

# Multiculturalism and Anti-multiculturalism Phenomena in South Korea

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*Multicultural policies in South Korea are currently showing some signs of backlash. The declaration that multiculturalism has failed has been successively announced around the world, and it is often observed that the extreme right-wing parties that support anti-multiculturalism and anti-immigration secure a significant number of votes. It is not certain how closely the phenomenon of backlash against multicultural policies in South Korea is related to global trends, yet this tendency undoubtedly appears in South Korea as well. Why has this phenomenon occurred? This article will discuss the rise of anti-multiculturalism as the major driver of retreating multicultural policies in South Korea and examine its causes. The article aims to explore the causes of this phenomenon from two angles: the limitations of the government's policy and negative reports through the mass media. Lastly, this article recommends a "new" politics that can be called a politics of multiculturalism or politics of immigration that has not yet appeared in South Korea.*

## 1 Issues Regarding Multiculturalism

Multicultural policies in South Korea (hereafter Korea) are currently showing some signs of backlash. The declaration that multiculturalism has failed has been successively announced around the world, and it is often observed that the extreme right-wing parties that support anti-multiculturalism and anti-immigration secure a significant number of votes. "We are indeed in a post-multicultural era" (Kymlicka 2010, 97). Whether this statement is right or wrong, the argument that "the term (multiculturalism) has become associated with socially disintegrative effects" has been the basis for criticizing multiculturalism (Vertovec 2010, 90). It is also one of the impetuses for a post-multicultural era. It is not certain how closely the phenomenon of backlash against multicultural policies in Korea is related to global trends, yet this tendency undoubtedly appears in Korea as well. Why has this phenomenon occurred?

This article will discuss the rise of anti-multiculturalism as the major driver of retreat-

ing multicultural policies in Korea and examine its causes. It is commonly seen in Korea that the number of migrants hoping for permanent residency has increased since the mid-2000s. This change in population composition threatens the idea of an ethnically homogeneous nation, a prevalent notion in Korean society, and thereby demands a change of policies. The ratio of the migrants' population is not high in total composition. Nevertheless, the growth in number of migrants for marriage has brought an opportunity to rethink the idea of an ethnically homogeneous nation, regardless of its proportion. Also, the rapid influx of migrant workers into the 3D (difficult, dangerous, dirty) industries, as well as the mass migration of Choseonjok (ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality) after the formation of official ties between Korea and China in 1992, is gradually destroying the possibility of protecting the idea of Korea as a pure-blooded nation. As a way of adapting or responding to this change, the Korean government has implemented a variety of policies related to migrants under the name of "multicultural policies." For example, approximately 274.5 million dollars was allotted for the two-year budget from 2011 to 2012 as a preliminary trial. In addition, 53 projects were conducted by the central government and 481 by local governments in 2012 (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and Joint Associated Ministries 2012). Approximately 1.12 billion dollars was also used for foreigners during the four years from 2009 to 2012 (The Committee for the Immigration Policy 2012, 13).<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the efforts with these policies, the acceptance of multiculturalism in Korea is not as high as was expected, and a discourse of anti-multiculturalism has begun to arise. As an indicator of this phenomenon, 38.4% of Korean people responded that they did not want to be neighbors with migrants or foreign workers in the World Values Survey of 2005, and the response rate for the identical question increased to 44.2% in 2010. The ratio does not signify a severe deterioration of Koreans' perceptions, but it is plausible to judge that the multicultural policies implemented so far have not contributed to a change of Koreans' general perceptions. This can be seen as a disappointing result to the government, considering the multicultural policies which were planned and implemented in the same period.<sup>2</sup>

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1 The size of the multicultural family support policy is different from that of the policy for foreigners, as the latter includes not only the migrant integration policy (multicultural policy) but also the cost of inviting foreign human resources and managing visas for foreigners' stays, nationality affairs, and protection of human rights.

2 According to a survey of 2,500 people (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family), the index of Koreans' acceptance of multiculturalism was 51.17, meaning that it is neither positive nor negative (Korean Women's Development Institute 2012). There is no standard for comparison because the survey was conducted for the first time; however, the result showed that the Korean general public does not highly accept multiculturalism. It is more or less difficult to make a direct comparison because it was conducted for different purposes, but the Asiatic Research Institute of Korea University survey (1,200 sample) in 2008, "South Koreans' perception of migrant laborers and the multicultural society," included an item concerning cultural coexistence ("It is desirable to co-exist with diverse races, religions, and cultures of any countries"). The positive answer ratio was 55.4 percent, but the proportion of the affirmative answer to the same item of above was only 36.2 percent. This outcome revealed that Koreans' perception of cultural coexistence hasn't improved despite the implementation of multicultural policies. The result of the Asiatic Research Institute survey was cited secondhand from Yoon and Song (2011).

The results that have betrayed the governmental efforts became the motive to alter the tone of the policies. When the second basic plan for immigration policy was announced in 2012 (The Committee for the Immigration Policy 2012, 18-19), under the heading of the public view of “policy environment analysis,” the government noted that Korean citizens simultaneously sense a “desire to increase national economic profits as well as a concern about crimes committed by foreigners and racial or cultural conflicts,” and that the public “is expressing anti-multiculturalism” and demands “a balanced policy for foreigners.” In relation to this aspect, the government diagnosed that “the ideas of ‘opposition to the multicultural policy’ and ‘reverse discrimination against the citizens’ are arising from the low-income class who have lost jobs due to competition at work, and from those affected badly by international marriage, and the government’s policy favoring multicultural families is accelerating this phenomenon.” Moreover, the document pointed out the public demand for reinforcing controls against foreigners and the “increasing sense of crisis of Korean identity.” In this regard, the second trial of immigration policy attempted to “maintain the balance in itself by reflecting the citizens’ various and contrastive demands as much as their perceptions highlighting order and safety, as well as the migrants’ responsibility and contribution to the society,” which is different from the first trial. The terms *contrastive demands*, *balance*, *order and safety*, and *responsibility and contribution* are seen as signs showing the immigrant policy in Korea is retreating.

Similar to this phenomenon, the basic plan for multicultural families also reveals a sign of backlash in multicultural policy. The plan evaluated that the government’s multicultural policy helped to “amplify the societal interest in multicultural families, but also brought about negative perceptions toward them based on the issues of reverse discrimination and xenophobia.” It also pointed out the necessity of the effort to change public perception (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and Joint Associated Ministries 2012, 12). Additionally, the basic plan concluded that more projects should be conducted to change the public’s perception, but it seems that the public perception was already considered in the process of planning.

The backlash against multicultural policy actually appears to be the result of the incorporation of The Multicultural Family Support Center and Healthy Family Support Center. The government integrated these institutions with an intention to implement policy within a larger frame of the general family rather than classifying the multicultural family as separate. It is not wrong to amalgamate the multicultural policy which has been dealt with as a special domain into the universal one. However, it could cause some problems to try to excessively enforce the new policy, ignoring the objection to the policy that had already carved out its own niche. Also, considering that the number of immigrants will continue to increase in the long term, it is desirable to change The Supporting Center of Multicultural Family into a support center for migrants pursuing societal integration and to expand the subjects of multicultural policy. Nevertheless, the government is planning to incorporate these two institutions nationwide after the testing operation in 2014.

Based on this evaluation, this annexation is interpreted as an aspect of backlash against multicultural policy.

Further, the retreat of the academic fashion for multiculturalism seems to be occurring as the result of the backlash against multicultural policy. It is agreed among researchers that the number of studies regarding multiculturalism has gradually decreased in recent years. Also, another reason for the decline in the academic trend results from the difficulty of investigating married female migrants. A number of surveys have been conducted with these married female migrants during the last ten years, who were very often invited to governmental events. Due to this situation, they felt extremely reluctant to cooperate with the survey. In the impending era of a multicultural society, more attention should be paid to multiculturalism because the decline in academic trends can accelerate the backlash against multicultural policy.

Given the situations regarding the issues of multiculturalism, what are the reasons for the anti-multiculturalism that has brought about the retreat or the backlash against multicultural policy? This article aims to explore the answers to this question from the two angles: the limitation of the government's policy and negative reports through the mass media. Before the main discussion, multicultural policy in Korea will be outlined briefly in the following section.

## 2 Overview of Multicultural Policy in Korea<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 *The Development and the Main Content of Multicultural Policy in Korea*

Korea made use of funds from remittances for the development of the economy by exporting human labor before 1987. The major examples are miners and nurses dispatched in the 1960s as the result of the agreement with West Germany and some laborers sent to industrial sites in the Middle East. In addition to this, the overall outflow of the population was a lot larger than the influx as people moved to developed countries such as America, influenced by the establishment of Emigration Act in 1962. The influx of population started to be higher than the outflow as an industrial trainee system was introduced in 1987. In addition, the number of immigrants has been increasing with the growing percentage of permanent migration rather than circular labor migration since the mid-1990s, resulting from "the campaign for the rural bachelors' marriage." Nowadays, 1.8 million foreigners stay in Korea for either a short or a long term, and approximately 300,000 marriage migrants live in Korea. It is expected that the number of resident for-

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3 Although this part is very general, it is described in order to help the readers better understand and to provide a global perspective to compare the multicultural policy.

eigners will keep growing as medium and small-sized companies have difficulty finding labor and thus the demand for foreign workers will continue to grow as well.

The demand for new policies arose as marriage immigrants have rapidly increased since the mid-1990s. The Korean government has attempted to enforce immigration policy, albeit at a rudimentary level, in order to meet this demand for the policy since the mid-2000s. Further, with the continuous efforts for the policy, the government announced “The Fundamental Direction of the Foreigners’ Policy and the Plan for Implementation” in May, 2006. Additionally, they enacted a “Framework Act on Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea” in 2007 and a “Multicultural Families Support Act” in 2008 with a focus on support for international families. Based on the Framework Act on Treatment for Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea, the government established and enforced “The First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy” in 2008 and currently the second plan (2013-2017) is being implemented. According to the Multicultural Families Support Act, “The First Basic Plan for Multicultural Families” was enacted in 2010 and the second plan (2013-2017) was also laid down in 2012. Furthermore, each local government is in charge of supporting the migrants residing in their districts by issuing ordinances regarding foreigners as well as multicultural families.

As of January, 2014, the number of foreigners residing in Korea is 1,569,470 (3.1% of the total population), and 240,023 are marriage migrants. Among them, 90,439 (4,261 males, 86,178 females) were naturalized through marriage, and the total number of children based on migration is 204,204. The highest number of registered foreigners is 608,089 ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality (Choseonjok), followed by Chinese (235,566), Vietnamese (185,470), Americans (71,053), Filipinos (64,785), and Japanese (42,731). As for Japanese, the number of marriage migrants is 12,485 (including 249 naturalized citizens), and the number of their children is 21,388 (Ministry of Interior 2014). As of May, 2015, the total number of foreigners who reside in Korea including those staying for a short term is 1,845,976, which has become three times larger than that of 2005 (750,000) in only ten years (Ministry of Justice 2015).<sup>4</sup> The number of international marriages reached a peak with 42,356 cases in 2005 and gradually decreased to 25,963 cases in 2013, which made up 8% of the total number of marriages in Korea.<sup>5</sup> Corresponding to the quick change in population composition, the Korean government is enforcing immigration policies under the name of “policy for foreigners.” The following table outlines the policies associated with migrants, from among the policies for foreigners enacted from 2013 to 2017.

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4 There is some difference in the statistics between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice as they referred to different sources. The Ministry of Interior utilized data from Statistics Korea, and the Ministry of Justice employed statistics of entrance into and departure from Korea.

5 Statistics Korea, accessed June 23, 2015, [http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx\\_cd=2430](http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2430).

**Table 1** Present State of Multicultural Policies of Ministries

Governmental agencies	Field	Major specific projects	
Ministry of Gender Equality and Family	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing tailored support for marriage migrants</li> <li>• Providing information about education for the children</li> <li>• Reinforcing the control of marriage brokerage companies</li> <li>• Expanding participation in tailored jobs for marriage migrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating 'Rainbow School' for teenagers from migrant families</li> <li>• Expanding the participation of the teenagers from migrant families (Teenagers' special meeting)</li> <li>• Expanding counseling and welfare in a local society for teenagers from migrant families</li> </ul>
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the human rights of female migrants</li> <li>• Protecting the human rights of children from migrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding educational programs for cultural diversity</li> </ul>
Ministry of Education	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing Korean language education for children from migrant families</li> <li>• Strengthening access to the public education for children from migrant families (disposition of coordinator)</li> <li>• Strengthening career education for teenagers from migrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activating career education and counseling for teenagers from migrant families</li> <li>• Supporting tailored education for students from multicultural families</li> <li>• Providing bilingual educational environment (Providing bilingual teachers)</li> </ul>
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the human rights of children from migrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the capacity of students' understanding of cultural diversity in elementary/secondary schools and universities (Multicultural education for teachers and students of teachers college)</li> </ul>
Ministry of Justice	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcing evaluation of the basic groundings of the applicants for naturalization</li> <li>• Developing Korea Immigration and Naturalization Applicants Test</li> <li>• Providing civil affairs related with nationality and information service</li> <li>• Developing and operating the programs for social integration, depending on the types of migration</li> <li>• Expanding operating organizations for social integration programs and online education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activating the social integration information network</li> <li>• Reinforcing the criteria for international marriage visa</li> <li>• Reinforcing the control of foreigners' stay in prevention of fake marriage</li> <li>• Reinforcing the control of marriage brokerage companies</li> <li>• Inviting the family of marriage migrants and permitting their working</li> <li>• Standardizing the programs for professionals for social integration</li> <li>• Planning for the enactment of social integration fund (tentative name) for the future</li> <li>• Composing small groups based on nationality for bidirectional social integration</li> </ul>
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enacting Discrimination Prevention Act (tentative name)</li> <li>• Describing the rights and responsibilities of foreigners according to their visa status</li> <li>• Extending the visa of the foreigners whose rights were violated</li> <li>• Protecting the human rights of female migrants</li> <li>• Protecting the human rights of foreign workers</li> <li>• Protecting the human rights of children from migrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the human rights of illegal foreigners in the process of shelter</li> <li>• Providing humane medical service to foreigners</li> <li>• Expanding educational programs for cultural diversity</li> <li>• Constructing the cooperation system among ministries for enhancement of multicultural perception</li> <li>• Implementing 'World People's Day' through local governments</li> <li>• Strengthening the electronic civil affair service for foreigners</li> <li>• Monitoring mass media and internet</li> </ul>
	Realization of a safe society for citizens and foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematization of the information of foreigners through the realization of an integrated migration information system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcing the local authorities' control of the actual conditions (statistics) of foreigners residing in their district</li> <li>• Investigating actual conditions of foreigners in Korea</li> </ul>

Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardizing the programs for professionals for social integration (Cultivating Korean teachers and materials development)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operating 'Rainbow School' for the teenagers from migrant families</li> </ul>
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting the human rights of children from migrant families</li> <li>Expanding educational programs for cultural diversity</li> <li>Strengthening the capacity of students' understanding of cultural diversity in elementary/secondary schools and universities</li> <li>Constructing the cooperation system among ministries for enhancement of multicultural perception</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing culture and art network between migrants and citizens (Rainbow Bridge Project)</li> <li>Establishing laws and institutions for enhancing cultural diversity</li> <li>Supporting the development and utilization of contents for cultural diversity</li> <li>Developing broadcasting educational programs for cultural diversity</li> <li>Monitoring mass media and internet</li> </ul>
Ministry of Health	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hiring marriage migrants as teachers for child welfare</li> </ul>	
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting the human rights of female migrants</li> <li>Protecting the human rights of children from migrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing humane medical service to foreigners</li> </ul>
Ministry of Interior	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding the opportunities of participation in the policy-making process (Composing foreign resident committee and constructing advisory council)</li> <li>Expertise elevating of divisions of local foreigners' affairs</li> </ul>	
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing 'World People's Day' through local governments</li> <li>Improving the living environment of dense residential areas for foreigners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding foreign language service for civil affairs</li> </ul>
	Realization of a safe society for citizens and foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforcing the local authorities' control of the actual conditions (statistics) of foreigners residing in their district</li> </ul>	
Ministry of Employment and Labor	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding marriage migrants' participation in tailored jobs</li> <li>Providing financial support for participants in career education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing financial support to the social companies contributing to the creation of jobs</li> <li>Activating career education for teenagers from migrant families (Dasom schools)</li> </ul>
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting the human rights of foreign workers</li> </ul>	
Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Social integration respecting Korean common values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing rural marriage migrants with agricultural education</li> <li>Operating the program of rural settlement support for multicultural families</li> </ul>	
	Prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding educational programs for cultural diversity</li> </ul>	

Source: The Second Basic Plan for Immigration policy (2013-2017); FY 2014 Action Plan of Ministries

\* Only the policies associated with the multicultural policy in the Second Basic Plan for Immigration policy are described here.

Reflecting criticism of overlapping multicultural policy, policies related to migrants shown in the Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy are much more properly arranged in comparison to the first plan. The divisions which enforce overlapping policies are clearly identified. For instance, language education for gifted children operated by the

Ministry of Female Equality and Family is integrated into bilingual education implemented by the Ministry of Education. Another remarkable part is that the names of the projects were changed. For example, “high-quality social integration” is modified to “social integration respecting Korean common values,” “protection of the human rights of foreigners” to “prevention of discrimination and respect for cultural diversity,” and “orderly migration administration” to “realization of a safe society for citizens and foreigners.” Overall, these modifications display the change of their focus from migrants to Korean citizens and the state. This is also another facet of backlash against multicultural policy in Korea.

## *2.2 Characteristics of Multicultural Policy in Korea*

The characteristics of multicultural policy in Korea can be examined in terms of two parts: contents and practices. As for contents, multicultural policy in Korea has a great deal of similarities with assimilation policy. Although there are also some policies which cannot be easily categorized to assimilation policy, they are oriented toward the adaptation and settlement of marriage migrants and focused on integration into Korean society. Multicultural policy in Korea, which can be seen as a project of “making them into Korean citizens,” reveals some aspects which are opposed to multiculturalism and the goals of multicultural policy. Despite the fact that the definition of multiculturalism and multicultural policy vary among different countries, all of them display the common agreement to repeatedly modify existing systems and related practices in order to satisfy the goals of multicultural policy by respecting groups of cultural minorities, preserving their culture, and recognizing their expression in public areas. However, the consideration of basic agreements regarding multiculturalism is omitted in multicultural policy in Korea. There are two reasons related to this situation. First, the subjects of the multicultural policy in Korea are limited to marriage migrants, particularly married female migrants, among the total migrants. They need to assimilate to Korean society to a degree, and this aspect is underscored. Consequently, multicultural policy becomes unavoidably analogous to assimilation policy. Second, the government did not have enough time to philosophically reflect on multiculturalism as they needed to satisfy the demand for the new policy due to the rapid increase of migrants.

In terms of the aspect of practices, first, multicultural policy in Korea is more or less negligent in issues of agency. According to multiculturalism theory, cultural minorities are identified as the agents, who are given “the power and authority” to independently protect their cultures. The Korean government shows a considerably limited perspective related to this issue. The agency of groups of cultural minorities means that they are endowed with the right of representation for their organizations and activities. Further, it is necessary to support their representation in the political sphere. Related to this, the Saenuri Party positioned a female migrant from the Philippines (Lee Jasmin) in the running



for proportional representation in 2012 and helped her to be elected. Proportional representation is usually employed to represent social minorities such as representatives of professional associations, females, and the physically disabled; Lee Jasmin was asked to play the role of representing multicultural families who are considered as social minorities. Previously, the Saenuri Party also helped a Mongolian married female migrant to be elected as a proportional representative of Gyeonggi Province. Some local authorities hire marriage migrants these days as public servants and leave the related work to them. As noted above, the Korean government provides them with opportunities to let the migrants represent themselves and to participate in the policy-making process within a narrow frame. However, this policy is still not a step to supply ‘power’ to them. Rather, it is estimated that it is merely a token display of the policy made for social minorities or females. It is regarded in this way as marriage migrants have regularly been assigned as either the targets or objects of the policy, and have seldom been called the agents of the policy by the central or local governments. This is also linked with the fact that there rarely has been policy governance associated with migrants.

Second, multicultural policy in Korea is characterized by being uniformly state-run policy. Although policies are normally enacted and enforced by the government, multicultural policy in Korea specifically reveals the absence of social agreement as well as aspects of normativity. It has been declared and enacted unilaterally, excluding the process of reaching social agreement. In this process, civil society organizations that have tried to protect the human rights of migrants and support their welfare and settlement were alienated in the policy process. It is not plausible for a policy made without the active intervention and participation of civil society organizations to reach social agreement. In addition, because the government has led the policy-making process unilaterally, this has become a norm. In order to secure the validity of the policy, it cannot help turning to normativity when it is not enacted through the process of social discussion and agreement. A policy enacted on the basis of norms and morality can’t be criticized easily, and this is why the multicultural policy in Korea has been implemented without having faced severe opposition. However, it also can’t be denied that it offered the cause for the opponents of the multicultural policy to express their opinions gradually.

### **3 The Phenomenon and Logic of Anti-multiculturalism in Korea**

There was an incident where the internet was filled with malignant posts regarding a child from a migrant family who appeared in a globally popular music video in 2012 and became famous as ‘Little Psy.’ As soon as the information that his mother was Vietnamese was released, the website of his company was paralyzed due to numerous vicious posts (*The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, May 2, 2013; *The Dong-A Ilbo*, June 19, 2014). This incident was perceived to be an extremely serious social matter in that the object of the

racist posts was a child and they criticized the child because of his being from a multicultural family, which has been the main subject of the multicultural policy that the government has enforced.

Anti-multiculturalism in Korea can be examined mainly from two perspectives.<sup>6</sup> One is provided by the left or progressive camp's indifference. The other is supplied by xenophobia linked with sentiments of anti-multiculturalism spreading on internet websites, SNS, and right-wing movement camps. As noted above, it is a conservative party that actually makes use of multiculturalism as a political issue. Regardless of their inner logic, it is the conservative party that introduced female marriage migrants to the political sphere and endured the controversies about it. This phenomenon is ironic in that the political party that declared the change to multicultural society as the ruling party in 2006 is now the opposition party (The Minjoo Party of Korea). In a different context, the left-wing party or camps consistently show indifference to multiculturalism. It is not easy to discover the reason for their indifference because of the lack of data on their views regarding multiculturalism. However, given that Korean academia is significantly affected by the West for the most part, it is estimated that they were influenced by the criticism of multiculturalism by the Western left. According to such criticism, multiculturalism or cultural recognition is employed as an ideology for making the expansion of capital based on the globalization of neo-liberalism, and functions to conceal problems regarding inequality and class.<sup>7</sup> Further, it seems that the left, which has valued solidarity with the working class, could not actively defend the rights of migrant workers and migrants, some of whom are hired as alternatives in the labor market. Indeed, cultural groups distinguished by ethnicity have not expressed their voices in Korea and ethnic conflict has not been a major issue to bring about social cleavage. Also, the issue regarding irregular workers in Korea and social conflicts in terms of the welfare state are so serious that the major orientation that multiculturalism suggests is limited to a social agenda in this situation. Despite this fact, the silence of the left concerning multiculturalism still seems awkward. It appears that they have some reasons why they have not shown either consent or opposition to the project that the government has pursued for ten years.<sup>8</sup>

A second way that anti-multiculturalism is expressed is in internet spaces. Anti-cultural opinions are often strongly expressed on internet websites or through SNS. Although the former are generally well-organized, the latter involves a large number of

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6 This article only proposes to display the logic of anti-multiculturalism, so the validity of its logic will not be discussed here. The analysis of the logic of anti-multiculturalism is discussed in Lee (2010) and Kim H. (2013).

7 If my assumption is correct, the logic of the left wing has some similarity with the extreme right wing which expresses anti-multiculturalism because of encroachment on domestic job opportunities. It is an accidental encounter between the left and the right. However, it should be acknowledged that the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions expresses support more or less for the protection of the rights of migrant workers.

8 The government's moral approach which will be described below shows a degree of usefulness. In another aspects, Barry's argument (2001, 6) that "those who do not take this position (multiculturalism) tend not to write about it at all but work instead on other questions that they regard as more worthwhile" has some valid parts.

anonymous internet users that sporadically assert anti-multicultural ideas. The logic of anti-multiculturalism can be categorized in several ways. The first logic comes from a fear of damaging national identity or the character of a nation that resides in a strong feeling of nationalism. The second logic is the encroachment on domestic employment opportunities and reverse discrimination. Thirdly, there is the simple hatred of foreigners and sentiments of racial discrimination.

The first of these logics is related to multicultural policies aimed at marriage migrants, particularly women. Though the views of nationalism regard marriage migrants as others, they are reserved to acquire Korean nationality through taking a Korean citizen in marriage and will also become the parents of children who will automatically become Korean by birth as a result of *Jus Sanguinis*. From the perspective of anti-multiculturalism, this is a threat to the nationalistic concept of a one-blood nation and the belief that mixed-blood children desecrate ethnic authenticity. Children of these marriages are viewed as interlopers who threaten the purity of the one-blood nation. Although migrants have not been described so far as beings who disturb the stable social order or shared democratic values, which can be seen in Western societies, at least they are described as strangers who can weaken the national identity which is based on an ideal type of nation-state. Nevertheless, it was not surely related to a notion of blood, the assertion that, “a state with one ethnicity is much better in unifying the society than a multi-ethnic state” can be included with the first logic because it relies on the mythology of ‘one state with one ethnicity’ consequentially (Kim Y. 2013: 151-152). These logics have in common that they depend on the nation in seeking ‘Korean-ness’, that is, a “commonality that members of Korean society need to have” (Modood 2008: 85).<sup>9</sup>

The second logic is based on the argument that migrants usurp jobs from Koreans and make these social groups vulnerable and unstable. That foreign laborers are competitive in the workplace for lower wages, particularly in unskilled labor, lends credence to this viewpoint. In addition, the presence of foreign workers in the so-called 3D jobs perpetuates the structure of low salaries in those industries. The second logic is the other side of the same coin, in that the hiring of foreign laborers should be put aside because it is a tool of capitalism and the unyielding pursuit of profit. As mentioned above, left and right wing political groups overlap at this point.

The third rationalization of anti-multiculturalism is based on xenophobia or racism that, though hard to define as logic, is a result of strong emotions that its supporters are able to adhere to out of passion. One anti-multiculturalist asserted in an interview that it is a “justified right that supports discrimination of foreigners over the citizens in an independent nation” (Kang 2012, 20).<sup>10</sup> This is a common defense of racism. Xenophobia and

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<sup>9</sup> It was borrowed from Modood who addressed Britishness.

<sup>10</sup> Some people who support anti-multiculturalism are concerned about being recognized as racists, so they are cautious about using terms related to racism and other such arguments. The attitude like this shows that anti-multiculturalism camps advance to the stage of forming a logic beyond simple antipathy or sense.

racism promote stereotypes of migrants, such as the idea that foreigners are a threat to the national security of the country or its public health. Despite committing fewer crimes than citizens, foreigners are seen as a greater danger of committing crime and this view leads to even greater fear and prejudice.

The nature of this xenophobia is rarely a result of facts and rests mostly on opinion and anecdotal evidence.<sup>11</sup> Thus, defenders of anti-multiculturalism exaggerate certain facts in order to perpetuate their ideas. One example was of a foreign-born lawmaker who was accused of signing a bill granting governmental services (education, child care, health care) to undocumented children in late 2014. Only later was it acknowledged that she had nothing to do with the bill, which had been implemented under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, this did not stop internet rumors about the lawmaker and personal attacks on her character.<sup>12</sup> This is not independent of the fact that a marriage migrant, who is typically considered weak, has taken charge as a law-maker who wields considerable power. This is perceived as a betrayal against familiar perceptions, according to which migrant women are vulnerable members of society and are in need of protection.

As already mentioned, the genesis of xenophobia in Korea is not a result of informed opinion, yet this anti-foreigner sentiment now influences Korean society at certain levels. This has the effect of moving Korea's multicultural policies backward. It also begs the question, where does this anti-multiculturalism come from?

## 4 Causes of Anti-multiculturalism Phenomena

Although fear that diversity will threaten the way of life of the mainstream was at the root of the backward-moving multicultural policies in Western democracies, Korea's policy retreat is different. Korean multicultural policies are based on assimilation and are primarily aimed at marriage migrants. Therefore, there is less fear of outside forces invading the mainstream lifestyle. In addition, the criticism from the center-left – they who are represented by social democrats are former supporters of multiculturalism – or left-wing groups that multicultural policy has failed to include minorities in social, economic, and political spheres is the cause of backlash against multiculturalism in the West (Kymlicka 2010, 98; Vertovec 2010, 83). However, in Korea, the left-leaning politicians pay little attention to multiculturalism, thus they cannot be held responsible for its backward trend.<sup>13</sup>

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11 I refer to an article that is written by Kim, Y (2013) about claiming disagreements with the government's multicultural policies, but because his criticism on multicultural policies did not stand on the universal values which should be pursued, it has limitations in offering meaningful debate.

12 Actually, she led the proposal of 'Basic Act for Rights of Migrant Children' in December, 2014. There was also fierce criticism from the right wing at that time, claiming the act as "a supportive act for illegal migrants."

13 The political party that has produced lawmakers in the national assembly and proportional representatives in the metropolitan assembly is the conservative or near far-right Saenuri Party (formerly Grand National Party), which supports this point.

Though there are significant differences between multicultural policies in Korea and the West, there are some important similarities. Both emphasize the importance of social integration and impose duties on these social minorities. Where, then, are we able to find the cause of anti-multiculturalism in Korea?

#### 4.1 *The Excess of Discourse and Policy Fatigue*

In the mid-2000s, the Korean government wanted to ensure policy legitimacy through the presentation of migrants as a vulnerable social class in the process of implementing multicultural policy. As with all governmental policies which require a large budget, the support of the populace is paramount in stable policy implementation and success. It makes sense as a means of securing policy legitimacy that the Korean government represented the multicultural families as underprivileged objects who should be supported by related policy. In reality, there are many marginalized multicultural families.<sup>14</sup> However, by representing them as objects of dispensation of policy, the government failed to promote ‘recognition’ of these families as important members of society.

Though policies that help the poor and vulnerable may garner stable and unshakable support temporarily from the public, this support will not last forever. Even those who would oppose such aid would be unlikely to voice their concerns in fear of public reprisal. It is difficult to oppose the imperative that ‘we should help the less fortunate.’ However, while the government has insufficient funds for other necessary programs, this kind of an approach tends to boost public skepticism, expressed in sentiments such as “how long do we help,” or “where can we stop helping.” It is not highly unfair to feel fatigue under a policy that mobilizes support through representations of others as objects that need help and cannot be self-reliant. In addition, the paternalistic and dispensational approach brings about a collateral effect that makes them be perceived as burdens of public service independent of the intent of government. There may not be a lot of continued mainstream support for a policy that targets groups who make little contribution to the whole society and rely entirely on the welfare system.<sup>15</sup>

Even the beneficiaries of the policy, marriage migrants and their children, seem to be unwilling to be labeled “multicultural families” because of the negative representation. This is the factor threatening the sustainability of the policy. Although that is a different

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14 According to a survey of multicultural families in 2012, the number of households with less than \$1,706 income in US dollars consists of 41.9%, which is more than twice as much (17.7%) as the rest of the country (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2013). For reference, the average monthly income of households was \$3,853 in the first quarter of 2015. 73% of households earn less than \$2,560, which are similar level as the second bracket in five brackets of distributional share among the multicultural families (Statistics Korea 2015).

15 In the same context, Kymlicka (2010, 108) points out that if “immigrant groups are seen as predominantly illegal, as potential carriers of illiberal practices or movements or as net burdens on the welfare state,” the support for multicultural policy will wane.

reaction from the mainstream's feeling of fatigue, the government needs to keep in mind that target groups are also tired of the policy. Of course, they do not oppose multicultural policy itself.<sup>16</sup> However, policy fatigue of the mainstream has led to a social stigma effect for multicultural families, causing a side effect that they are unwilling to be called policy target groups.

One of the main reasons for fatigue is the expansion of doubts about multicultural policies. There are two reasons. First, there is a dissonance between policy justification and policy reality. Korea still does not allow for labor immigration, and adopts circular migrant labor in the same way that Japan does. At present, the only collectively allowed immigrants are marriage migrants, and they are what are recognized as multicultural families who are the targets of multicultural policies. They scatter all over the country by nature and cannot easily compose their own communities. This is almost impossible and composition of communities based on common homelands or cultures is still at a rudimentary level in Korea.<sup>17</sup> The multicultural policies targeting multicultural families were introduced into this kind of situation, so there was an unavoidable incongruence between policy reality and policy justification. That is, the government's so-called multicultural policies are really just assimilation policies, which leads to a great deal of confusion. Immigrants who migrated to Korea to construct a family are required to adapt and assimilate to Korean culture significantly. The mismatch of reality and policy justification causes fatigue from both sides of supporters and opponents of multiculturalism.

A second problem was the government's excessive management of multicultural policies that created hostility from its opponents and exhausted its supporters (Han 2012). Almost all ministries including local governments competitively implemented policies related to multiculturalism, and the budget of programs was increased rapidly. Consequently, the swell of the disbursement of funds to civic groups and academics caused over-production of discourse that is different from reality. The excess of discourse went side by side with philosophical poverty.<sup>18</sup> While omitting the factors that must be considered when specific ideology is suggested, namely the philosophical basis of multiculturalism, justifying logic, the prospect of demographic change, etc., and the process of social consensus, the excess circulation of discourse lowered the reliability of policy and caused policy fatigue.

Lastly, the reason for fatigue from policy limitation is the trivialization of culture. In-

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16 Some female marriage migrants respond critically to their being routinely stereotyped. I have witnessed, for example, when an officer from the education office addressed the children of multicultural families, they generally had a delay in language acquisition; but the women strongly disagreed with the argument by giving opposite examples. Conversely, multicultural families which consist of migrants from an advanced country do not actively cooperate with multicultural policies.

17 Even though there are local-based migrant communities and communities based on the same nationality which are led by the government, they do not have a strong voice.

18 Lee (2011, 146) conceptualized the character of the debate on multiculturalism in Korea as "poverty of philosophy and the excess of discourse."

stead of focusing on substantive cultural issues and concerns based on recognition, the government's multicultural policy focused on mundane items like food and clothing, performance, etc., which are comparatively trivial. One cause of this phenomenon is due to the confinement of policy target groups mainly to marriage migrants and their families. Although it can't be said that the government does not strive for the promotion of cultural diversity as we can see above, it has remained at the level of exhibition of tangible cultural elements rather than the recognition of a collective culture. It is not a problem that the cultural elements of migrants are exhibited. The problem is that the trivial factors of culture are represented as the whole of the migrants' culture, with an absence of reflection about why the culture must be recognized. The general public may have a short-term interest in exotic attire and food, but such curiosity is difficult to maintain for a long time. If each country's culture is limited to materials for "exhibition" in this manner, it is only a matter of time before multiculturalism policy is trivialized. And if the routine exposing of culture is like this, it would be a relatively easy choice for the general public to withdraw support for the policy.

#### *4.2 The Change of Attitude in the Media*

The media has represented marriage migrant women as a "vulnerable social class that receives various social dispensations and a 'model case' that performed gender role and Korean identity" (Cho and Seo 2013, 103).<sup>19</sup> It is the result of the faithful imitation of government and the reflection of self-perception of media. The media has stereotypically represented marriage migrant women as the poor who were in need of support. The government relies on the media in its attempt to manufacture consent within the Korean public. As the government's coconspirator, the media promotes the idea that a multicultural society is ideal and that multicultural families are an object who need to be helped for a multicultural society. The government may recognize marriage migrants and their children as agents by showing support for bilingual teachers, social enterprises, acquisition of degrees, or global precocious education, but it is just publicized by the government for the result of policy support, which shows that the level of recognition is still quite low. This is not unlike an ethnic minority or vulnerable class that writes its own myth of success owing to dispensation in any multi-ethnic and multicultural countries.

The media's tone has seen a change recently. The rise of anti-multiculturalism has negatively affected multicultural policies as previously mentioned. If anti-multiculturalism was confined to the internet or an otherwise minor resistance, the government would not have changed the direction of policy. However, the government cannot help respond-

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<sup>19</sup> The article points out that since 2009, the media have addressed migrant wives and multicultural families as valuable and scarce global resources. Cho and Seo (2013) interpreted this phenomenon as reinforcement of neoliberalism but I believe that this change is related to the evolution of multicultural policies.

ing to anti-multiculturalism because more negative stories about multicultural families have begun to appear in mainstream media. These stories do not rely fully on distortion or fabrication but more or less factual details, which has caused a greater ripple effect in society. The problem is that even though most marriage migrants maintain ordinary lives like other citizens, the media selects only negative cases and reconstructs them maliciously.

Negative media reports about migrants accuse marriage migrant women as wrongdoers, domestic husbands as victims by extension, and denounce the migrants for their illegal stays and criminal acts. There are stories about fake marriages where the women aim only to obtain citizenship or employment through marriage. There are reports about wives abandoning elderly husbands and children. Previously, these women were shown in the media as care givers for their children and in-laws. However, acts forsaking the 'invented' social expectation easily become the target of condemnation, while their internal circumstances were neglected. This is an inevitable result of considering migrant wives as gendered care laborers and family members not as individuals.

As a result of this new type of media coverage, migrant wives are no longer seen as vulnerable members of society. Instead, the men who marry these women are seen as the victims. By showing cases of migrant women who have experienced violence and mistreatment from her husbands converted to the position of wrongdoer, this has increased the negative perception. Negative media coverage has affected the way people view these types of marriages and have led to anti-foreigner sentiment and a desire for national homogeneity. This desire for homogeneity does not necessarily mean racism, but it does increase anti-foreign feelings.

A further cause of anti-multiculturalism is the media's highlighting of crimes by migrants. Crimes committed by migrants are treated much more importantly than similar crimes committed by nationals. Exposure to media is also carried out repeatedly. Reports on migrant crimes often focus on the foreignness of the perpetrator. Despite the crime rate of migrants being at absolutely lower levels than that of the whole, and it being from the deviant behaviors of some migrants, reports about crimes by migrants were highlighted. As more such stories become sensationalized, the public's perception of migrants changes and a false generalization is imprinted of all migrants as potential criminals. It is contradictory in that the media maintains the tone of supporting multiculturalism while reporting negatively about migrants.

As we can see, the media plays a critical role in propagating anti-multiculturalism by reporting negative stories about migrants. This is exacerbated when internet users comment on these media stories, inflaming the issue.<sup>20</sup>

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20 An analysis of the social background of anti-multiculturalism among these groups is beyond the scope of this article. Park (2015) argues that these groups are considered as right-wing extremists with support from all around the world and suggests their opinions originate in the search for victims being led by 'imagined exploitation.' <http://journal.kiso.or.kr/?p=5950> (accessed August 25, 2015).



## 5 Conclusion: For “New Politics”

This article has explored the spread of anti-multiculturalism in Korea and its causes. Although the anti-multiculturalism movement drives backlash of Korean multicultural policies, it is related to the partial failure or false implementation of the policies. From that angle, the failure itself, the spread of anti-multiculturalism due to the very failure, and the rollback of other policies form a vicious circle. If the current multicultural policies follow the same pattern, future ones may be doomed to failure as well. The government has tried to justify the changes in policy toward emphasizing migrants’ responsibility and the safety of citizens as a result of anti-multiculturalism, but their reasoning is a paradox because the retreat of policy was caused by policy failure. Of course, the government does not deny that there are problems with its implementation of policy. However, its ascribing policy adjustment to anti-multiculturalism is nothing but avoiding responsibility because it is responsible for the national sentiment.

Meanwhile, anti-multiculturalism might be seen as the displeasure of some extreme groups, yet it should be acknowledged that there has been a fertile soil to present them before the public. It might not be the general perception, but the allergy to foreigners or migrants has been overflowing in Korea’s social base. Such flow reappears whenever some sensitive migration issue arises, especially when there are policy loopholes. In this respect, there is a direct link between anti-multiculturalism and the failure of governmental policies.

To date, anti-multiculturalism in Korea stays on the level of emotional criticism rather than reaching at positive critique that multiculturalism has not improved human rights, freedoms, or standard of life for migrants which it pursues. Thus, attacks on multiculturalism are primarily based on faulty logic. That is, “Korean anti-multiculturalism does not have a precise philosophical idea and does not yet have the power to resist the hegemonic discourse of multiculturalism” (Kim, H. 2013, 329).<sup>21</sup> Starting a true debate on how to solve certain social problems or contemporary challenges is possible when there is disagreement over the process of executing policy but for the same purpose. As anti-multiculturalists attack the superficial problems of multiculturalism, there is little chance for tangible improvements in the areas of human rights, expansion of freedoms, quality of life, and social equality.

If any productive solutions are to be reached, liberal politicians or left-wing parties in Korea will need to step forward. Migration is a “phenomenon that is observed in the life of every person” including in Korea (Han, 2012, 114) and has a close relationship with future prospects of the nation; liberals in Korea need to take a stand. If the potent political forces take a clear position about immigration policies, the debate on multiculturalism in

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21 However, Kim, H. points out that anti-multiculturalism in Korea is in the process of meta-narratives.

Korea can be led to a full-scale dispute regarding alternatives of the population fluctuations.

Conversely, anti-multiculturalism is not all bad. It can provoke genuine discussions on multiculturalism, its policies, and the relationship of Koreans with migrants that are often neglected. That is to say, the acceleration of debate for pros and cons about multiculturalism can provide a good foundation for the improvement and suitability of the policies in reality.<sup>22</sup> This article would like to refer to the possibility of ‘new politics,’ which can manage the addressed problems above.

Vertovec’s ‘post-multiculturalism’ is far from a reality in Korea.<sup>23</sup> However, it is clear that multiculturalism has entered a new phase in the nation. The future of multiculturalism is still difficult to predict, but public discussion and so-called ‘politics of multiculturalism’ or politics of immigration will affect future policy. Just recently, the Supreme Court of Korea allowed for the unionization of migrant labor.<sup>24</sup> This is a signal change that new politics can possibly emerge. “Politics refers to the public arguments and discussions among the related groups in the process of yielding the public policies. In the same vein, multicultural politics refers to the conflicts and the adjusting behaviors under the name of ‘multiculturalism’” (Lee 2010, 19). Multicultural politics does not exist yet, but with the spread of criticism of multiculturalism, it may arise in the not too distant future. This will hopefully result in a public discussion on “what kind of multiculturalism there should be” in Korea and the lack of social consensus would be solved to some extent during the process.

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22 Kang (2012) who first analyzed the discourse of anti-multiculturalism in Korea evaluates discourse of anti-multiculturalism positively like this. Modood (2008, 88) also points out that “many genuine criticisms of multiculturalism have to be taken seriously, but none of them are reasons for abandoning, rather than strengthening through modifying multiculturalism.”

23 Vertovec (2010, 83) suggests the policies as features of ‘post-multiculturalism’ that promote either the recognition of diversity or maintenance of national identity. Vertovec argues that the force of ‘new’ multiculturalism is from super diversity, tendencies of anti-multiculturalism, and transnationalism.

24 The Supreme Court of Korea ruled in June, 2015 that people who offer labor and earn income by working are regarded as laborers according to the ‘Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act.’ Although the laborers are unqualified foreigners, they are still within the boundary of the labor law and they can form a trade union and join it. En banc Decision 2007Du4995, decided June 25, 2015.

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