

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE KOREAN LANGUAGE AND KOREAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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## 1. The Korean Language<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Prehistory of Korean

Little authentic documentation is available on the origin of the Korean language. Thus, inferences to the genetic affiliation of the language have been made on the basis of various degrees of linguistic resemblances, often supported by archaeological or ethnological findings. Also, earlier forms of the language are not readily accessible because written historical data for internal reconstruction or comparative work are scarce and cannot be traced far back.

Some old language fragments are available only in the literature dating from the eleventh century, such as *Gyun-yeo jeon* (Life of the Great Master Gyun-yeo, 1075) by Hyeklyen Ceng, *Gyerim Yusa* (Things on Korea, 1103-4) by Chinese Sung Dynasty scholar Sun Mu, *Samguk Sagi* (Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms, 1145) by Kim Busik, and *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, 1285) by Monk Il.yen, all of which are written in Chinese characters. Moreover, much of the earlier vocabulary has been either irretrievably lost or obscured by succeeding waves of linguistic contacts, including a massive influx of Chinese loan words.

Lacking solid evidence in establishing the genealogy of Korean, innumerable attempts has been made to relate the language to diverse language families such as the Indo-European, the Tibeto-Burman, the Dravidian, the Atlantic, the Austronesian, and the Paleosiberian. While there are many ingenious studies based upon the widely accepted principles of comparative method and internal reconstruction, there are also numerous amateurish attempts based merely on accidental lexical resemblances, linguistic borrowings, shared typological features, or anthropological similarities.

For instance, Koppelman (1933) and Eckardt (1966) attempt to relate Korean to Indo-European, observing certain accidental lexical and anthropological resemblances. Hulbert (1905) maintains that Korean is related to the Dravidian languages in India in view of such shared syntactic features as word order and the lack of a gender system. Rahder's (1956-61) etymological dictionary of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Ainu lists, for each of his lexical entries, forms from a vast variety of the world's languages not compared in accordance with the established principles of comparative linguistics. This evidential opacity leads some linguists to treat Korean, together with Japanese, as a separate language family along with other major language families such as Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, Uralic, Altaic, Sino-Tibetan, Dravidian, Austronesian, and Amerind (Pei, 1954: 31).

### 1.2. Altaic hypothesis

The altaic hypothesis is the most persuasive explanation yet proposed given the available data and methodological refinements. It includes Korean and Japanese in the atlantic family which is composed mainly Turkic, Mongolian, and Manchu-Tungus groups that range widely in the regions west and north of China. Altaic is thought to be a linguistic unity spoken sometime during the Neolithic period, and its original homeland is assumed to be somewhere in northern or northcentral Eurasia (Miller, 1976: 341). The Ryukyuan language of the Okinawa prefecture of Japan and the islands belonging to the former Ryukyuan kingdom was considered by some scholars (e.g., Miller, 1971) as a sister language of Japanese but is now considered to be a Japanese dialect by most Japanese scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper mainly refers to H.M. Sohn (1999), Chapters 2 & 3 and Y.S. Park (2008).

The first noteworthy comparative study of Korean is by Shiratori (1914-6) who compiled a 595-entry vocabulary comparing Korean and other Altaic languages, claiming their genetic relationship. Polivanov (1927), noticing the existence of vowel harmony in Korean, proposed the affinity of Korean to Altaic. It is Ramstedt (1928, 1949, 1952, 1957), however, who first assigned Korean into the Altaic family in a systematic way. Ramstedt deals with the entire field of Altaic comparative linguistics. Partly due to the etymological contributions of Ramstedt and others, Poppe (1960) demonstrates the linguistic unity among the Altaic languages, reconstructing the proto-Altaic phonology, morphology, and lexicon of some 570 roots based on regular sound correspondences among many of these languages. Poppe's reconstructions are summarized and indexed in Street (1974). According to the Altaic hypothesis, the dominant original Koreans and Japanese were Altaic people who migrated to Korea and Japan, bringing with them the basic elements of their languages.

Ramstedt, Poppe, and others found that the proto-Altaic word-initial \*p had the following development: \*p>f>h>ZERO. While Old Mongolian had p and Middle Mongolian had h, most Modern Mongolian dialects have ZERO (except Monguor, which remains f). In the Manchu-Tungus group, the Nanay, Olcha, and Orok dialects retain the original p and Manchu has f, whereas Orochen, Evenki, Lamut, etc. have h and Solon has ZERO. Turkish has ZERO in general. Korean is regarded as retaining the original p. These are illustrated in Table 1 (e.g., Ramstedt 1949 and Poppe, 1960).

**Table 1. Sound comparison amongst several languages**

to pray	Manchu firu-, Evenki hiruge-, Mongolian iryge- Middle Mongolian hiryge-, Korean pil-
village, plain	Manchu falga, Mongolian ail, Turkish al, Korean pəl
to blow	Manchu fulgije, Lamut hu-, Mongolian ulije- Middle Mongolian hulie-, Korean pul-
season, year, spring	Manchu fon, Mongolian on Middle Mongolian hon, Monguor fan, Korean pom

Japanese may be included in the above set in view of its having h in such putatively cognate words as hara 'plain', huk- 'to blow', and haru 'spring'.

Miller (1971), a strong defender of the Altaic affinity of Korean and Japanese, includes Korean materials (mainly from Martin, 1966) in thirty-six of his fifty-eight sets of phonological correspondences that relate Japanese to the Altaic. In a recent historical-linguistic study of some ten Old Korean fragments of the Baekje dynasty which are preserved largely in Japanese sources, Miller (1979) shows their etymological relationship to Altaic.

Recently, however, leading scholars such as Pinker (2003: 257) set forth a counterargument that Korean and Japanese do not belong to the Altaic language family, they seem to orphans from the linguistic viewpoint. This is because there are only few cognate words and the pronunciations of some corresponding words of Korean, Japanese and Altaic languages are normally quite different.

### 1.3. History of the Korean Language

Since the overall picture of the structure and lexicon of the language became much clearer only after abundant data became available from the 15<sup>th</sup> century due to the invention of Hangeul (the Korean alphabet), emphasis is naturally placed on the evolution made during the past five hundred years.

#### 1.3.1. Summary of Korean history

As described in many works on Korean history (K.B. Lee, 1984; A. Nahm, 1993), archaeological findings suggest that paleolithic people first came to Korea over 30,000 years ago and the Neolithic culture emerged in the Korean peninsula around 6,000 B.C. The Neolithic period was followed by the Bronze Age around 1,200 B.C. According to *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, 1285), Ancient Joseon, one of the first tribal leagues of the Bronze culture, was

established in 2333 B.C. by the legendary king Dangun in northern Korea and southwestern Manchuria. Ancient Joseon is subdivided into three periods: The Dangun Joseon, the Gija Joseon, and the Wiman Joseon periods.

According to *Samguk Yusa*, the Gija Joseon period was initiated around 1,120 B.C. by Gija, a scion of the fallen Shang dynasty of China who fled to Ancient Joseon; and the Wiman Joseon period was begun around 194 B.C. by Wiman, a Chinese military leader of Yen who fled to Ancient Joseon and usurped the throne. Ancient Joseon dominated the territory between the Liao River in southern Manchuria and the Daedong River in central North Korea until Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty in China invaded Wiman's Ancient Joseon and placed the new territory under his administrative control in 108 B.C.

By the fourth century, there existed Tungusic tribal states such as Buyeo on the Sungari River in Manchuria, Goguryeo on the Tungjia River (a tributary of the Yalu), Okjeo on the plains of Hamheung in the northeastern part of the peninsula, and Yemaek along the eastern coast south of Okjeo, while in the regions south of the Han River, Mahan was in the west, Jinhan in the east, and Byeonhan in the south. These three tribal leagues are called Samhan (Three Korean Han States).

Among the northern tribal nations, Goguryeo (37 B.C. - 668 A.D.) matured into a kingdom, conquering and annexing Buyeo, Okjeo, and Yemaek. Goguryeo also routed the Chinese in 313 A.D. and put an end to their 400-year colonial rule over Ancient Joseon. By this time, Goguryeo bordered Baekje (18 B.C. - 660 A.D.) to the south, a kingdom founded by immigrants from Goguryeo who controlled the Mahan tribes. Goguryeo also faced to the south the Silla kingdom (57 B.C. - 935 A.D.) which was founded on the Jinhan region. On Byeonhan soil, a group of six small states called Gaya (42 A.D. - 562 A.D.) prevailed, but they were eventually subjugated to Silla. Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla are referred to as the Three Kingdoms.

Chinese culture had a great impact on the Three Kingdoms and Japan. The Three Kingdoms successfully assimilated Chinese culture with their own traditions. Envoys, political refugees, and emigrants from the Three Kingdoms, especially from Baekje, contributed greatly to the early Japanese civilization and culture by transmitting Chinese literature, Buddhism, farming methods, weaving, medicine, painting, and music to the Japanese people.

Silla subjugated Goguryeo and Baekje, unifying the Korean peninsula as a single political entity in 668 A.D., with a territory including only Pyeongyang and Wonsan to the north. The Goryeo dynasty (918-1392), which succeeded Silla, restored part of the former territories once possessed by Goguryeo, expanding the northern frontier as far as the Yalu River on the western coast and including most of today's South Hamgyeong Province on the eastern coast. The English name Korea is derived from the Goryeo dynasty.

Goryeo was succeeded by the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). It was during the reign of King Sejong (1397-1450) that the northern frontier was expanded to the Tumen River on the eastern coast, thus establishing Korea's borders where they remain today. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea, putting an end to the Joseon dynasty. The Japanese occupation lasted for thirty-five years, until 1945 when the Second World War ended. Subsequently, Korea gained its independence but was divided into South and North Korea.

### ***1.3.2. Evolvement of Korean***

The nature of the Korean language prior to the period of the Goguryeo kingdom in the north and the Samhan states (Mahan, Jinhan, Byeonhan) in the south of the Korean peninsula is difficult to access due to a lack of written materials. The few fragmentary records lead us to believe that the Goguryeo language was Tungusic, along with the languages of Buyeo, Okjeo, and Yemaek; that the languages of the Samhan states in the southern part of the peninsula were merely dialects of each other; and that Goguryeo and other northern languages (called the Buyeo group by K.M. Lee, 1976) on the one hand and the Samhan languages on the other were considerably different.

The few records are contained in *Weyi Chih* (Records of Weyi, written by Chen Shou in the third century), *Houhan Shu* (History of Later Chinese Han, written by Fan Yeh in the latter half of the fifth century), and *Chou Shu* (History of Chou, compiled at the beginning of the seventh century). According to *Chou Shu*, the language of the dominating class of Baekje, who were Goguryeo people, was not the same as that of the commoners, who were Mahan people. This indicates that there was a noticeable difference between the languages of the northern group to which Goguryeo

belonged and those of the southern group which consisted of the Samhan states. Based upon the remark in *Weyi Chih* that the language of the tribe called Sushen in the northern part of the continent was considerably different from the languages of the northern group (Goguryeo, Buyeo, etc.), K.M. Lee (1976: 30) assumes that the Sushen language belonged to Manchu-Tungus, further speculating that the northern group had already diverged from Manchu-Tungus languages around the beginning of the Christian era. It is widely held that the Sushen tribe is the ancestor of the Yeojin tribe. The terms Sushen, Yeojin, Nuchen, and Jurchen might have been derived from the same word that refers to the same Manchurian tribe.

Scanty records, such as *Samguk Sagi* (1145) and *Samguk Yusa* (1285), allow a glimpse of the nature of the Silla language and lead us to regard Contemporary Korean as the descendant of the language of Unified Silla and the succeeding dynasties. The language of Unified Silla is assumed to have been composed mainly of the Samhan dialects with very little influence from the northern languages. In support of this assumption, H.K. Kim (1972: 21-22) advances the following points.

a) The fragments of the Silla language that are contained in existing records are reflected in present-day Korean. For instance, the name of a Silla king ‘julnisageum’, which appears in *Samguk Sagi*, is interpreted as nuli ‘world’ and nimgeum ‘king’.

b) Many northern place names reflect the Goguryeo language and are related not to present-day Korean but to the Manchu language.

c) There is no record indicating that Silla’s unification of the Three Kingdoms was impeded by difficulty in communication among the three peoples, suggesting that their languages were mutually intelligible.

d) Since Unified Silla was comprised of the region south of the Daedong River and South Hamgyeong Province, the people who occupied the area north of this borderline are assumed to have spoken the Goguryeo language.

The few records of the language of the Goryeo dynasty that succeeded Unified Silla include *Gyun-yeo jeon* (1075) and *Gyerim Yusa* (a book listing 350 Goryeo words, 1103-4). However, the detailed structures of the languages of Goguryeo, Silla, and Goryeo are extremely difficult to ascertain since all the old records are not only scanty but also written in Chinese characters.

It is with the creation of Hangeul in the Joseon dynasty during the fifteenth century that the structure of the Korean language began to reveal itself fairly accurately. The large amount of material written in Hangeul over the past five centuries enables linguists to observe the evolvement of the language. In particular, the structure of fifteenth century Korean has been revealed through literature published during the fifteenth century. *Yongbieocheonga* (Songs of flying dragons, a eulogy cycle in 125 cantos comprising 248 poems, 1447) represented the first experimental use of Hangeul. Song books written in Hangeul praising Buddha and Hangeul translations of Buddhist scriptures include *Seokbosangjeol* (A life of Buddha, 1449), *Weolinseokbo* (a combined volume of *Weolincheongangjigok* and *Seokbosangjeol*, 1458), *Beophwagyeongeonhae* (Korean translations of the Lotus scripture, 1463), and *Weongakgyeongeonhae* (Korean translations of the scriptures for Buddha and Buddhist saints, 1464). Earlier Hangeul materials also include *Tusieonhae* (Korean translations of the poems of the Chinese poet Tu Fu, 1481).

Although linguists do not agree on the details, the widely accepted chronological divisions of the Korean language are based upon certain historical events relevant to the language (e.g., H.K. Kim, 1962; K.M. Lee, 1976). Besides the historical evolvement discussed above, significant events also include the creation of the Korean alphabet (‘Hunminjeongeum’, 1446), the Japanese invasion (1592-8), and the appearance of various significant books, such as *Gyerim Yusa*, *Samguk Sagi*, *Eonmunji* (A manual of vernacular Korean, written by Yu Huy in 1824), and *Daehanmunjeon* (A Korean grammar, written by Yu Giljun in 1909). The following periodization of the developmental stages of Korean (<Table 2>) is mainly based upon K.M. Lee (1976) and I.S. Lee et al. (1997).

**Table 2. Periodization of the developmental stages of Korean**

Prehistoric Korean	to the Buyeo and Samhan period (until around the beginning of the Christian era)
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Old Korean	the Three Kingdoms period to the end of the Unified Silla dynasty (from around the beginning of the Christian era until early tenth century)
Middle Korean	ranges over the Goryeo dynasty period (10 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> century) and the first 200 years of the Joseon dynasty, that is until the Japanese invasion in 1592 (15 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> century)
Modern Korean	ranges over the period after the Japanese invasion to the end of the nineteenth century (17 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup> century)
Contemporary Korean	20 <sup>th</sup> - 21 <sup>st</sup> Century

## 2. Korean Language Education

### 2.1. The globalization of Korean language education

The Korean language is a native language of a small country: a country whose territory is even divided. Against the odds, however, Korea has established a remarkable economic growth (12th in the world, 2017) and democracy in a relatively short time, and hosted the two Olympic Games (Seoul, 1988; Pyeongchang, 2018) and the FIFA World Cup (2002). Also it has become one of leading IT powers and major car exporters, and given birth to the frenzy of the Korean wave with K-Pops, K-Movies, and K-Dramas. Thanks to its scientific alphabetical system, over time the Korean language will encourage more people to learn it in the world.

The reasons for learning the Korean language differ from person to person, but they could fall into several categories such as for pure curiosity, sightseeing, job opportunities, academic purposes, national strategies and so on.

Take America first. This nation has several reasons for teaching Korean. Firstly, teaching Korean could produce high quality Korean speakers for its national purposes. The Defence Language Institute (DLI) has a system in which learning foreign languages can replace military services. In its Korean department, 200 or so professors teach the Korean language approximately 1,500-3,000 American soldiers intensively. More than 30,000 soldiers have already finished learning Korean. Secondly, they teach Korean for academic purposes. Approximately 140 universities in America have opened Korean studies departments for the purposes of teaching the Korean language and Korean culture. Thirdly, entering universities is added for another purpose of teaching Korean. One hundred or so high schools offer Korean language courses for those who choose Korean as their second language in SAT II. Meanwhile, some efforts are being made to include the Korean language in the Advanced Placement (AP) program, a program designed to provide a motivation to high school students with college-level academic courses.

In Japan, more university students are making efforts to learn Korean because the ability to speak, write, and read Korean is a great advantage to those who wish to have a job Korean or Japanese companies in Japan. More than 330 universities and colleges have Department of Korean Studies or offer Korean language courses. From primary to high schools, they run “national classes” in which Korean is taught. Besides, more than 280 high schools open classes of “Korean as a second language” as an optional subject.

In China, more than 60 universities have opened Korean language departments for the last 15 years. As many as tens of thousands of Korean companies have made their way into China. Therefore Chinese students are majoring in Korean to have jobs in Korean companies in China or in Korea or to do business relevant to Korea.

### 2.2. Education for overseas Korean language teachers

“National Institute of Korean Language” has promoted the educational work for overseas Korean language teachers from 1992 in order to improve the quality of overseas Korean language teachers. This educational work is classified into two programs: 1) the Korean Language Specialist Dispatching Program, by which the Korean language specialist educates Korean language teachers in foreign countries; and 2) Overseas Korean Language Teachers Invitation Program, by which overseas Korean language teachers were taught in Korea.

The educational work is aimed at spreading the Korean language and grammar criteria to the

Korean community in China and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), in which Korean residents spoke the Korean language influenced by North Korean language and local foreign language, and to retrieve linguistic commonality. The targeting areas of the educational work started from 1992 were Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and the three north-east provinces in China.

In the Korean Language Specialist Dispatching Program, Korean language specialists (one professor and one researcher) introduce Korean language and publicize the differences between North and South Korean language to not only local Korean language teachers, but also proofreaders proficient in the Korean language and grammar criteria of North Korea, journalists, announcers, and educational researchers in charge of the Korean language.

Meanwhile, in the Overseas Korean Language Teachers Invitation Program, 15-20 overseas Korean language teachers or Korean language-related workers from China or the CIS who were not able to visit Korea because of political or economical reasons, are invited to Korea. They learn Korean teaching methods, Korean language and grammar criteria, language and etiquette, and explore cultural and industrial sights for two weeks.

As a result of the dispatch and the invitation program, Korean language criteria were used in periodicals and Korean language institutes in China and the CIS for about 10 years. Since the beginning of 2000 the number of people who want to study Korean language has increased in Asia. As the environment of the overseas Korean language education changed, the purpose and the content of the education should be verified and the targeting area should be expanded. Because the yearning for Korean language was higher in Southeast Asia as well as the rest of the world, the targeting area for the educational work was expanded throughout Asia and to North and South America from 2000.

In addition to the Korean language and grammar criteria, various courses and activities for the education of overseas Korean language were added to curriculum. The dispatch program is currently operated by exchange among the Korean Cultural Center, the Korean embassies and the association of Korean language teachers. Korean embassies select people for the invitation program. Thus, by the education under the construction of network with overseas Korean institutes, the education of the overseas Korean language is supported; therefore, the situation of the overseas Korean language can be understood.

### **2.3. Education of teachers of the Korean language in Korea**

“National Institute of Korean Language” manages a special academy, “the Korean Language Culture Academy”, for teaching high level contents of the Korean language to teachers of Korean in Korea. The Korean Language Culture Academy, founded in 1992, operates to help teachers of the Korean language acquire the correct and high level knowledge of Korean and spread them to foreign students. There are not only 'lectures in the Korean Language Culture Academy', but also 'visiting lecture outside the Korean Language Culture Academy', by which professors or specialists of the Korean language visit institutes or organizations located at every region in Korea and give special lectures.

The Korean Language Culture Academy offers various learning programs for teachers of the Korean language. Each course is designed with specialized curriculum and schedule according to participants. Teachers are provided with 30-hour course for 5 days. The detailed curriculum offered by the Korean Language Culture Academy is as follows. At the linguistic norm class, participants can learn about orthography, spacing words, the standard language, the notation of loan words and Romanization of Korean. At the writing class, the writing of correct sentences, the writing of correct official documents, the practice of plain Korean language, and the writing of a dissertation are taught. The speaking class consists of the standard pronunciation, language-etiquette, debate and discussion, effective speaking, and one-minute speeches.

### **3. Conclusion**

As a conclusion I would like to put an article in Korea Herald, a Korean newspaper in English, issued on April 3rd, 2017. This article clearly shows what and how to do to make a better relationship between ASEAN and Korea, and what to do to live in Korea or in ASEAN countries as foreigners.

“ASEAN youths dream of future in Korea”

Alfiana Raharjo dreams of teaching the Korean language to Southeast Asians vying for careers in Korea.

As an Indonesian studying at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, she has acquired an acumen of Korea, which she believes will prove instrumental in bridging the two countries. Raharjo also wants to offer her perspectives on halal-oriented tourism here, as the country is belatedly beginning its charm offensive toward Muslim travelers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as part of its diversification strategy.

“Wearing a hijab, eating halal food and praying five times a day, I’ve encountered frequent problems in Korea,” Raharjo told The Korea Herald on March 25. “Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and other Muslim-dominant countries in ASEAN have great tourism potentials, but many of their travelers don’t choose Korea as an initial destination, preferring Turkey, Dubai and other halal-friendly countries instead.”

Raharjo was participating in a mentorship program for students and young people seeking employment in Korea, organized annually by the ASEAN-Korea Center in Seoul. The event comprises a lecture on job application processes and requirements -- with tips on writing cover letters and succeeding in interviews -- and a networking session for students and graduates who have been hired by Korean companies.

As advice to people looking for careers in ASEAN, Raharjo emphasized the importance of mastering the local language, noting “English proficiency is not enough.” English is not an official or second language across most ASEAN societies, with the exceptions of Singapore and Malaysia, Raharjo mentioned, adding in Indonesia it is the third most spoken language and first foreign language.

“Secondly, immerse yourself in the local culture,” Raharjo recommended, noting ASEAN is roughly divided into three cultural groupings: the Indo-China group of Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam; the Malay-Austronesian group of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, southern Thailand and southern Philippines; and the Western-Austronesian group of East Timor and the Philippines.

“Thirdly, do not act in a superior way as a Korean,” she urged, adding that Koreans often fail to mingle with other nationalities. Raharjo also dissuaded against brandishing a luxurious lifestyle or complaining about hot weather or traffic jams.

Noting that Korean people work hard, the Indonesian suggested the often ostentatiously gung-ho ethos may not be suitable in Southeast Asia, a region that celebrates pragmatic and down-to-earth lifestyles.

“One of my friends who worked at a Korean company in Indonesia told me he couldn’t understand why his boss kept him in the office after work hours, when he finished his job,” Raharjo recalled. “My friend said he ended up watching movies and playing computer games in his cubicle, instead of going home early to his family. He asked me why Koreans worked vaingloriously instead of working smart and productive.”

Marilyn Manalaysay, a Filipino who works at GS Engineering and Construction as a global human resources assistant manager in Korea, said some of her job-related challenges have included long office hours, juggling work and family, the high expectations of colleagues and feelings of alienation.

“But after gaining my colleagues’ trust and confidence, I found it very rewarding to see them respect who I am and what I do,” Manalaysay said. “Through my commitment to and lasting relationships with my coworkers, they started listening to my ideas and suggestions and recognized my efforts.”

On how Korean companies can improve their culture and governance, she suggested the pool of employees can be more diversified with additional global talents, and the roles and responsibilities placed on foreign employees should stand equal to those of Koreans.

“ASEAN youths here play a key role in strengthening our bilateral relations,” said Kim Young-sun, secretary general of the ASEAN-Korea Center, adding those who studied and launched careers in Korea serve as vital links connecting the two regions.

“When they go back to their countries, they can apply the skills, knowledge, experience and

networks they have developed to help the local economies move up the value chain.”

According to 2016 statistics, there are 485,000 people from ASEAN living in Korea, out of which more than 17,000 are students enrolled in universities and 200,000 are workers in various sectors. Highlighting that ASEAN has become the new economic horizon for businesses, the former career diplomat argued the Southeast Asians, by tapping into their tacit knowledge, could assist Korean firms as they make inroads into local markets.

Kim -- the Korean ambassador to Indonesia from 2011 to 2014 -- also encouraged Koreans to seek employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in ASEAN, as Korea’s economy has been growing tepidly with prospects for new jobs on the decline.

“It is high time for Korean youths to consider ASEAN as a place to realize their dreams and potentials,” the secretary general said. “Employment and business opportunities there are growing on the back of rapid economic expansions, and various infrastructures are being developed.”

The rising number of Korea Towns in major cities in ASEAN means newcomers can easily find support for a softer landing on their new environment, he added.

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