

REVISITING MULTICULTURALISM AND MULTICULTURAL POLICIES IN SOUTH KOREA¹

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For centuries, Korea has viewed itself as an ethnically homogenous society but now globalization has pushed South Korea to be increasingly multicultural in composition. The issue of how to integrate migrants into society so as to achieve a healthy balance between diversity and national unity has become problematic. Korean Society as a whole has responded well to this new multicultural reality. Policymakers have taken actions, albeit slowly, to accommodate the needs of migrant workers and marriage migrants. However, the existence of many different interpretations of "multiculturalism" has caused confusion. As a result, group-specific policies have become the norm. However these policies are inconsistent and discriminatory, making it inappropriate for the foundation of coexistence among peoples of different cultural background. Thus, the article argues for more universal and inclusive policies of social integration that can be applied to all members of Korean society.

Keywords: South Korea, multiculturalism, globalization, marriage migrants, migrant workers, foreign brides

Introduction

The advancement of communication and transportation technology has broken down traditional boundaries and blurred national borders. Increasingly, citizens of the world are linked and united in an unprecedented way. An understanding and toleration of national and social differences, however, remains important, even as the people of the world forge one large global society. The notion of single ethnic nationalism in contemporary Korea is being replaced by an emergent multiculturalism with the growth of foreigners residing in the country. For centuries, Korea has viewed itself as an ethnically homogenous society and maintained an almost zero immigrant policy. The growing multicultural character of Korea is consistent with broad trends of global migration. The growth in the number of migrant workers and marriage migrants in Korea indicates the acceleration of migration. The influx of foreigners into Korea began with migrant workers, but expanded to include foreign brides, illustrating the differentiation of migration.

The majority of immigrants come from China, the United States, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The main reasons they came to Korea to work (56 %), to live with their partners (14 %), and to study (7 %). Since early 1990, the number of foreign workers has grown due to Koreans' low birth rate and avoidance of doing difficult, dirty, and dangerous labour-intensive jobs. For the last six years, the international marriage rate has gone up remarkably as well, prompted by the growing number of foreign workers in South Korea. Another reason for the rise in the international marriage rate is that many Korean men in the countryside have begun to marry women from other Asian

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge that this study was sponsored by a 2013/2014 Korea Foundation Grant.

nations such as China, Vietnam, and the Philippines because of a great disproportionate ratio of men to women within Korea². Rapid urbanization has drawn young Korean women to the cities where they have more job opportunities for a better life. This new trend poses the issue of how to integrate new communities with the existing group and by what means to achieve a healthy balance between diversity and national unity.³

Korean Society as a whole has responded well to this new multicultural reality. The government has taken actions, albeit slowly, to accommodate the needs of migrant workers and marriage migrants. For migrant workers, the government has taken measures to grant them more rights and create better working conditions. For marriage migrants, the government has provided Korean language and cultural programs to help them better adjust into Korean society. In view of carrying out these policies, the government has enacted the *Foreigners Treatment Act and the Multicultural Family Support Act* and the Korean Immigration Service manages the affairs of immigrants. Also, multiculturalism has become a guiding principle of policies dealing with foreigners, particularly focusing on measures to help multicultural families and their children. Civil groups have done their part in campaigning for the rights of foreign-born residents and supporting their adjustment in Korea. The role of mass media in Korea is also noteworthy. Irrespective of their political orientation, newspaper editorials have called for more tolerant attitudes toward foreigners and news media routinely report on cases involving discrimination and human rights violations suffered by foreigners, raising public awareness. As a result, many surveys have shown that Koreans largely hold positive view of migrant workers and marriage migrants.

Understanding the Concept of Multiculturalism in Korea

Multiculturalism is one of the most popular academic topics in Korea today. However, the existence of many different definitions and interpretations of multiculturalism is the cause of serious confusion. The concept of multiculturalism has been debated in academic circles and in the media since 1990s.⁴ In 2006, the term multiculturalism became a way of describing government policy;⁵ in 2009, "multicultural family" became a legal term. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family established the Department of Multicultural Families in 2008, and as a result, some colleges have launched institutes or departments for multicultural studies.

Damunhwa (multicultural) has become a key term in describing contemporary Korean society, much like the key slogans of the development period, such as *geundaehwa* (modernization), *saneophwa* (industrialization), *jeongbohwa* (informatization) and *segyehwa* (Globalization). The concept *damunhwa* stands in contrast to homogenous, identical culture and describes a state of the coexistence of different cultures.⁶ References to, and arguments about, multiculturalism (*damunhwa*) as both descriptive of increasing

² Kim, A., "Global Migration and South Korea: Foreign Workers, Foreign Brides and the Making of a Multicultural Society, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009, pp 70-92.

³ Jungsoon Choi, "Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society: The Case of South Korea," *The Social Studies*, Vol. 101, No. 4, 2010, p 174.

⁴ Seol Dong-Hoon, *Foreign Labourers and Korean Society*, Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999.

⁵ Interview with officials from various ministries in Seoul, Korea, June 2013.

⁶ Seol Dong-Hoon, "Which Multiculturalism? Discourse of the Incorporation of Immigrants into Korean Society," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 41, No.4, 2010, pp 593-594.

demographic diversity, and prescriptive of policy, have proliferated in the media, in academic scholarship, in education and immigrant incorporation policies.⁷ Newspapers feature stories with titles like “More Koreans Open to Multiculturalism,” “Korea Celebrates 2nd ‘Together Day,’” and “Is Korea Homogeneous Country?” Academics publish articles with titles like “Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift in Contemporary Korea?,” “Emerging Multiculturalism in Korea: Competing Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion,” and “Multicultural Challenges in Korea: the Current Stage and a Prospect.” The 2009 *First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy* calls for Korea to develop “into a more mature, multicultural society where human rights are respected”.⁸ The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has, since 2007, undertaken textbook revisions to teach Korean students about “the different lifestyle of foreigners or difficulties of mixed race children”⁹, and the ministry announced plans to “remove words from textbooks, which have connotations of superiority of a single race and homogeneous cultural tradition.” Given the new development, there is overwhelming interests in symposiums, seminars, conferences, lectures, festivals, and classes on multiculturalism as well as experts involved in this new ‘booming multicultural industry.’¹⁰

However, the notion of multiculturalism in Korea is a diffused version of Western liberal multiculturalism either in word or deed or both. Is the Korean version of multiculturalism different in meaning than the way it is used in the West in a descriptive, normative, and ideological sense? Some native Korean scholars, notably cultural anthropologists, suggest that Koreans use the term Multiculturalism in their own way to describe an increasingly ethnically and racially diverse society in Korea. Multiculturalism in this sense is being used as a counter concept to a single notion of ethnic nationalism that seems to have originated in response to Japanese colonialism and this sentiment seems to have persisted from the beginning of the nineteenth to early twenty first century.

Kim Hyun Mee writes that the term multiculturalism was coined in Korea after the racial, sexual, and class violence stemming from ethnic nationalism based on pure-blood ideology. This seriously encroached on the rights of migrant workers, biracial citizens, and migrant women. Multiculturalism in Korea is thus used as a counter concept to Korea’s violent mono-ethnicity, rather than its general meaning of recognizing cultural differences.¹¹ Further, Han Geon-Soo is critical of the way Koreans use multiculturalism,

⁷ Han, G.S., “Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift In Contemporary Korea?” *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47, 2007, pp 32-62; Lee, J.B., “The Current Status and Tasks of Educational Support for the Students from Korean Multi-Cultural Students,” 2010, pp 71-88.

⁸ Lim, T., “The Politics of Immigration And Multiculturalism in South Korea,” paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies*, Honolulu, 31 March to April 3, 2011, p12.

⁹ Kim, N.K., “Multicultural Challenges in Korea: The Current Stage and a Prospect,” *International Migration*, 2009, p 20.

¹⁰ Michael R. Olmeck, “Facing multiculturalism’s Challenges in Korean Education and Society,” *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 12, 2011, p 675.

¹¹ Kim Hyun Mee, “The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of ‘Multicultural Families’ in Contemporary Korea” *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47, 2007, p 103.

*In Korea multicultural society and multiculturalism are not used as analytical concepts reflecting the reality of Korean society, but merely as rhetoric concepts or political slogans for future visions of Korea.*¹²

Han Kyung-Koo, on the other hand, characterizes Korean multiculturalism as a weak form of “state sponsored multiculturalism” or “government-led multiculturalism.”¹³ As a consequence, in 2006, the South Korean government announced *A Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Mixed-Race and Immigrants* as well as *A Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Female Marriage Migrants and their Family*. More importantly, in 2008, the government introduced the *Multicultural Families Support Act*, which indicates that multicultural families are at the center of governmental policy on multiculturalism.¹⁴

The only legal foundation that regulates multiculturalism is the *Multicultural Families Support Act*, which provides services exclusively for multicultural families. Except for some activists in various Non-Governmental Organizations, few members of the Korean public or officials in the Korean government recognize some 557,000 foreign workers, both legal and illegal, as multicultural or as issues for multiculturalism policy. Little effort has been made to protect their human rights in Korea. They are governed by the Act on the employment of foreign workers and are not allowed to stay any longer than five consecutive years as otherwise they could be eligible for naturalization. Obviously, this suggests that Korea’s commitment to multiculturalism has its limitations and policies do not reflect reality.

Multiculturalism, as it is understood in this study, is the invention of Western political philosophers in the twentieth century. Multiculturalism was a political and social response to accommodating ethnically and culturally diverse immigrants, and in some countries, indigenous minority groups. Because Koreans have been indoctrinated since the early twentieth century to believe that Korea is a homogenous, mono-ethnic society, there has previously been no word in the Korean language equivalent to western defined “multiculturalism.” However, the term *damunhwa* does not carry the same meaning as the English word because Koreans understand the term without first the implications and ramifications of it.¹⁵

Some scholars have pointed out that a rapid increase of migrant workers and international marriages promotes the idea of multiculturalism in South Korea.¹⁶ They have examined various social factors that contribute to the making of a multiethnic Korea. He situates the South Korean case in the context of theoretical frameworks

¹² Han Geon-Soo, “Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift in Contemporary Korea”, *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47, 2007, p 37.

¹³ Han Kyung-Koo, “The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation State: Multiculturalism in Korea,” *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47, 2007, p 9.

¹⁴ Ahn Ji-Hyun, “Global Migration and The Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference Through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea,” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol.8, No.1, 2013, p 32.

¹⁵ Kim Choong Soon, *Voices of Foreign Brides; The Roots and Development of Multiculturalism in Korea*, p xx, 2011, Altamira Press, Korea.

¹⁶ Han Geon-Soo, “Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift in Contemporary Korea”; Kim, N.K., “Multicultural Challenges in Korea: The Current Stage and a Prospect”; Ahn, J H., “Transforming Korea into Multicultural Society: Reception of Multiculturalism Discourse and its Discursive Disposition in Korea”; Kim, H.M., “The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of “Multicultural Families” in Contemporary Korea.”

of globalization and migration.¹⁷ Along the same lines, scholars also hold views on the multiethnic and multicultural shift in South Korea in terms of the matrix of class, gender, ethnicity, and physical space.¹⁸ At the same time, he is also critical of Korean multiculturalism, viewing it as more of a political rhetoric than an analytical concept for understanding social changes in South Korea. Meanwhile, other scholars apply a more gender-specific framework to Korean multiculturalism policy. She especially pays attention to the conditions and status of migrant women in South Korea. She demonstrates that the South Korean government rigorously tries to incorporate multicultural families into South Korean society, as female migrants are the most easily exploited resource in the global circulation of labour.¹⁹

Multiculturalism originated in Canada where the conflict between ethnic minorities and the dominant majority was troubling.²⁰ It is thus highly problematic to apply it to Korean society where the existence of ethnic minorities is still relatively small. Therefore, this study focuses more on the discursive shift within the immigration policy; it does so by examining the topology of multiculturalism policy from the perspective of a racial project and analyzing specific policies toward migrant workers as well as multicultural families. This study focuses on the governmental sector not only because it is interested in how the hegemonic idea of multiculturalism is shaped, but also because governmental policies have legal power that accompanies specific social practices. In the following sections, I examine the transformation in South Korean society brought about by the discourse of multiculturalism; by analyzing governmental policies and practices, I also explore how this transformation creates racial lines among various ethnic minorities.²¹

Ethnic Diversity of Korea

Globalization has forced South Korea to experience a massive new influx of immigrants. According to the statistics, there are now over 1,200,000 foreigners in South Korea²². This number represents about 2.3% of the total population in South Korea, which signals a new level of racial diversity. The current trend of global migration is not merely about individuals' movement across national, territorial borders, but also about transformation of the global economy and diffusion of new technologies as well. South Korea has become a labour receiving country due to its aging population and labour shortages in 3-D (difficult, dangerous, and dirty) industries.²³

¹⁷ Kim, N.K., "Multicultural Challenges in Korea: The Current Stage and a Prospect."

¹⁸ Han Geon-Soo, "Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift in Contemporary Korea."

¹⁹ Kim, N.K., "Multicultural Challenges in Korea: The Current Stage and a Prospect."

²⁰ Seol Dong-Hoon Seol, "Which Multiculturalism? Discourse of the Incorporation of Immigrants into Korean Society," p 607.

²¹ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project in Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," p. 33.

²² According to the Hankyoreh newspaper in 2010, in the era of 1,200,000 foreigners, multicultural society, education is the key to integration. [in Korean].

²³ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project in Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," p. 33.

Influx of Immigrant Workers

Korea became a labour-exporting country from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. Thousands of Korean workers emigrated annually in the 1960s and 1970s, notably to Germany, when miners and nurses made up the bulk of outgoing migrant workers. During the “construction boom” of the 1970s and early 1980s, tens of thousands were sent to the Middle East to work as construction workers for Korean companies. In the 1980s, more than 30,000 Koreans migrated annually as labourers to other countries.

Since the late 1980s, Korea changed from a labour-exporting nation to a labour importing nation.²⁴ When migrant workers began arriving in Korea in 1987, manual workers were estimated at 100,000, mainly in small-and medium-sized manufacturing firms.²⁵ Since the mid-1980s, Korea experienced a deceleration in the growth of domestic labour force as rural labour declined and the participation rate of youth (15-19 age group) dropped significantly due to longer schooling. The labour shortage was also caused by the booming construction industry, which drew Korean workers out of relatively low-paying factory jobs into higher-paying construction work. Moreover, growing labour market segmentation since the early 1990s brought about uneven labour shortages: large firms subcontracted some of their labour intensive production lines to smaller firms (5-29 employees) to cope with growing national and international competition, leading to an increase in the percentage of employees in small firms from 18.3 % in 1980 to 27.6 % in 1995. Labour shortage became more serious in smaller firms than in larger ones, and in unskilled jobs rather than in highly skilled jobs.²⁶ Lack of workers in manufacturing became critical in 1991 when unfilled production jobs totaled 222,000.

At the end of 1992, when migrant workers were legalized, many overseas investment enterprises that have overseas branches started to admit migrant workers. Furthermore, starting from November 1993, migrant workers entered Korea more easily through the introduction of the *Foreign Industrial Trainee* program that various industrial organizations, such as Korea Federation of Small and Medium Business, National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives, and Construction Association of Korea, implemented. Also, the number of migrant workers gaining illegal access to jobs in Korea using tourist visas increased. The number of migrant workers in 1991 was 45,449 and it quickly increased to 144,000 by 1995. Though the number slightly decreased in the 1997 financial crisis, when the economy quickly recovered, the number bounced back to 258,866 by July 2000.²⁷ Particularly, Korea attracts migrant workers from developing nations for employment in the so-called ‘3D’ (difficult, dirty and dangerous) jobs or

²⁴ Park, Y., “The Turning Point in International Migration and Economic Development in Korea,” *Asian Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994, pp 149-74.

²⁵ Kwon, Kisup, “The prospect s and challenges for The Employment Permit System,” a paper presented at the *3rd Meeting of the Immigration Policy Forum*, Gwacheon Government Complex, Gwacheon, Korea, 17 June 2004, p.1.

²⁶ Lee Hye-Kyung “The Employment of Foreign Workers in Korea: Issues and Policy Suggestion,” *International Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1997, pp 357.

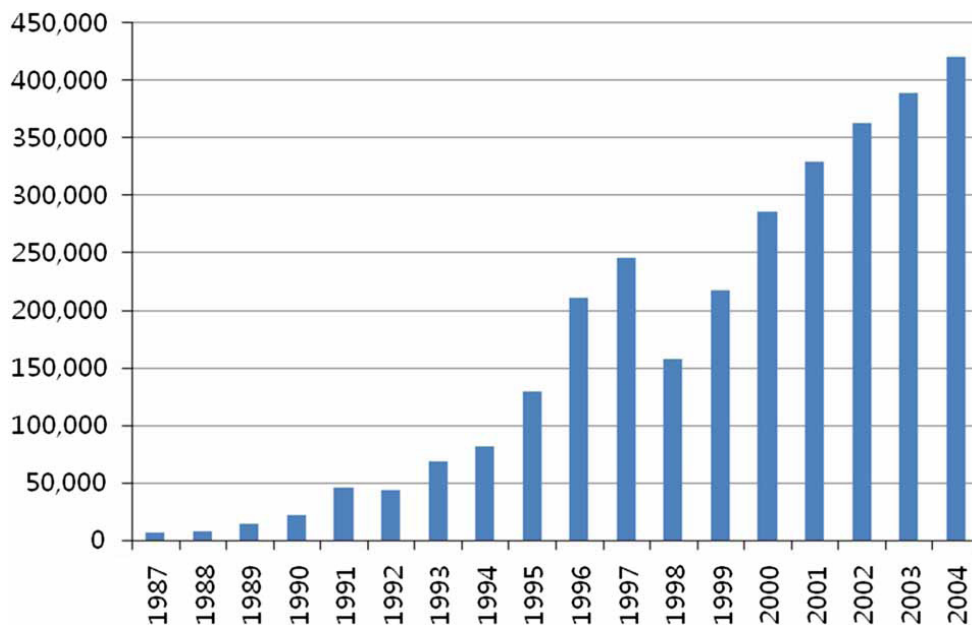
²⁷ Yoon In-Jin, “Multicultural Minority Groups and Multicultural Coexistence in Korean Society,” *Korea Observer*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2010, p 527.

demeaning manual jobs. Almost 95% of migrant workers in South Korea are classified as economic migrant workers.²⁸

Thus, migrant workers became an important component of intersection between immigrants and the Korean population. There has been a huge influx of migrant workers, especially from near Asian countries (Figure 1). Given that it was a labour issue, this influx was not considered a major event that shaped racial order in South Korea. In other words, migrant workers are only viewed in the context of labour division and circulation despite challenging the myth of a racially homogenous Korea.

As shown in Figure 1, the number of migrant workers has been gradually growing since the first wave in 1987. Although migrant workers are a visible index that illustrates the increase of foreign population in South Korea, they have not been the main object of the country's multiculturalism policy. Instead, the main targeted beneficiaries of multiculturalism policies are female marriage migrants and multicultural families that consist of interracial parents and their mixed-race children.²⁹

Figure 1 Influx of Migrant Workers to South Korea (1987-2004)



Note: This figure is the sum of both documented and undocumented migrant workers.
Source: Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea (2005).

Demographic changes often involve three key elements - birth, death, and the movement of people - but what is unique about the demographic trends of Korea is its exceptionally rapid pace of change. Korea is now one of the world's most rapidly aging societies and its fertility rate, which is the number of children a woman has in her

²⁸ Jin-Hee Kim, "A Changed Context of Lifelong Learning under the Influence of Migration: South Korea," *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2010, p 256.

²⁹ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," pp 34-35.

lifetime, has fallen at a record pace to nearly one, a level well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per family.³⁰ Rapid aging in Korea is a result of country's increasing life expectancy – e.g. it rose from 67.14 in 1983 to 72.83 in 2003 – and above all its low fertility rate. Korea's total fertility rate was 1.15 in 2009, one of the lowest, if not the lowest, in the world. The figure is a slight improvement from the record-low 1.08 in 2005. If low birthrate persists, as demographers anticipate, in 2007, the National Statistic Office projected a total population of 42.35 million in 2050, falling from the current 48.29 million. Over the past twenty years, South Korea has faced dramatic demographic changes.

One of the dire consequences of such rapid aging of the population is the decline of the economically active population (15-64 year olds). As of 2010, 62.7 % of the population is economically active, which is already relatively low, but the proportion will fall to as low as 53.7% by 2050.³¹ What this portends is a declining labour supply. As early as 2005, the Korea Labour Institute predicted that Korea will face a severe labour shortage from 2010. Assuming that Korea's economic growth average is 4.5% annually and that there will be an annual 1.51 % increase in demand for labour during the next 15 years, there will be a shortage of 586,000 workers in 2015 and 1.23 million in 2020. Unless redressed through labour importation, the projected labour shortage will undoubtedly have a serious negative impact on the Korean economy. The low birthrate also poses many economic problems, such as diminishing consumption, declining tax revenues, declining savings, waning investment, and even budget deficits. All of this leaves Korea with little choice but to bring in larger numbers of foreign labourers. The availability of a large pool of migrants in developing countries in many parts of the world, coupled with the government's wish to mobilize foreign labour facilitates a continuous flow of migrants into Korea.³¹

However, migrant workers face numerous obstacles. Issues associated with migrant workers are: 1) the exceedingly expensively referral fee, 2) differentiation of terms in contract and reality, 3) long working hours and low wages, 4) overdue wages, 5) industrial accidents and lack of safety education, 6) verbal abuse and discriminatory treatments, 7) vulnerability to diseases, injuries, and mental stresses, 8) exclusion from public social welfare and medical check-ups, and 9) violation of human rights of detained migrant workers at the Foreigners Detention Center.³² Most migrant workers face mental stress due to the fear of regulation violations and exportation. In their daily lives, migrant workers have difficulties with Korean language and face discrimination because of their background, especially if they are from developing countries. Furthermore, their exclusion from medical and social benefits, poor residential environment and educational benefits for their children, as well as the lack of legal protections makes living in Korea incredibly harsh. Last but not least, being unable to communicate well

³⁰ Kim Andrew Eungi, "Increasing Ethnic Diversity in South Korea: An Introductory Essay," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2010; Kim, A., "Global Migration and South Korea: Foreign Workers, Foreign Brides and the Making of a Multicultural Society," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009, pp 70-92.

³¹ *Dong-A ilbo*, 20 January, 2005.

³² Han, Geon Soo and Seol Dong-hoon, "Korean Policy and System from Immigrants," *Perspective*, Seoul: Hanguk Yeoseong Jeongchaek Yeonguwon, 2007, pp 57-58.

in Korean forces them to be vulnerable to accidents and minor disputes that can lead to racial conflicts.³³

Development of Migrant Marriages

International marriages have a long history in Korea and have contributed to the diversification of the Korean gene pool. According to the *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), according to Korean history written by Ilyon, a thirteen century monk, the first-century Korean Kim Suro, the king of Kaya, married a princess of Ayodhya, India, in AD 48.³⁴ Later, during the period of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392), a succession of four kings married Yuan princesses. These foreign immigrants introduced their native cultural traditions to Korea, thus enriching Korea culture.³⁵ The contemporary history of international marriage in Korea goes back to the Korean War. In order to block the expansion of communism in Northeast Asia after the war, 40,000 US soldiers were stationed in Korea annually. From 1950-1964, about 6,000 Korean women were married to American soldiers and moved to the US. But, gradually, the number of Korean women who emigrated overseas for the purpose of marriage decreased; the number dropped to 6,187 in 1981 and further to 1,113 in 2003.

Nevertheless, Koreans have a history of immigrating to other countries to find work or other means of improving their economic situations. For example, from the mid 1960s through much of the 1970s over the ten thousand Korean nurses went to West Germany to earn foreign currency, which was desperately needed in Korea. Not long ago, in 1980, some 17,000 Korean women, most of whom were relatively well educated but economically deprived, relatively older than what was considered the ideal marriageable age, or divorced, married Japanese men using the services of Japanese marriage brokers. The characteristics of the Japanese men they married were almost identical to those of the Korean men who marry foreign women today. They were relatively older, economically deprived, and living in remote prefectures such as Yamagata. In 1997, an additional 300 Korean women went to Japan to marry Japanese men for the same reasons and under the same conditions. At that time, Korea's economy was struggling with challenges from the foreign currency crisis that swept across Asia that year. The outflow of brides to Japan was halted when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in and bailed out the Korean government.

The turning point of international marriages occurred in early 1992. As the diplomatic relations between Korea and China were established, Korean bachelors in rural areas married female Korean Chinese, and from then, the number of Korean Chinese increased. Furthermore, Japanese and Filipino women entered Korea to get married as well, with religious purposes emphasized under the Unification Church. In 2000, international marriages became the norm with the introduction of marriage brokers and bureaus. Foreign brides began coming into Korea from the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Mongolia, Russia, and Uzbekistan. The number of Vietnamese brides increased significantly after the year 2003. It is reported that in the year 1990,

³³ *Gyeonggi Research Institute, Housing and Living Condition of Foreign Migrant Workers*, Gyeonggi: Gyenggi Kaebal Yeonguwon, 2006, pp 208-210.

³⁴ Ilyon, "Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea," trans. Ha Tae-hung and Grafton K. Mintz, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2007, pp 158-73.

³⁵ Kim Choong Soon, *Voices of foreign brides; the roots and development of multiculturalism in Korea*, p. xiv.

1.2% of all marriages in Korea were international marriages, which later increased to 13.6% by 2005 and slightly decreased to 11% by 2008.³⁶ Seeking foreign women as mates is a logical, practical choice for many single Korean men in rural villages. At the same time, there are factors that make the option of marrying a Korean man attractive to a non-Korean woman. According to a study conducted by the Korean Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs in July 2005, 41% of all the foreign women who have married Korean men are searching for economic betterment and the avenue for sending money to their families back home. Over 73% of those who married via international marriage brokers wanted to improve their economic status. In some areas of Southeast Asia, finding foreign husbands for young brides is believed to be the best route out of poverty. By marrying foreigners from richer countries, brides believe they can provide for their family back home.³⁷

With rapid economic development, marriageable women in Korean farms and fishing villages are decreasing due largely to the massive exodus of rural peasant families from the countryside to the cities and industrial zones. The lower income and poor living conditions in rural areas has motivated peasant farmers to leave their homes for urban areas and industrial zones, as these locales promise higher wages and modern living conditions along with the prospect of better education for their children. With the traditional custom of arranged marriage no longer in vogue, younger generations of Koreans are opting out of arranged marriages and choosing mates independently. This makes the situation that much more difficult for rural men who are looking to marry since now they must depend on their ability to convince someone to marry them rather than have a match made for them. A variety of demographic changes have complicated rural men's efforts to find Korean mates. Many of them have turned to foreign brides and often have looked to local government agencies for assistance. These government agencies have a vested interest in such marriages since they ultimately serve to keep young people from immigrating to the city which would allow for the rise in fertility rates in order to stabilize declining populations.

Between 2004 and 2008, the number of foreign spouses married to Koreans increased nearly 44 times and the trend continues to rise. Currently, approximately 40% of Korean men who work in the agriculture sector, forestry, or in the fishing industry are married to foreign women. The number of children born into these families is increasing at a rapid pace. By 2010, the total had reached 121,935.

To compensate for the shortage and to attempt to keep men on the farm, local Korean governments have spearheaded campaigns to recruit foreign brides by relying heavily on international marriage brokers. The success of this effort has ensured that Korea will become an increasingly multicultural society. While the program itself has been a success, the central government has not responded effectively to the needs and expectations of foreign brides. Until recently, the government did not have a formal mechanism for addressing and coordinating the affairs of foreign brides. Now this responsibility belongs to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. However, there is still some confusion since several branches of government that often compete with one another monitor the affairs of these international brides. In response to such

³⁶ Yoon In-Jin Yoon, "Multicultural Minority Groups and Multicultural Coexistence in Korean Society," pp 529-530.

³⁷ Kim Choong Soon, *Voices of foreign brides; the roots and development of multiculturalism in Korea*, p xxvii.

shifting demographics, multiculturalism has become one of the most talked-about issues in Korea. Increasingly, the public, government, and many civic organizations are demanding that the country recognize and affirm ethnic diversity within Korea.³⁸

One significant feature of migration is that it is gendered and the phenomenon is called 'feminization of migration.' This means female immigrants are becoming more and more involved as sex workers and in contract as well as international marriages. Not surprising, mail-order brides have become such a crucial social phenomenon in East Asia.³⁹ South Korea is no exception. The rapid increase of international marriages and mail-order brides from other Asian countries, such as Vietnam, China, and Cambodia reflect this trend. In this context, it is not a coincidence that female migrants who have migrated to South Korea for the purpose of marrying South Korean men - are the most targeted subject of South Korean multiculturalism policy⁴⁰. Thus, analyzing policy documents and public discourses of the extent to which gender, class, and race are articulated under within multiculturalism is essential.⁴¹

The proportion of intermarriages in total marriages in Korea has jumped more than ten-fold since 1990, accounting for nearly 14% in 2005. As many Korean men in the countryside have great difficulty in finding marriageable partners domestically, the number of foreign brides in Korea has increased remarkably in the last decade. For example, there were some 25,000 foreign brides in Korea in 2000, but by May 2009, it increased six times to 149,853. Since Korean society is expected to suffer from a serious bride shortage in the next two to three decades, the only way to redress this situation is to bring in more marriage migrants.⁴²

Another reason for the projected shortage of brides is unbalanced sex ratio at birth. Sons are preferred over daughters in Korea. Although it is less prevalent now, preference for a son was stronger in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in an unbalanced sex ratio. Under normal circumstances, sex ratio at birth, which is the number of male births per 100 female births, is around 105, but the figures for Korea had been noticeably higher, especially in the late 1980s, when ultra-sound technology was introduced. The figure reached as high as 116.5 in 1990. The data is even more startling for the birth-order-specific sex ratios: the sex ratio at birth for the family's third-and fourth-born children has hovered between 130 and 140 in Korea⁴³. It goes without saying that such sex ratio at birth in favor of males became common through widespread sex-selective abortions. As a consequence, Korea will face a serious shortage of brides in the future. For example, the sex ratio of men and women in their most "suitable" years for marriage - i.e., 26-30 years old males and 24-28 year old females - is expected to be 118.9 in 2010, 112.0 in

³⁸ Will Kymlicka and Baogang He, (eds.), *Multiculturalism in Asia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p 2.

³⁹ Interviews with officials at various ministries in Seoul in June 2013.

⁴⁰ Kim, H.M., "The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of "Multicultural Families" in Contemporary Korea," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47, 2007, pp 100-122.

⁴¹ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," pp 31-32.

⁴² Andrew Eungi Kim, "Increasing Ethnic Diversity in South Korea: An Introductory Essay," p. 504.

⁴³ Park Chai Bin and Nam-Hoon Cho, "Consequences of Son Preference in a Low-fertility Society: Imbalance of the sex ratio at birth in Korea," *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1995.

2020 and 116 in 2030. This means that hundreds of thousands of males in their teens and early 20s today will be unable to find Korean wives when they reach marriageable age.⁴⁴

The projected rise in intermarriage in the near future suggests that the nature of intermarriages will change. While intermarriages to date have been largely limited to farmers and blue-collar workers, it is likely to increase involving urbanites and even college-educated white-collar workers. What is certain is, consistent with international marriage trends, Korean men with low incomes are less likely to find Korean wives.

The Korean government has discouraged abortions in general and sex-selective abortions in particular. In fact, abortion has been illegal in Korea, except in cases of pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, involving deformities of fetuses, and endangering the lives of pregnant women. And doctors are prohibited from informing the mothers about the sex of the fetus. The harshest penalty for violating this law for doctors is loss of their license to practice, but no doctor has ever been “convicted” that degree. Thus far, no country has successfully prevented sex-select abortions.⁴⁵

Although female marriage migrants are increasing in numbers, they face economic difficulties in Korea. According to the 2009 survey of multicultural families, 38.4% of the interviewed families earned less than 1-2 million won (approximately US\$ 862-US\$ 1,724) per month, and 21.3% earned even smaller income of less than 1 million. Only 2% earned more than 5 million won (US\$ 4,310) monthly. Because of financial difficulties, the families that failed to pay their medical insurance or utilities bills, borrowed loans for living expenses, suspended or gave up medical treatment accounted for 30% of all interviewed families⁴⁶.

Despite the apparently growing public acceptance of multiculturalism, social prejudice and discrimination still exists toward marriage migrants. The most frequently reported difficulties include 1) language barriers, 2) financial insecurity and limited access to social services, and 3) difficulties with educating and raising children. Especially, those with children at the ages of elementary school have extra difficulties of paying tuition fees for private educational institutes and tuition. High levels of perceived discrimination in terms of social marginalization and discrimination because of low status and physical appearances persists. However, North America, Austrian, Western European and Cambodian, Thai, and Vietnamese marriage migrants expressed higher levels of life satisfaction while Japanese marriage migrants reported the lowest level of satisfaction. This difference shows that the stability of international marriages is fragile. The husbands’ lack of economic progress, domestic violence, language and cultural barriers are hard to overcome and many international marriages have come to an end. According to divorce statistics released in April, 2010 by the Korean National Statistical Office⁴⁷, the number of divorces in international marriages increased rapidly

⁴⁴ Kim Andrew Eungi, “Increasing Ethnic Diversity in South Korea: An Introductory Essay,” p. 505.

⁴⁵ Kim Andrew Eungi “Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, accessed: 11 November 2014, http://japanfocus.org/-Andrew_Eungi-Kim/3035.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Health and Welfare, *National Survey of Multicultural Families*, Seoul: Bogeon-bokjibu, 2009.

⁴⁷ Korean National Statistical Office (KNSO), *Divorce Statistics of 2009*, April, 2010, pp 2-3.

from 1,744 in 2002 to 4,171 in 2005 and to 11,692 in 2009. By contrast, divorce cases of ordinary Korean couples decreased from 144,900 in 2002 to 124,000 in 2009.⁴⁸

Multicultural Families and Children

Along with the rapid rise in intermarriages, the number of multicultural children have also increased. The issue of children from multicultural families has been debated among researchers, government officials, civic activists, and immigrants themselves. Bride migration is intimately related to the issue of bi-ethnic / bi-racial children, who are referred to as "multicultural children" in Korea. These children used to be called "the racially-mixed" or "children of mixed-blood" but those terms were replaced with "children of multicultural family," giving a more positive meaning and connotation.

The offspring of marriages involving Koreans and persons of other Asian heritage are called Kosians, with prefix "Ko" deriving from the term "Korean" and the suffix "sians" from the term "Asians." As the number of intermarriages is expected to rise over the years, their number too is likely to rise. Accordingly, nearly a third of all children born in 2020 are expected to be Kosians and their accumulated total will soar to 1.67 million or 3.3 % of the population by that year.⁴⁹ In addition, the number of bi-ethnic / bi-racial children in elementary and secondary school reached 13,445 in 2007, up 68.1 per cent from the previous year (7,998). The proportion of bi-ethnic / bi-racial children in total enrollment is expected to rise to 16 per cent in 2118 and to more than 870,000 or 26 per cent in 2050. Elementary text books will soon include a section on bi-ethnic / bi-racial children and multicultural families, highlighting the need to understand diverse cultural backgrounds and to develop more tolerant attitudes. This is a major change from emphasizing on ethnic homogeneity, which presents Korea as a consanguineous community comprised of the descendants of one common ancestor. Major television networks have started to feature immigrant brides and multicultural families. Korean society is starting to implement measures to accept the multicultural reality, at least for those who share "Korean blood."⁵⁰

The children of multicultural family have different appearances, ways of speaking, and poor language proficiency when compared to native Korean children, and are often alienated from mainstream South Korean culture and by their peers at school. This creates difficulties for them in establishing self-identity as Koreans.⁵¹ As a result, the number of students who dropout or discontinue the pursuit of education is increasing - 14% of multicultural family children do not attend elementary school, 40% do not attend middle school, and 70% do not complete high school.⁵²

According to Cho, who evaluated educational problems of children of multicultural families, these children are referred to as "falling-behind children," children of migrant workers as "neglected children", and children of North Korean migrants as "dropout children." About 8,000 children of migrant workers are not receiving any type

⁴⁸ Yoon In-Jin, *Multicultural Minority Groups and Multicultural Coexistence in Korean Society*, p. 532.

⁴⁹ 'A Possibility of the Political Empowerment of Kosians,' *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, 5 April, 2006.

⁵⁰ Andrew Eungi Kim, "Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea."

⁵¹ Kim, Wang-Bae, "Immigration of Foreign Workers into Korea: From Periphery to the Global Labour Market," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2004, pp 316-335.

⁵² Kim, Wang-Bae, "Immigration of Foreign Workers into Korea: From Periphery to the Global Labour Market."

of education, and moreover, undocumented migrant parents hesitate sending their children to public or accredited schools because of unconfirmed residence, financial insecurities, and fear of disclosing their identities. Children of migrant workers, especially undocumented ones, however, are neglected and abandoned from basic public education because they are not Korean citizens. On the other hand, the children of marriage migrants and North Korean migrants are Korean citizens and civil organizations. Although these children suffer from difficulties in following Korean curriculum at school, but they are offered better support, such as guaranteed educational opportunities and access to various programs carried out by the government and civic organizations to improve educational performance.⁵³

Multiculturalism and Migrant Policies in Korea

Korean society have responded well to the multiculturalism phenomenon. Korean scholars have introduced theories and discourses of multiculturalism developed in Western societies and have examined current situations and problems of various types of migrants. Civic organizations have advocated rights of migrant workers, marriage migrants and supported their adjustment in Korea. Mass media has transformed migrants' problems into a social issue and raised public awareness of difficulties faced by migrants. The Korean government has taken proactive measures to accommodate needs of foreigners and migrants. Although acting too quickly and hastily, the central government and its affiliated organizations have made some remarkable accomplishment in immigration and multicultural policies. They included 1) establishment of the Employment Permit System and Healthy Family Support Centers, 2) legislation of the *Foreigners Treatment Act and Multicultural Family Act*, and 3) involvement of legal and institutional infrastructures like the Korea Immigration Service. These developments have resulted in a more positive perspective towards multiculturalism among Koreans. Today they have a much more open-mind and positive viewpoint towards migrant workers, marriage migrants, and a multicultural society. These changes were possible due to the work done by many progressive civic organizations and media, which actively challenged infringement of human rights, social prejudices and discriminations faced by migrant workers, marriage migrants, and their children. They also have spotlighted the urgency of granting support and attention to migrants.⁵⁴

Migrants Policies in Korea

At the heart of the matter is Korean demand for cheap, unskilled labour to fill jobs shunned by locals. In congruence with dual labour market theory, the demand for foreign labour came about as relatively better-educated, more status-conscious, and wealthier Koreans began to turn away from low-paying and less prestigious manual jobs. To mitigate the labour shortage in unskilled, manual jobs, since 1992 the Korean government has sought to bring in and control the inflow of unskilled migrant workers. The number of such workers entering Korea increased from 33,861 in 1994 to 49,345 in

⁵³ Cho Youngdal, *A Survey of Educational Conditions of Children of Multicultural Family*, Seoul: Kyoyukinjeokjawanbu, 2006 quoted in Yoon In-Jin, "Multicultural Minority Groups and Multicultural Coexistence in Korean Society," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2010, p 534.

⁵⁴ Yoon In-Jin, "Multicultural Minority Groups and Multicultural Coexistence in Korean Society," pp 519-520.

2000, and 106,688 in 2004. Korea attracted workers from a dozen or so Asian countries, including China (predominantly ethnic Koreans), Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Recently, however, unskilled migrant workers are now coming from other parts of the world, including Russia, Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan, Brazil, and Nigeria. They are employed in agriculture, fishery and service industries as well as in 3D jobs in industries including construction, metal works, dyeing, auto-parts, tanning, textiles, furniture-manufacturing and other small-to medium-scale manufacturing industries.⁵⁵

Four types of work permits regulate the influx of foreign workers: Professional Work Permit System (PWPS), Industrial Training System (ITS), Employment Management System (EMS) for less-skilled overseas Koreans, and Employment Permit System (EPS) for unskilled foreign workers. The work permit system stipulates different conditions and entitlements for skilled and less-skilled or unskilled workers. Skilled foreign workers are subject to lesser regulations than their less-skilled counterparts. The Immigration Bureau does not limit the number of visas for skilled workers, while setting visa quotas for less-skilled foreign workers in specified Industrial sectors according to needs.

The Industrial Training System (ITS) was implemented in January 1994. In the inaugural year, 31,830 Asian workers arrived. Since then, the number of industrial trainees fluctuated between 25,000 and 52,000. The training program consists of a one-year training and two-year work permit system: trainees are eligible to apply for a work permit after completion of the training program. If they are successful in obtaining a work permit, they can work as regular workers with the full range of labour rights. Four main sectors in which these trainees work are manufacturing, construction, agricultural, and inland and coastal fisheries. However, the trainee program created many problems: trainees often became undocumented workers as they ran away from the trainee program for better pay elsewhere (trainees were paid barely more than minimum wage and were often forced to work overtime with no overtime pay); there were many reports of abuses as trainees were not protected by the Labour Standard Law.

Further, the program had a very crucial flaw at the outset. It was originally introduced to provide undocumented workers with skills and legal status. However, in opposition to its initial purpose, the program resulted in the departure of foreign workers from the program because they were considered trainees, not workers; therefore, with trainee status, they were paid much less than undocumented workers.⁵⁶

The Employment Permit System (EPS) for less-skilled or unskilled foreign workers was implemented on August 17, 2004 to ultimately replace the problematic ITS. From 2004 to 2007, ITS and EPS were practiced together, but the ITS became discontinued as of 1 January 2007. Unlike the ITS, which was controlled and operated by business associations, all activities of the EPS—registration of potential migrant workers, selection, pre-departure orientation, post-arrival orientation, job placement, return and reintegration, and monitoring—are strictly regulated by government agencies.

⁵⁵ Seol Dong-Hoon, *Foreign labourers and Korean society*, Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999; Seol, Dong-Hoon, "Past and Present of Foreign Workers in Korea, 1987-2000," *Asia Solidarity Quarterly*, Vol. 2, 2000, pp 6-31; Kim, Wang-Bae, "Immigration of Foreign Workers into Korea: From Periphery to the Global Labour Market", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2004, pp 316-335.

⁵⁶ Skrentny, J., and D.H. Seol, *South Korea: Importing Undocumented Workers*, 2004. In *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, ed. W.A. Cornelius, T. Tsuda, P.L. Martin, et al, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp 475-513.

The new system is aimed at providing equal treatment to foreign workers, including basic labour rights, employment insurance and legal minimum wages, while ensuring a stable supply of manpower for Korean employers. However, foreign workers are banned from changing workplaces on their own and are allowed to work in Korea for a maximum of three years. To establish labour migration through bilateral agreements between the sending and receiving countries, the government entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with six Asian countries – Thailand, Viet Nam, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines – from which about 25,000 workers arrived in 2004. In 2006, three other countries were added – Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Cambodia – followed by MOU with China, Bangladesh, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Myanmar and East Timor in 2007. More than 100,000 workers arrived from these countries in 2007 alone. The Korean Ministry of Labour assigns annual quotas to all sending countries according to employer preference, evaluation of sending procedures, and the number of illegal workers. Consequently, sending countries competed for quotas, and this brought higher quality workers to Korea and guaranteed fairness in recruiting in the sending countries. Eligibility is restricted to manufacturing companies with less than 300 workers which can prove that they previously tried to employ Korean workers. However, this initiative has been criticized by civic activists for being advantageous to employers. In other words, migrant workers are not given full details and information about the workplace environment and it restricts workers' from making any autonomous decisions. Furthermore, the right to rehire migrant workers solely resides within the employers. This means when a worker's employment contract expires, employers are most likely to take control over the amount of wages and plight of the migrant workers. All in all, the system is criticized for severely restricting workers' right to change workplaces, for paying them lower wages and being trapped in subordinate employment.⁵⁷

In addition, an Employment Management System (EMS) for overseas Koreans has been implemented since December 2002 for overseas Koreans who have foreign nationalities. To be eligible, they have to be at least 30 years old and have a relative living in Korea. EMS permit holders were originally allowed to stay for up to two years, but from August 2004 permission was extended to three years. Through these labour importation schemes, several hundred thousand foreign workers, skilled and unskilled, have been brought to work in hotels, restaurants, as cleaners and maid.⁵⁸ Table 1 shows a summary of the policy changes for migrant workers.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kim Hee Sung, "Legal Problems and Proposal on Employment of Migrant Workers," *Gyeongyeong Beopryul*, Vol. 13, No. 2008. pp 290-294.

⁵⁸ Kim Andrew Eungi, "Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea."

⁵⁹ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," p 38.

Table 1 Governmental Policies on Foreign Labour Recruitment from 1988 to the Present.

Period	Enacted Policy	Policy and Consequences
1988-October 1991	Absence of policy	Ignoring the influx of foreigners who visit relatives and travel in South Korea at first, yet later settled down in South Korea as undocumented migrant workers
January 1992	Industrial Trainee of Overseas Investment Enterprise	The first governmental policy for migrant workers
January 1994	ITS	Importing foreigner labourers on 'student' status/ visas Excluding them from the social welfare system, as they were not '(legal) workers' based on the <i>Standard Labour Law</i> Migrant workers suffered from long hours of work and low wages Number of undocumented workers increased
November 2002	EMS	One year of training and two years of employment
August 2004	Combining the ITS with EPS	Introducing the EPS Enforcing a law on hiring foreign workers
January 2007-Present	EPS	Abolishing the ITS and validating only the EPS

Source: Kim, A.E. 2009. Global migration and South Korea: Foreign workers, foreign brides and the making of a multicultural society. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32: 70-92., Lee, S.O. 2009. Migrant workers' movement and multiculturalism in Korea. *Multiculturalism in Korea: Reality and issue*, ed. K.S. Oh, 81-107. Seoul: Hanwool Academy., Skrentny, J., and D.-H. Seol. 2004. South Korea: Importing undocumented workers. *Controlling immigration: A global perspective*, ed. W.A. Cornelius, T. Tsuda, P.L. Martin, et al, 475-513. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Multicultural Policies for Foreign Brides

Prior to 2004, the Korean government was not concerned about foreign spouses, while local governments and NGOs were. The central government began paying attention to the new immigrants when sixteen congressmen, most representing rural constituencies, submitted a petition in February 2005 proposing that international marriage agencies be regulated. Upon their request, the Ministry of Health and Welfare asked several scholars to investigate foreign wives in 2005. Based on the findings of this nationwide survey, the government announced the 'Grand Plan' on April 26, 2006. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family became the leading coordinating department, while other ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, Labour, Health and Welfare, along with local and central government departments were required to participate. The 2006 'Grand Plan' includes various services, such as Korean language instruction, cultural education and employment training. Since 2006, the government has devoted considerable funding to social services for immigrant wives.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Danièle Bélanger, Hye-Kyung Lee & Hong-Zen Wang, "Ethnic Diversity and Statistics in East Asia: 'Foreign Brides' Surveys in Taiwan and South Korea," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33:6, 2010.

The term “multiculturalism” in Korea has evolved from the concept of multicultural families. Most Koreans still tend to understand multiculturalism as something pertaining almost exclusively to foreign brides. For that reason, various programs, aid, and campaigns related to multiculturalism is still built largely around foreign brides and their circumstances. Other immigrants, such as migrant workers, foreign students, or even North Korean escapees are not considered critical to the development and implementation of multiculturalism policies. Therefore, understanding the meaning of multiculturalism and the development of related operational policies is most effectively achieved by emphasizing foreign brides.⁶¹

In governmental policy designed to regulate increasing foreign population, this broad shift from the framework of labour (migrant workers) to that of family (multicultural family) has been (in)directly affected by the rise of the discourse of multicultural society since 2005.⁶² As mentioned earlier, the South Korean government and press initiated the discussion of multiculturalism; in this process, the unit of family has moved to the center of the discussion as a type of assimilation policy. For instance, one of the newspaper articles, titled ‘From labour policy to immigration policy,’ argued:

Although policies for migrant workers are important, it is discussed that the careful welfare policies for multicultural family and their mixed-race children are more urgently needed. In other words, since the children of migrant workers and the children of Korean citizens and foreign spouses (known as ‘Kosian’), are continuously increasing these days, a comprehensive governmental policy should be enacted.⁶³

As seen above, the main subject of governmental immigration policy is now children, whether they are the children of migrant workers or mixed-race children from interracial marriage, which signals that the framework of immigration policy has shifted from labour to family. It is also interesting to note that the issue of migrant workers, in the case that they start a family in South Korea regardless of their visa status, begins to be covered under the rubric of multicultural family rather than that of labour. Aside from the press, academia has also problematized the sudden discursive shift ‘from migrant workers to multicultural society’ or ‘from labour to neighbor.’

The government’s awareness towards immigrants, including migrant workers and female marriage migrants, has increased significantly. The launch of the *Foreign Policy Committee* set a new policy direction under the slogan of ‘living together with foreigners.’ Hence the emphasis has shifted from ‘low-skilled labour’ and ‘care and control’ to a new paradigm with ‘respect for human rights and social integration of foreigners’ and ‘living with foreigners and an open society.’⁶⁴ In other words, the increase in discourses

⁶¹ Kim Choong Soon, *Voices of Foreign Brides; The Roots and Development of Multiculturalism in Korea*, p xxiv.

⁶² Ahn, J H., “Transforming Korea into Multicultural Society: Reception of Multiculturalism Discourse and its Discursive Disposition in Korea,” *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 13, 2012, pp 95-107.

⁶³ Oh, S.W., “From Labour Policy to Immigration Policy,” *Nail Newspaper*, 16 November, 2005, http://www.naeil.com/news/politics/View_News.asp?sid_E&tid_0&num_233408.

⁶⁴ Jung, K.S., Korean Government’s Immigration Policy, 2006, “Government’s Immigration Policy Caring and Leaping,” paper presented at the *Annual Symposium of Network for Migrants Rights*, 2006, p 12.

on multiculturalism has played a role in shifting the immigration policy agenda from labour to family welfare.⁶⁵

The Basic Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea

Korea's National Assembly passed the 2007 *Basic Act* after years of debate, research, and negotiations between policymakers and civil society organizations. Following a 2006 meeting of representatives from the major government ministries, migrant advocacy organizations, and scholarly community, the government announced plans to enact the Basic Act with the stated purpose of promoting immigrant social integration and mutual respect between foreigners and Korean nationals. This act calls for the implementation of a Basic Plan for Immigration Policy every five years that entails the cooperation of the national, municipal, and local governments and the designation of the Foreigner Policy Committee to coordinate all policies regarding foreign residents. *The First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2008-2012; "First Basic Plan")*, which included a total budget of 612.7 billion Korean won, set the basis for designing and funding programs and assigning specific ministries with tasks related to the following four goals: 1) enhancing national competitiveness with a proactive openness policy; 2) pursuing quality social integration; 3) enforcing immigration laws; and 4) protecting human rights of foreigners.⁶⁶

Although the *Basic Act* is meant to serve as a general guide for drafting the five-year Basic Plan for Immigration Policy, it is notable for its explicit provision to safeguard the human rights of foreign residents in Korea (Article 10). As minorities in Korean society who are vulnerable to "human rights abuse", foreigners require "national-level protection against discrimination".⁶⁷ In addition to outlining broad plans for reviewing and reforming discriminatory practices and institutions, the First Basic Plan offers specific provisions for protecting migrant women, foreigners in detention facilities, and refugees.

Migrant women, especially marriage migrants, are also central to the First Basic Plan's second goal of "pursuing quality social integration." Among the four major tasks assigned to this objective are two that are devoted solely to marriage migrants and their children: "helping immigrants through marriage get settled" and "creating a sound environment for multicultural children." In a similar vein, the last task in this section concerns the social integration of co-ethnic immigrants or the "Korean Diaspora" while the first section that discusses reforms to immigration policies makes clear that they have priority over other foreign nationals in entry and employment rights. This section additionally includes a framework for equalizing working conditions for foreign and Korean workers from workplace abuse. Accordingly, the Basic Act and the First Basic Plan sets distinct guidelines for incorporating specific immigrant populations: social integration for marriage migrants, preferential entry and employment rights for co-ethnic immigrants, and human rights protection for migrant workers.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," p 37 .

⁶⁶ *Korea Immigration Service (KIS), Korea Immigration Service Statistics 2009 (2009).*

⁶⁷ *Korea Immigration Service (KIS), p 13.*

⁶⁸ Chung Erin Aeran, "Korea and Japan's Multicultural Models for Immigrant Incorporation," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2010, p 663.

Dynamics of discursive transformation: exclusion and inclusion

As mentioned before, migrant workers are systematically excluded from multiculturalism policies. However, it does not mean that they are entirely excluded. The appearance of migrant workers in South Korea is not accidental, even though they were not welcomed. It took about 15 years to earn EPS, which guarantees migrant labour rights with certain limitations. In contrast, the multicultural family became the foremost object of governmental multiculturalism policy after 2005. But then the question is how did the discussion move to multicultural families instead?

First of all, we need to examine the logic that especially excludes migrant workers more than the multicultural family, even though both migrant workers and multicultural families are racial others in South Korea. When the ITS resulted in migrant workers undocumented, the EPS was designed to guarantee migrants the same basic labour rights as other Korean workers. However, a principle of exclusion and inclusion is still in place as migrant workers can only stay up to 5 years, and their movement is restricted from one job to another.

Secondly, the exclusion lies in the dichotomy between national and non-national that is related to state racism. Since migrant workers are not citizens who have political-legal rights, they are distinguished and discriminated against in the form of a group. The logic is based on the ideology of being national and non-national: Who are the nationals? And who does not belong? Moreover, regulating and governing the population is a very political issue from beginning to end because it distinguishes a citizen from a non-citizen and a legal worker from an illegal one. Furthermore, citizenship accords one with legal political rights and it also distinguishes abnormal from normal according to one's sexual orientation and marital status.

As we can see from Table 2, migrant workers, regardless of their status eventually return home, hence they become objects of exclusion. In contrast, the multicultural family automatically acquires legal status and is the object of assimilation. Simply put, migrant workers are considered temporary residents who earn money and bring it back to their home country, which makes them an object of exclusion, whereas the multicultural family (and their children) is considered a member of Korean society, which allows them to be an object of assimilation and governmental support.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Korean multiculturalism as a governmental policy has a strong inclination toward assimilation and social integration. While Western multiculturalism fought racism, Korean multiculturalism assimilates individuals of differing races into the process of nation-building. I have argued that racial projects have been formed through the discourse of multiculturalism whereby a discursive transformation from migrant workers to the multicultural family has developed. First, the process of inclusion and exclusion controls and regulates the population. This is important because the transition from migrant worker to multicultural family is one of the state's techniques to govern its citizens. Second, the multiculturalism discourse in South Korea has shaped an order based on race and racial categories determine the distribution of social resources. Lastly, family as the basic unit is mediated by sexuality and race.

⁶⁹ Ahn Ji-Hyun, "Global Migration and the Racial Project In Transition: Institutionalizing Racial Difference through the Discourse of Multiculturalism in South Korea," p 41.

Table 2 Control Mechanism that Regulates Migrants in South Korea

	Detailed classification	Legal status	Regulating mechanism	Assimilation or exclusion
International marriage	Female	Legal	Multiculturalism	Assimilation
	Male	Legal		
Children	Multicultural family children	(Legal) Korean	Multiculturalism	Assimilation
	Migrant worker children	Illegal	Very limited human rights	Exclusion
Migrant worker	Documented worker	Legal	EPS	Exclusion
	Undocumented worker	Illegal	Forced deportation, purposeful connivance	Exclusion
Overseas Koreans (in China)		Legal/illegal	Employment for compatriots	Assimilation/exclusion

Source: Lee, S.O. 2009. Migrant workers' movement and multiculturalism in Korea. *Multiculturalism in Korea: Reality and issue*, ed. K.S. Oh, 81-107. Seoul: Hanwool Academy.

The discursive disposition of migrant workers changed after it began to be discussed under the discourse of multiculturalism, which resulted in a new discursive order through the process of rearranging the racial discourses in South Korea. Thus, the discursive transformation from migrant workers to the multicultural family is complicated. For example, it is true that migrant workers have been systematically excluded from governmental policies before multicultural policy was enacted, whereas multicultural families and female marriage migrants have become the main subjects of multicultural policies. However, this process is not dichotomous, as in 'migrant workers out, multicultural family in.' Dynamic movements of inclusion and exclusion are still happening within the migrant workers. It is more accurate to argue that the discursive position of migrant workers has been renegotiated.

Foreign residents in Korea comprise only 2.4% of the Korean population and the percentage of long-term foreign residents is even lower. Therefore, it is premature to call Korean society a multicultural society. Yet, the number of foreigners and the level of racial and ethnic diversity keep growing, transforming Korea into a multicultural society. Low fertility and aging is reducing population growth, especially the economically active population and it would be inevitable Korea to admit more foreign labour force in order to keep up with the current level of economic growth and living standards. Furthermore, in addition to migrant workers, marriage migrants and foreign students enter Korea in increasing numbers and many of them manage to settle permanently. As a result, Korean society will become more diverse in term of race, ethnicity, and culture, and achieving social integration out of diversity has become the major task for Korean society. The question now is not about whether to accept multiculturalism or not, but is about what form of multiculturalism should be implemented. The discourse on multiculturalism should seek solutions to actual problems of an increasing multicultural society.

Koreans should prepare for potential risks and conflicts that a multicultural society can bring. Western countries that used to admit large numbers of immigrants are now facing racial and religious conflicts due to the majority group's prejudice and discrimination against foreigners. Koreans now are tolerant toward immigrants because there are not big in numbers. When foreigners increase in numbers, they are likely to compete with natives and resist assimilation to the mainstream culture. In order to avoid such a situation, Korean society needs to improve its acceptability of multiculturalism and create environments where multicultural minorities can feel they are equally productive members of the society. Multicultural coexistence between the majority and minority groups requires both attitudinal changes of society and systematic changes of laws and institutions.

First, all kinds of discrimination and social exclusion should be stopped and everyone should have equal opportunities for self-development. Thus, the *Prohibition Act on Discrimination* which prohibits any mistreatment and discrimination against multicultural minority groups should be strengthened.

Second, Koreans need to actively support the protection of human rights that guarantees social and cultural rights of minority groups. For example, children of multicultural family who face learning difficulties need to be acknowledged, funded and given rights to receive special education tailored to meet their needs.

Third, Koreans need to find a solution for undocumented foreign residents who are actual members living in the society. They are stuck as they lack basic human rights like education and medical care because they are not legally Korean citizens. Plans of legalization needs to be developed by setting qualifications and conditions of legalization, selecting qualified individuals, giving them conditional legal status until they gain permanent legal status after they prove their ability of self-sufficiency. Benchmarking the precedents in the United States to develop a Korean specific model of legalization of undocumented migrants should be done.

Attitudinal changes of society require long-term investments in education and training. Thus Korea needs the expansion and strengthening of multicultural education not only for migrants but also ordinary Koreans so that they can appreciate multicultural values, lifestyles, and modes of behavior.

Finally, Korea must develop a new principle of social integration suitable for a multicultural society. There is a need for a more universal and inclusive principle of social integration that can be applied to all actual members of a multicultural society. South Koreans apply the principle of national to naturalized married migrants and their children, the principle of compatriot to overseas Koreans, and the principle of legality to foreigners. Naturalized marriage migrants and their children become the target of inclusion and assimilation. Overseas Koreans receive preferential treatment over non-Korean foreigners. Legal foreigners are protected from discrimination and receive support for social adjustment and economic activities while illegal or undocumented ones are excluded from such support and protection.

These group-specific principles are discriminatory and not appropriate in a multicultural setting. The attitude of citizens must change. Thus far, most Koreans have a positive attitude toward immigrants, but we can never be sure that they will not become hostile in the future. Hence, Koreans and immigrants need to adapt to living with each other despite their ethnic and cultural differences. In sum, citizens have a role to play as it is not the sole task of the government to make preparations for a multicultural society.