted by Jeju's climate and quality of life.

### **Chinese Tourism**

When visa-free travel for 30 days was first offered to Chinese tourists in 2008, Jeju was an upmarket and expensive place to visit for the vast majority of Chinese nationals. However, as China has become more economically prosperous, traveling to Jeju has become easier, and just under 3 million Chinese now visit the island every year (Nam, 2015).

### **Chinese Immigration**

In 2010, Jeju began offering residency to anyone who invested over 500 million won, which is approximately 414,593.70 USD, on the island. The latest figures dated December 2015 show that Chinese investors bought 8.95 square miles, which is 1.25%, of Jeju's 713 square miles of land, in order to take advantage of this offer. The rapid increase of foreign residents led to the mainland government's pressuring the province to limit the offer of residency, and strict new rules were introduced early in 2015. In 2014, 508 foreigners had been granted residency on the island. In 2015, after the introduction of the new rules, only 111 were granted residency (Kim, 2016). As of November 2016, the total number of Chinese nationals with permanent Korean residence on Jeju Island was 4,930, which is 0.8% of the population (Kang, 2016).

### **Chinese Residents and Tourists in the Media**

Although Chinese residents account for only 0.8% of the population of Jeju, crimes and other potential problems are made high-profile by the media. Due to the influx of foreign investment, the price of land in Jeju has risen dramatically since 2010, with a 19.35% increase in 2016 even after the new, stricter investment residency rules were enacted (Kim, 2016). Some residents have profited from the increase in property value, but others feel they are not able to buy homes on their own island because of Chinese-fueled price hikes (Choe, 2015).

Furthermore, The Korean National News Agency Yonhap has reported violent incidents, including one murder, committed by Chinese tourists visiting Jeju, causing hostility toward both foreign tourists and foreign residents. In October 2016, Yonhap reported that a Chinese tourist had been arrested on suspicion of murdering a 61-year old Korean woman in an unprovoked attack. A month earlier, Yonhap had reported that eight Chinese tourists had

allegedly assaulted a Korean restaurant owner on the island. Even before these events, Yonhap had reported that lawmaker Rep. Kim Jin-tae had claimed that crime committed by Chinese nationals accounted for 40% of all crime committed by foreigners in the country.

The media's profiling coverage and stereotyping have led to a generally negative perception of Chinese people in Jeju. In 2015, a survey of 1,000 Jeju residents found that 68% believed Chinese tourism is not helping the island (Choe, 2015). In September 2016, more than 10,000 people signed a petition demanding that visa-free travel for Chinese tourists be revoked ("Revoke Visa Free Travel," 2016) despite over 70% of \$6.1 billion dollars of international investment in Jeju between 2010 and 2016 from Chinese sources and an "economic bonanza" caused by the increase in Chinese tourism (Choe, 2015).

A recent potential solution to some of the problems caused by Chinese tourism is the introduction of Chinese police officers in Jeju. In September 2016, South Korean foreign minister, Yun Byung-se, said, "The ministry should immediately discuss with the Chinese government the idea of dispatching Chinese police officers to Jeju so that they can join local police in patrolling areas where Chinese tourists gather" (Kim, 2016).

Likewise, if the solution to problems caused by Chinese tourism is access to Chinese cultural understanding and language, the long-term Chinese residents of the island are an untapped resource. A multitude of problems and potential solutions could be discovered that would contribute to the long-term sustainability needed to make Jeju thrive as a multicultural society. The lessons learned from Jeju could also be applied in other areas experiencing mass-movements of people.

## Methodology

In order to uncover the problems faced by Chinese residents on Jeju, a qualitative approach was chosen. The research was comprised of questionnaires with open-ended questions in two sections (Appendix A). The first section asked for personal details, including gender, age, occupation, residence area on the island, and languages spoken. The second section asked each participant to list inconveniences encountered in daily life, including communication with Koreans, administrative operations, medical services, and "other" with examples of traffic and workplace. The questionnaire was offered in Mandarin and English with the translations completed by a native Mandarin Chinese speaker with an English education.

Chinese residents on the island were invited to participate in the research with posters in areas often visited, including Chinese markets and restaurants. Thirty-eight people responded to the posters, and thirty-two were successfully contacted and participated in the research. No information that could identify the participants was recorded, and the research was conducted with adherence to the guidelines set out by the MIT Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects.

## Results

Fourteen of the participants who responded were women, and 18 were men. The average age of the participants was 31, and the range of ages was 18-64. All participants reported being able to speak Mandarin Chinese fluently, 26 reported being able to speak Korean fluently, and 10 reported being able to speak English fluently. Fifteen participants reported professional occupations, 12 reported their occupation as "student", 1 reported an occupation as self-employed, and 4 reported being unemployed or did not answer.

### Results by Frequency

From 5 main categories of questions about inconvenience ("Daily Life," "Communication," "Administration," "Medical," and "Other") and 32 participants, if the questionnaires were fully completed, 160 separate answers could be collected and analyzed. Out of the 160

potential responses, 32 were left blank or contained answers that no inconvenience had been experienced in that area.

As the queries were open-ended, some participants responded similarly to different questions. For example, one participant described inconvenience with public transport under “Daily Life” inconveniences, while another participant described difficulties with public transport under “Communication” inconveniences. For this reason, the results will first be described by grouping similar answers. Table 1 shows how many times a type of answer was repeatedly given across all of the questions asked in the questionnaire:

**Table 1** Subject Mentions

Subject of Answer	Number of Mentions
Cultural Misunderstanding	23
Limited Public Transport	18
Communication-Verbal	14
Communication-Written	11
Rudeness	4
Unsociable Behavior	4
Overcrowding	3
Cleanliness	2

### Translation of Important Responses

**Cultural Misunderstanding:** Cultural misunderstandings appeared 23 times in the answers given by the participants. One participant typified this type of response by writing, “Because of some cultural differences and etiquette issues, often there will be some misunderstandings.” Commonly in these responses, Koreans are not blamed for the cultural misunderstanding, and the participant did not explicitly accept responsibility. Instead, the misunderstandings are blamed on more abstract concepts such as “cultural differences” and “differences in etiquette.” One participant wrote:

"There are certain cultural habits that some may consider insignificant, but these habits could be very important to locals. There could be misunderstandings. It is best to have a summary of what the local customs and cultural habits are and different reminder articles or information to refer to."

The Jeju dialect was also referred to as cultural misunderstandings. One participant wrote, "Jeju slang and accent is difficult to get used to." Another wrote, “because of the dialect in Jeju, my Korean language skill doesn’t help me as much as I thought it would.”

**Limited Public Transport:** Limited public transport in Jeju is mentioned 18 times. In particular, the irregularity or distance of bus stops is highlighted. One participant wrote, “The location of my home (Arden Villa) is relatively convenient, but the bus stop is too far.” Another wrote, “It is difficult to get around the island without a car.” Another participant stated, “More bus stops and buses would make it much easier to get around the island.” Most of the mentions about limited public transport are short; for example, “Using public transport is difficult.”

**Communication-Verbal:** Inconvenience caused by verbal communication is mentioned 14 times in the questionnaires. The contexts in which verbal communication causes inconvenience vary, but a common theme is the impatience of native Korean speakers. One participant wrote, “I don’t understand what some people say to me in Korean and they become impatient very quickly.” Another wrote, “I don’t understand some people when they speak quickly and then they get frustrated with me.” But some responses describe how even

though verbal communication causes problems, native Korean speakers do not exacerbate the issue: "Koreans are always kind even if my Korean language ability is weak."

**Communication-Written:** Inconvenience caused by written communication is mentioned 11 times in the questionnaire. All of the mentions of problems with written communication are in the context of filling in forms, in particular, for official purposes. One participant wrote, "The government paperwork is sometimes long and confusing." Another wrote, "For insurance or driver's license and other things, because of a lack of translation, handling those are more difficult." Eight of the mentions of inconvenience caused by written communication included suggestions for documents to be more widely translated. One participant sums up the attitude toward written communication by writing, "Important documents need to be translated."

**Rudeness:** Rudeness is mentioned four times as causing inconvenience. All four responses included references to taxi or bus drivers. Two participants simply wrote, "Taxi drivers are rude."

**Unsociable Behavior:** Unsociable behavior is also mentioned four times. Three participants wrote about drunken behavior; for example, "Too many drunk people [are] in the streets at night." While another wrote, "It's too noisy late at night in the summer in my neighborhood."

**Overcrowding:** Overcrowding is mentioned three times, and each mention refers to the beach. For example, one participant wrote, "The beaches are very busy in the summer and it can be difficult to get into restaurants during the holiday season."

**Cleanliness:** Finally, cleanliness is mentioned twice. One participant wrote, "Beaches and street trash should be cleaned in time." While another wrote, "Trash should be cleaned quicker when the city is busy."

## Analysis

The purpose of the research was to uncover problems preventing more effective integration of long-term Chinese residents in Jeju Island. By uncovering the problems blocking integration, the research aimed to create the opportunity to find solutions. Very little research has been completed that looks at the success, or lack of success, of Chinese residents integrating into Jeju society. Any attempt to deal with the problems being experienced was therefore guesswork. The results obtained, although from a relatively small sample, have revealed a culture of misunderstanding and limited mobility on the island among Chinese residents.

### Cultural Misunderstanding

Firstly, the long-term Chinese residents who participated in the survey mention cultural misunderstanding more than any other factor in the problems they face. Some residents mention the misunderstandings under the Daily Life category, some mention it under the Communication category, and some mention it under Administrative Operations and Medical Services. Several participants mention Cultural Misunderstanding more than once. Importantly though, the participants do not blame people, whether Korean or Chinese, for the misunderstanding. Instead, cultural differences and language problems are often cited. These data suggest no animosity in these situations, but the fact that cultural differences are mentioned so much suggests that it is a cause of tension and hinders integration.

Although this research is not broad enough to provide evidence to associate the problems surrounding Chinese tourists in Jeju with cultural misunderstanding, it does suggest there is an ongoing problem that, defined by the examples given, could apply to Chinese tourists. The repeated reference to cultural misunderstanding by most of the participants, often more than once, is also evidence that although individual Chinese residents are aware of the problem, they have not yet found a way to solve it or have not yet consciously identified it as a major cause.

On the other hand, the fact that the participants do not blame any individual for the inconvenience suggests there is an understanding that problems related to cultural misunderstanding are an accepted part of migration. If the long-term residents are not identifying cultural misunderstanding as a cause of conflict, further research would have to be carried out to find out whether short-term Chinese tourists interpret the same kind of events differently, or whether they are more likely to blame someone than were the long-term residents. Research into native Jeju islanders' attitudes to cultural misunderstanding could also reveal differences or similarities and possibly reveal a solvable cause of conflict or hostility.

### **Limited Public Transport**

Secondly, limited public transport is mentioned more times as a cause of inconvenience than more obvious potential causes such as verbal or written communication. Jeju has a much less advanced public transport service than mainland Korea, so it creates a great deal of inconvenience to many Chinese nationals living or traveling in Jeju who do not own or drive cars. Before becoming eligible to drive, any foreigner would need to exchange his license, which can take time, or pass the Korean driving test. Both require time and effort, but the reward is limited because most people fly to the mainland, so a car would only be used on the island, which is only 70km long. Complaints about public transport suggest that Chinese nationals in Jeju without cars are not participating in the social life of the island as much as people with cars.

Further research is needed to determine whether this obstacle is causing isolation and a lack of integration. Furthermore, the poor standard of public transport could be a source of frustration for short-term Chinese tourists. Even more than the long-term residents, tourists are unlikely to have access to private transport and would rely on public systems. This would not only be a cause of frustration, but also limits the tourists' ability to travel and spend money on the island.

### **Verbal and Written Communication**

Although the Korean language makes use of Chinese characters, the languages are mutually unintelligible. The research shows that verbal communication problems in Jeju are exacerbated by the Jeju dialect. Jeju islanders can often speak with both a mainland and island dialect, but their accents are strong enough to cause confusion for native-Korean speaking mainlanders. For Chinese migrants, who, if they have studied Korean, almost certainly study the standard Seoul dialect, the Jeju dialect causes verbal communication problems. In the long-term, Chinese migrants will adapt to the Jeju dialect, but in the short-term they report not only difficulties communicating but also the tension and hostility caused by such difficulties.

If long-term Chinese migrants struggle with the Jeju dialect, then short-term tourists have no hope of communicating easily, unless the islander they speak to has some Chinese ability. The problem is worsened by the lack of a lingua franca. International tourism has been facilitated by a basic knowledge of English among tourists. However, as China's working classes become rich enough to travel the short distance to Jeju, the type of person visiting the island is changing. In the past, only the wealthy and educated would have been able to visit. Nowadays, people without university education or English language ability can travel to the island. Tension caused by communication difficulties is inevitable. It is difficult to see an immediate solution in this context.

In a slightly different context, difficulties with written communication, especially official documents that are not translated into a Chinese language, cause integration issues. Although frustrating for migrants, this problem is more easily solved than the problems with verbal communication as documents can be offered in translated forms.

### **Rudeness, Unsociable Behavior, Overcrowding, Cleanliness**

With the limited sample size, the few mentions of rudeness, unsociable behavior, overcrowding, and cleanliness need to be addressed but seem to be minor issues compared to cultural misunderstandings, limited public transport, and communication problems. Furthermore, these issues could be described by natives, migrants, and visitors as inconveniences on the island or in any other busy tourist destination in the world. As none of these factors are mentioned more than four times, they can be labeled minor irritants rather than obstacles to integration when compared to the more frequently mentioned factors.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

By asking long-term Chinese residents of Jeju to describe inconveniences they face, this research hoped to uncover obstacles to integration and to the mutually beneficial Chinese migration to the island. The open-ended questions revealed difficulties that can now be addressed. By reducing difficulties experienced by long-term Chinese residents, the Jeju government might also find them as useful partners in limiting negative impacts of mass-tourism.

Due to millions of tourists and long-term investment from China, Jeju has boomed economically. The island is proud to be a self-governing province, but without the economic boost from Chinese migrants and tourists, it would have struggled to hold its independence. Past troubles can still be seen today by comparing the public transport infrastructure on the island to that on the mainland. Jeju cannot afford to reject Chinese tourism and long-term migration.

To maximize the benefits of Chinese investment and to protect the serene way of life on the island, the Jeju government should integrate long-term Chinese migrants and serve Chinese tourists. Merely reducing visa requirements and offering enticements is not enough. With this approach, the island suffers from hostility and tension caused by misunderstandings and unmet expectations. To integrate long-term migrants and handle mass tourism, the voices of long-term Chinese residents should be heard.

Experience and time can solve verbal and cultural misunderstanding as language and local dialect are learned. To speed up integration in these areas, the Jeju government could offer language and culture classes to new long-term arrivals. Chinese residents, with the Jeju government's help, could also create culture awareness days, festivals, or clubs, to introduce Jeju islanders to Chinese customs.

Difficulties with written communication will also fade over time as language skills improve, but to facilitate newcomers, the government, banks, schools, hospitals, and other organizations should translate documents into Chinese languages.

The last categories of difficulties described-Rudeness, Unsociable Behavior, Overcrowding, Cleanliness-are mentioned very few times, and although overcrowding and cleanliness might be important factors, rudeness and unsociable behavior are too subjective.

Finally, solutions to the problem of integration often focus on non-physical issues, but limited public transport, might be the most important. When participants described the inconvenience of limited public transport in this research, they often commented that it led to some form of isolation. Without the ability to move around and interact, Chinese residents cannot hope to overcome the difficulties of cultural and language misunderstanding.

Improvement in public transport would make the cultural and linguistic knowledge of the Chinese residents accessible to the native islanders and help them experience mass-tourism to the fullest. In addition, the problem of limited public transport as revealed by the Chinese residents would suggest that Chinese tourists also struggle to get around the island and are concentrated in certain areas. No research has been done on the spread of tourism on Jeju, but

with better public transport, the tourists' impact can be spread and diluted, potentially reducing the frustrations and fears of native-islanders in highly concentrated areas.

This research has uncovered areas for further investigation and would be strengthened by follow-up interviews from a larger sample. Further study could focus on the impact of limited public transport on integration and whether cheap and easily accessible systems correlate with better reported integration in other parts of the world. There are probably several solutions to the problem of integration, but focusing only on the more obvious aspects such as language and culture evades reality. By listening to immigrants and addressing their concerns, the host nation, or island in the case of Jeju, can improve the lives of both natives and immigrants alike, maximize the economic benefits of mutual trade, and offer insights into growing challenges of mass-tourism.

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