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# South Korea's Demographic Changes and their Political Impact

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# South Korea's Demographic Changes and their Political Impact

South Korean society is in the throes of demographic and socio-political change, which will challenge the adaptability and resilience of its young democracy. The growing influx of immigrants into the Republic of Korea (ROK) creates a unique opportunity for the South Korean society to deepen the meaning and practice of democracy through the social and political integration of these “New Koreans.” Although official recognition of these newcomers includes rights to citizenship under specific circumstances and substantial support for acculturation programs, discrimination by the larger society, economic insecurity, and sociocultural marginalization surround their daily lives. The ROK is in a transitional moment from what Anthony Smith describes as the “ethnic-genealogical” model of national identity to the “civic-territorial” model.<sup>1</sup>

This paper addresses the political implications of a South Korea that is increasingly constituted

by ethnically different individuals from multiple countries who speak different languages and practice unfamiliar customs. It emphasizes that South Korean democracy, born of relative homogeneity in the late 20th century, will have to accommodate growing heterogeneity in the 21st century. Accommodation includes political representation of the New Koreans in government, elected office, civil society organizations, in addition to educational access and re-education of the Korean public regarding national identity and interests. The paper also discusses how demographic heterogeneity can change foreign relations as newcomers mediate economic, diplomatic, and people-to-people ties with their countries and cultures of origin. Additionally, the increasing presence of different and mixed ethnicities invites examination of the long-held basis of peninsular unification, namely, “pure bloodline,” and the exploration of an alternative civic and democratic rationale for unification to match the demographic dynamism.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Wiley, 1991) and *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991). Ethno-symbolic aspects of nation-hood, including cultural and aesthetic expressions of collective life, are explored in Athena Leoussi and Steven Grosby, eds., *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

## Policy Implications

The presence of New Koreans means the rise of new political voices that demand attention and influence in Korean politics. The acculturation process necessitates an expansion of political space by the majority South Korean population so that the newcomers can exercise the rights and responsibilities of political participation and avoid the accumulation of grievances against the majority.

Deepening democracy in this context requires policy adaptation in the legal system (pertaining to immigration, family law, criminal jurisdiction and adjudication, legal redress for foreign nationals who are victims of violence, etc.), improved oversight and coordination among government ministries and between the central government and local governments, changes in political institutions (developing mechanisms for political representation of New Koreans, civil society responsiveness), and national education about demographic changes and democracy.

In a society whose denizens are of diverse national and cultural origins, foreign policy diversification is inevitable. Immigrants are and will be creating new economic, diplomatic, and people-to-people ties between the ROK and their respective native countries. How New Koreans might shape the foreign policy and security interests of the ROK is an important question.

New Koreans do not share with the majority of South Koreans the history and psychological legacy of the Korean War and over a half century-old commitment to the U.S.-ROK alliance. Will the alliance and the bilateral relationship with the United States be more or less of a priority in the

future? Given that Chinese citizens are the largest group of marriage migrants in South Korea, might they and their offspring facilitate friendlier ties with Chinese and China? What kinds of regional geopolitical and economic changes might emerge from the demographic changes inside the ROK?

Concerning unification, the growing number of officially recognized multicultural denizens prompts a renegotiation of the foundational basis and future goals of unification within the ROK from an emphasis on ethnonational unification to a unification based on pluralism and acceptance of sociopolitical heterogeneity. Inducing North Koreans to accept non-ethnic Koreans as integral members of a Korean polity will be a significant challenge.

Lastly, the U.S. and other stakeholders of democracy and pluralism should fashion policies toward the ROK that support political and cultural pluralism and advance the deepening of democracy.

## Overview of Migration

Since the 1990s, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has hosted tens of thousands of foreign nationals in any given year. As of March, 2015, the ROK government recorded 1,813,037 foreign-born persons residing in Korea, including students, white collar workers, migrant workers in low-end industries and service jobs, undocumented workers, and “foreign brides.”<sup>2</sup> In 2014, documented (legal) workers totaled 503,135 and together with an estimated 64,507 undocumented workers comprise laborers in primarily 3D industries (dirty, dangerous, difficult) and low-end service sectors.

Currently, more than three out of one hundred residents in Korea hail from foreign countries,

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<sup>2</sup> Republic of Korea, Ministry of Justice, Korea Immigration Service, *March 2015 Monthly Report on Immigration Service and Foreigner Policy* [출입국-외국인정책통계월보 2015년 3월호], (Seoul: Government of the Republic of Korea, 2015), 1.

a spectacular demographic change from 1990, when less than 50,000 foreigners, comprising 0.1 percent of the nation's population lived in Korea.<sup>3</sup> By 2020, they are expected to constitute about five percent of the total population and 10 percent by 2030, a level comparable to the proportion of immigrants and multi-ethnic populations in some European societies today.

The first significant wave of in-migration involved workers from poor countries, predominantly from Asia, who were invited by the ROK government through the Industrial Trainee System in the early 1990s. The second wave resulted from the ROK Employment Permit System (2004), which granted worker status to foreigners from fifteen Southeast and Central Asian countries with specific visa allotments for each country and type of job agreed upon in bilateral Memorandum of Agreements. The ROK government's EPS website states that the permits "[a]llow employers to hire foreign workers in the labor shortage industries such as agriculture & stockbreeding, fishery, construction, and manufacturing with less than 300 regular workers."<sup>4</sup> The EPS allows for a maximum three-year term of employment with the possibility of a one-time extension of two years (at the employer's request) and entitles the workers to protection under Korean labor laws and Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance.<sup>5</sup> The aim was to regularize foreign workers by lowering their inclination to leave their designated workplaces in search of greater mobility and pay (thereby increasing the pool of undocumented workers). This had been a serious problem for the Korean government and employers under the trainee system. As in other countries, the

undocumented ("illegal") worker population persists, as a result of overstaying tourist or student visas or as a consequence of quitting the designated place of employment without authorization.

The third wave involves mostly women who formally immigrate to Korea as wives and build families with the Korean men they marry. Korean men who are agricultural workers, part of the urban poor, or lower-middle class bachelors or divorcees have a hard time finding Korean women to marry and therefore engage match-making agencies or "brokers" to find a spouse. The men tend to be significantly older than the women, and the couples usually cannot communicate in a common language and have little or no understanding of each other's personalities or living conditions. China is the largest sending country, followed by Vietnam; women also come from the Philippines, Mongolia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and some Eastern European countries. Today, there are over 820,000 people belonging to a multicultural family in Korea, a figure which has more than doubled over the past eight years.<sup>6</sup>

Marriage migration has been facilitated by the central and local governments. It is one of the very few immigration categories that promises an expedited path toward permanent residency and naturalized citizenship. Although South Korea has restrictive immigration policies, this group is singled out because of their ability to fill a vital social and economic need: to offset the "bride shortage" among Korean nationals and to increase the Korean-born population. In February, 2014, about 300,000 foreign spouses (mostly female) of

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<sup>3</sup> Yoshihiro Makino, "South Korea struggles to welcome growing number of foreign workers," *Asahi Shimbun*, May 11, 2013, accessed April 25, 2014, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean\\_peninsula/AJ201305110007](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201305110007).

<sup>4</sup> "Overview: Introduction of Employment Permit System," Republic of Korea, Employment Permit System Website, accessed February 12, 2014, <https://www.eps.go.kr/ph/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "Rights/Duty: Legal Rights," Republic of Korea, Employment Permit System Website, accessed February 12, 2014, <https://www.eps.go.kr/ph/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Kim, "Multicultural families double over eight years," *JoongAng Ilbo*, October 14, 2015, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3010284>.

Koreans resided in the ROK, about half of whom held foreign passports and half had become naturalized ROK citizens.<sup>7</sup> In rural areas, about 40 percent of new marriages per year are between a Korean male and a foreign-born female.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the migrant workers, the female marriage migrants are expected to reside permanently in South Korea, rear children, take care of their parents-in-law, and assimilate into Korean society. The *Korea Times* summed up the changing demographic situation in a nutshell: “Given that one in 10 Koreans tie [sic] the knot with a foreigner and the number of children from such marriages has surpassed 20,000 per year since 2010, it has become practically impossible to define Korean society without taking them into account.”<sup>9</sup>

### Native Population Decline and Immigrant Family Growth

The in-migration of a significant group—“foreign brides” or “marriage migrants”—has been the single exception to the ROK’s restrictive immigration policy, and the government has facilitated marriage migration at the central and local levels. A combination of an acutely low birth rate among the native-born—the lowest among all OECD countries at 1.19—and the fastest-ageing popula-

tion in the OECD<sup>10</sup> has become a looming threat to economic productivity, social stability, and the size of the military.

The demographic crisis is well-understood by Korean leaders. A study commissioned by the National Assembly concluded that South Koreans could “face natural extinction by 2750 if the birth-rate were maintained at 1.19 children per woman—assuming no reunification with North Korea or significant inflow of migrants.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast to a precipitous decline in the native 9-24 age group, the number of multicultural adolescents increased by more than 21 percent from 2013 to 2014.<sup>12</sup> The total size of South Korea’s labor force is expected to peak in 2016-2017 and decline thereafter; economic growth would shrink to 2.5 percent in 2050, compared with 4.2 percent in 2011.<sup>13</sup> In December, 2014, the Korea Economic Research Institute issued a report concluding that continued and increased immigration is the only viable way to sustain an adequate labor force and economic growth (4.3 million in 2030; 11.8 million in 2050; 15.3 million in 2060).<sup>14</sup>

In the security sector, military officials are formulating future troop size based on the declining number of potential recruits and are planning reductions

<sup>7</sup> Jeyup S. Kwaak, “South Korea Birthrate Hits Lowest on Record,” *Wall Street Journal Asia*, August 26, 2014, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2014/08/26/south-korea-birthrate-hits-lowest-on-record/>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrei Lankov, “Foreign Wives stir Korean melting pot,” *Asia Times Online*, November 16, 2010, accessed April 28, 2015, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/LK16Dg01.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Tae-hoon Lee, “Korea Needs Shift in Multicultural Policy,” *The Korea Times*, November 26, 2012, accessed February 19, 2014, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/03/180\\_125554.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/03/180_125554.html).

<sup>10</sup> “S.Korea has fastest aging population among advanced economies,” *Yonhap News*, September 9, 2014, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/full/2014/09/09/34/1200000000AEN20140909001800320F.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Jeyup S. Kwaak, “South Korea Birthrate.”

<sup>12</sup> Jeong-mo Koo, “68,000 Multicultural Students...Projected to reach 100,000 in Three Years [다문화가정 학생 6만 8천명...3년내 10만명 돌파 전망],” *Yonhap News*, September 21, 2014, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/society/2014/09/20/0703000000AKR20140920042200004.HTML>.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Howe, Richard Jackson, and Keisuke Nakashima, *The Aging of Korea: Demographics and Retirement Policy in the Land of the Morning Calm* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), March 2007, accessed January 27, 2008, [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/070321\\_gai\\_agingkorea\\_eng.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/070321_gai_agingkorea_eng.pdf); “S. Korea’s average age to be highest in the world in 2045,” *Yonhap News*, June, 19, 2012, accessed September 30, 2013, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/06/19/95/0302000000AEN20120619001500320F.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Kwanwoo Jun, “South Korea May Need Up to 15 Million Immigrants, Study Says,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 2014, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2014/12/15/immigration-needed-to-bolster-workforce-study-says/>.

of soldiers from 552,000 to 387,000 by 2020.<sup>15</sup> In February, 2012, compulsory military service law was changed to increase the eligibility pool and reflect a growing heterogeneous population; language emphasizing ethnonationalism (“serving the nation and ethnicity”) was deleted and replaced with “serving the nation and its citizens.” The law formally recognized a multi-ethnic ROK military, requiring all male citizens, regardless of ethnic background, to perform the mandatory military service expected of all able-bodied Korean men. Prior to this revision, the law exempted men who visibly appear to have phenotype (physical) features that reflect a mixed-race background from performing the mandatory service.<sup>16</sup>

The need for in-migration of foreign women also reflects changes in Korean women’s priorities about marriage. Women from the countryside migrate to urban areas in search of jobs and upwardly mobile husbands. In urban areas, they eschew middle-age bachelors or divorced men seeking wives. In general, women are less interested in marriage than ever before: A recent government survey reported that only 45.6 percent of female respondents aged 9-24 said marriage was something they should do in life in contrast to 62.9 percent of males, and in a survey of 2,361 college students, 47 percent of women did not believe marriage is necessary.<sup>17</sup>

## Citizenship, Acculturation, Discrimination

The ROK government formulated what Deborah Milly calls “orchestrated governance”<sup>18</sup> through the Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea (2008). The top-down framework relies on central policy planning that local governments and NGOs can adopt and support based on the specific strengths of the assistance-providing body and the particular needs of immigrants in specific locales. The Multicultural Families Support Act (2008) focuses on marriage migrants and multicultural children and families through language classes, prenatal and child-rearing classes, educational support for children, employment of immigrant mothers as translators and interpreters at schools and counseling centers, and emergency centers and hotlines for victims of violence.<sup>19</sup> The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (Mo-GEF) oversees these initiatives.

Additionally, the government has tightened financial eligibility requirements for Korean males seeking foreign wives in order to reduce the large portion of multicultural families that are living in poverty. Language requirements for prospective wives also have increased in order to encourage better communication between the newcomers and their spouses and local communities.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Hervey Stephen, “Policy Concerns of Low Fertility for Military Planning in South Korea,” *Analysis from the East-West Center* 102 (2011): 3.

<sup>16</sup> Min-ah Lim, “An era of Multicultural National Defense: 1000 Multicultural Military Personnel [국방다문화시대: 다문화장병 1천명시대]” *Yonhap News*, November 20, 2014, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2014/11/20/0200000000AKR20141120154800372.HTML>.

<sup>17</sup> Mihye Go, “Threat of population decline: women marrying at 30...decline of birth rate [인구절벽위기: 여성들 30살은돼야결혼... 출산율낮아져],” *Seoul Economic Daily*, February 6, 2015, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://economy.hankooki.com/lpage/economy/201502/e2015020610182469890.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Deborah J. Milly, *New Policies for New Residents: Immigrants, Advocacy, and Governance in Japan and Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 141-143; The Act is available at <http://www.moleg.go.kr/lawinfo/engLawInfo?pstSeq=47161&searchCondition=UsrDef2&searchKeyword=foreign>.

<sup>19</sup> The Act is available at [http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=29049&lang=ENG](http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=29049&lang=ENG). Regarding 24-7 hotlines, see Philip Iglauer, “South Korea’s Foreign Bride Problem: The government tries to tackle the thorny issue of migrant brides and domestic violence,” *The Diplomat*, January 29, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/south-koreas-foreign-bride-problem>.

Authorities also have increased oversight of exploitative private agencies that recruit women for marriage migration. The government budget for multicultural family programs (which involves the Ministry of Education and other relevant agencies) ballooned from 200 million *won* (US \$195,000) in 2005 to 181 billion *won* (US \$170 million) in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

Citizenship requirements for marriage migrants were simplified and expedited since 2004.<sup>21</sup> While the simplified process normally requires the applicant to reside in Korea for more than three years and pass written exams on language & culture, the special rule for marriage immigrants requires only two years and generally exempts them from written culture exams. The assumption was that the immigrant spouse would gradually learn the Korean language and culture. Additionally, the normally required interview was eliminated with the understanding that interview materials used for the marriage process would be adequate. A report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Korea's naturalization requirements states that between the early 2000s and 2012, marriage immigrants composed about 70 percent of total naturalizations and at the writing of the report in 2013 composed 82.6 percent.<sup>22</sup>

Foreign nationals and new immigrants in Korea provide labor and replenish the national population

pool. The women also serve as unpaid care-givers for the growing number of elderly family members. However, their differences with native Koreans in terms of physical features, language, and customs are sources of social tensions and anxiety for the mainstream population. The discrimination that the women experience often trickles down to their children.

More than 200,000 “mixed race” or “mixed-ethnic” children are Korean citizens by birth and compose South Korea's “multicultural families” together with their parents. The Support for Multicultural Families Act, enacted in September 2008, defines “multicultural family” as consisting of a Korean national and immigrant spouse and their children. The birth rate among immigrant mothers is higher than that of native Korean women, and the number of school-age children from mixed ethnic families enrolled in schools grew more than seven-fold from 9,389 in 2006 (the first year the government began compiling official figures) to 67,806 in 2014.<sup>23</sup> In 2014, the proportion of South Korean youths to the country's overall population reached its lowest level ever at 19.5 percent.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, the number of multicultural adolescents increased by more than 21 percent from 2013.<sup>25</sup> The student population consisted of 48,297 (71.2% of total) in primary school; 12,525 (18.5%) in middle school; 6,984 (10.3%) in high school.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hyo-shik Chung, “Budget Increasing Annually for Multiculturalism... Reverse Discrimination Controversy against Single-Parent Families [해마다 뛰는 다문화 예산 ... 한부모가정 역차별 논란],” *JoongAng Ilbo*, February 10, 2014, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://news.joins.com/article/13846534>.

<sup>21</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Study on the Improvement of Naturalization System of the Republic of Korea: Focusing on the Naturalization System for Marriage Migrants IOM MRTC Research Report Series No. 04*, (Gyeonggi-do, Republic of Korea: IOM Migrant Research and Training Center, 2014), accessed April 28, 2015, [http://www.iom-mrtc.org/lib/download.php?file\\_name=IOM%20MRTC%20RR%202014-04.pdf&save\\_file=b\\_201501012210170.pdf](http://www.iom-mrtc.org/lib/download.php?file_name=IOM%20MRTC%20RR%202014-04.pdf&save_file=b_201501012210170.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> A further breakdown shows that the student population consisted of 48,297 (71.2% of total) in primary school; 12,525 (18.5%) in middle school; 6,984 (10.3%) in high school; Republic of Korea, Ministry of Education, *April 2014: Statistics on the Current Status of Multicultural Students* [다문화 학생 통계 현황 14.4월], (Seoul: Government of the Republic of Korea, October 15, 2014), accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.moe.go.kr/web/100068/ko/board/download.do?boardSeq=120777>.

<sup>24</sup> “[Editorial] Demographic Structure,” *Korea Herald*, July 14, 2014, accessed August 10, 2014, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140714000570>.

<sup>25</sup> Jeong-mo Koo, “68,000 Multicultural Students.”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



Children of part Chinese descent composed 34.4 percent; 19.5 percent of part Japanese descent; 16.5 percent of part Vietnamese descent; 14.3 percent, part Filipino, followed by Thai (2.2) and Mongolian (2).<sup>27</sup> An estimated third of all children born in 2020 (1.67 million) are expected to be of part Korean and part other Asian descent (“Kosian”), composing 3.3 percent of the total population.<sup>28</sup> Immigrants and Koreans of heterogeneous parentage will literally change the face of Korea for the long duration, but they also present the society with urgent policy tasks.

In late 2012, the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea reported that 42 percent of multiracial children surveyed in a recent poll had been “teased or discriminated against by their classmates for their inability to pronounce Korean words properly.”<sup>29</sup> A recent Seoul City survey “showed that four out of five foreign teenagers were not in school, largely because of discrimination and bullying.”<sup>30</sup> In 2008, government reports revealed that 15.4 percent of multicultural children aged 7 to 12 did not attend school (22 times the national average)<sup>31</sup> along with 39.7 percent of

junior high school age children and 70 percent of high school age children.<sup>32</sup> Social marginalization persists to the detriment of children’s schooling.

### **Korean Chinese (*joseonjok*)**

Chinese migrants, especially of Korean descent (*joseonjok*), have comprised the largest group of labor migrants. Geographic proximity, language familiarity, and in some cases, access to relatives in the ROK have made it easier for them to enter Korea and for Koreans to receive them as “distant kin” who share commonalities and are not fully foreign. Joseonjok occupy a higher rung on the hierarchy of foreign nationals than migrants of non-ethnic Korean descent and enjoy some preferential treatment, akin to Japan’s *nikkeijin* (“return-migrants”) from Brazil and Peru.<sup>33</sup>

In 2007, the ROK government created the “Visit and Employment Program” (H-2 visa) for ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship, which permits free entry into and departure from Korea for three years to work in specific economic sectors that require low-skill labor (construction, light

<sup>27</sup> “Number of Multicultural Kids in School Grows Explosively,” *Chosun Ilbo* (English), September 22, 2012, accessed March 3, 2014, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/09/22/2012092200339.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/09/22/2012092200339.html).

<sup>28</sup> Chul-jae Lee, Ae-rahn Han, Kang-hyun Chung, and Ho-jung Kim, “Potential of political empowerment of Kosians [코시안 정치세력화 가능성],” *JoongAng Ilbo*, April 4, 2006, accessed December 15, 2014, [http://article.joins.com/news/article/article.asp?total\\_id=2250434](http://article.joins.com/news/article/article.asp?total_id=2250434).

<sup>29</sup> “Multicultural Children Still Face Discrimination,” *Chosun Ilbo* (English), January 11, 2012, accessed August 3, 2014, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/01/11/2012011101030.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/01/11/2012011101030.html).

<sup>30</sup> Young-won Kim, “Korean society struggles to embrace multiculturalism,” *Jakarta Post*, June 19, 2012, accessed February 19, 2014, [www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/19/korean-society-struggles-embrace-multiculturalism.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/06/19/korean-society-struggles-embrace-multiculturalism.html).

<sup>31</sup> Martin Fackler, “Baby Boom of Mixed Children Tests South Korea,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2009, accessed May 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/world/asia/29babies.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>32</sup> Republic of Korea, National Assembly, *National Assembly Inspection Policy Report: 70 percent of Multicultural Students Not Attending High School* [다문화가정 자녀 70% 고등학교 안다녀], (Seoul: Government of the Republic of Korea, October 24, 2008), accessed February 23, 2015, [http://stat.mw.go.kr/stat\\_manager/modules/download.jsp?bbsSeq=15&nttSeq=11191&atchSeq=1244](http://stat.mw.go.kr/stat_manager/modules/download.jsp?bbsSeq=15&nttSeq=11191&atchSeq=1244).

<sup>33</sup> Takeyuki Tsuda, “The permanence of ‘temporary’ migration: The ‘structural embeddedness’ of Japanese-Brazilian migrant workers in Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 3 (1999): 687–722; Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Hiromi Mori, “Migrant Workers and Labor Market Segmentation in Japan,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 3, no. 4 (1994): 619–638; Michael Orlando Sharpe, “What Does Blood Membership Mean in Political Terms?: The Political Incorporation of Latin American Nikkeijin (Japanese Descendants) (LAN) in Japan 1990–2004,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2011): 113–142; Daniela de Carvalho, “Nikkei Communities in Japan,” in *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan’s New Immigrant and Overseas Communities*, eds. Roger Goodman et al. (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Angelo Akimitsu Ishi, “Between Privilege and Prejudice: Japanese –Brazilian Migrants in ‘the Land of Yen and the Ancestors,’” in *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender and Identity*, eds. David Blake Willis et al. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

manufacturing, and services).<sup>34</sup> In 2005, the Ministry of Justice established a program that applied only to joseonjok in order to legalize the status of those who were undocumented. The Voluntary Departure Program offered undocumented joseonjok workers to leave Korea voluntarily in return for legal visas (after a one-year hiatus abroad), which would permit them to reenter Korea and work for up to three years.<sup>35</sup> The joseonjok have received the most policy attention among migrant worker and immigrant groupings.<sup>36</sup>

However, many analysts point out that “co-nationality [sic., co-ethnicity] can be recognized but full equality denied.”<sup>37</sup> Workplace accidents are a form of danger to the hundreds of thousands of foreign workers in Korea. Undocumented workers have borne the lion’s share of them because they tend to work for bosses or businesses that emphasize cost-saving over worker safety and protection. Korean-Chinese are no exception. The *South China Morning Post* reported that “[c]onstruction industry insiders, meanwhile, estimated that their sector alone hires some 300,000 legal and illegal Korean-Chinese workers. South Korean employers, they argued, still hired ethnic Koreans without work permits because their illegal status would prevent them from protesting against harsh working environments and demanding

better treatment.”<sup>38</sup> In July, 2013, five out of nine deaths from industrial accidents in Seoul were of Chinese nationals of Korean ethnicity.<sup>39</sup>

## Ethnonationalism and New Koreans

The growth of international marriages and mixed families amounts to a social revolution in a society steeped in the belief that Koreans uniquely hail from thousands of years of “pure” ancestral bloodlines, common language, customs, and history.<sup>40</sup> Many scholars have demonstrated that Koreans on both sides of the 38th parallel have adopted constructed notions of ethnocentrism and ethno-nationalism as inherent or even constitutional parts of Korea’s and Koreans’ identities since the Japanese colonial era and the struggle to reclaim sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> Historian Andre Schmid traces the historiography further to turn-of-the-century intellectuals’ desire to “decenter” China as the Middle Kingdom and to frame national history as familial history rather than court-centered history.<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on bloodline and ancestry facilitates a familial orientation among people of Korean descent as belonging to the Korean “race” irrespective of actual kinship and citizenship. (Korean citizenship law is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* or citizenship by bloodline.)

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<sup>34</sup> Dong-Hoon Seol and John D. Skrentny, “Ethnic Return of Migration and Hierarchical Nationhood: Korean Chinese Foreign Workers in South Korea,” *Ethnicities* 9 (2009): 154.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>38</sup> Audrey Yoo, “Industrial accidents in South Korea raise questions on treatment of Korean-Chinese migrant workers,” *South China Morning Post*, August 1, 2013, accessed April 21, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/article/1293615/industrial-accidents-south-korea-raise-questions-treatment-chinese-korean-migrant>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion on marriage migration as a source of multicultural transformations in South Korea, see: Choong Soon Kim, *Voices of Foreign Brides: The Roots and Development of Multiculturalism in Korea*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); Yoonkyung Lee assesses the growing openness of Korean society to demographic and cultural heterogeneity as reflected in the media and popular culture. See “Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-Nationalism in Korea,” *Critical Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>41</sup> Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires: 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2013); Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism*, (M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Schmid, 190-191.

The Korean word for “state” is also infused with familism, as *gukga* translates literally into “state-family” and refers to the “collectivity of government, land, and people.”<sup>43</sup> Such identity construction allows North Koreans to be of the same national family even though a bloody war was fought and actual families have remained separated for over six decades. Two separate surveys conducted in 2014 by the Asan Institute and Seoul National University revealed that ethnicity still remains the primary reason for the necessity of reunification.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, many South Koreans today seem to be making genuine efforts to examine and overcome their biases when compared with neighboring societies of Taiwan and Japan, which also struggle with the need for marriage migrants amid the majority population’s resistance. Although Taiwan, like the ROK, has severely low birth rates, foreign mothers from two leading sending countries, China and Vietnam, do not bear more children than Taiwanese mothers. One explanation is that women from these countries are familiar with family planning.<sup>45</sup> But the fact that Taiwan’s public discourse derogates what is assumed to be a decline in “population quality” engendered by women who come from poorer countries in Southeast Asia may be a disincentive. In 2004, Taiwan’s Deputy Minister of Education publicly urged his ministry officials to discourage foreign brides from having many babies and encourage contraception for the sake

of population quality.<sup>46</sup> Sara Friedman emphasizes that Chinese women from the mainland who marry Taiwanese men exercise only “partial citizenship” because of their compromised political identity as originating from the People’s Republic of China.<sup>47</sup>

Although Japan confronts dire population problems similar to those of the ROK, thus far, it has gone out of its way to avoid and prevent permanent in-migration of foreigners. From 1992 to 2012, about 350,000 marriage migrants arrived in Japan, which is a tiny figure per capita compared to South Korea. The Japanese government does not pursue a policy of importing foreign brides or expending central government funds for acculturation and integration programs.<sup>48</sup>

Younger Koreans in particular are more civic-minded and less fixated on ethnonational markers of identity in comparison to their age group ten years ago and to the older generation today. They are more open-minded about the requirements of “Korean-ness.” A recent survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul revealed that only 55.4 percent of respondents in their 20s believe “having Korean bloodline” is an important component of Korean identity compared to 82.4 percent aged 60 and over. A remarkably high percentage (between 90.4 and 95.4) of all respondents believe “abiding by Korean political and legal

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<sup>43</sup> Kyung Moon Hwang, “Country or State? Reconceptualizing Kukka in the Korean Enlightenment Period, 1896-1910,” *Korean Studies* 24, no. 1 (2000): 13; Nan Kim, *Crossing the Divide: Memory, Reconciliation, and Reunions in South Korea* (New York: Lexington Books, forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> Jiyeon Kim, Karl Friedhoff, Chungko Kang, Euicheol Lee, *2014 Asan Public Opinion Report: South Korean Attitudes toward North Korea and Reunification* (Seoul: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2015), 20; “Presentation of 2014 Survey on Attitude towards Reunification [2014 통일인식조사 발표]” *Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul University*, October 1, 2014, accessed April 29, 2015, <http://knsi.org/knsi/admin/work/works/141020%202014%20%ED%86%B5%EC%9D%BC%EC%9D%98%EC%8B%9D%EC%A1%B0%EC%82%AC%20%EB%B0%9C%ED%91%9C%20%EC%9E%90%EB%A3%8C%EC%A7%91.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Wen-Shan Yang and Melody Chia-Wen Lu, eds., *Asian Cross-Border Marriage Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues*, Vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, “Foreign Brides, Multiple Citizenship and the Immigrant Movement in Taiwan,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 18, no. 1 (2009): 29-31.

<sup>47</sup> Sara Friedman, “Marital Immigration and Graduated Citizenship: Post-Naturalization Restrictions on Mainland Chinese Spouses,” *Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2010): 73-93.

<sup>48</sup> James Green, “Japan lags behind Asian neighbors in protecting marriage migrants,” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 15, 2013, accessed September 21, 2014, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/social\\_affairs/AJ201302150075](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201302150075).

systems” is a vital part of being Korean. Jiyoon Kim, who authored the study, comments that nearly 80 percent of respondents in 2005 and 2010 believed that Korean bloodline was important to being Korean but that in 2013, the figure dropped to 65.8 percent and “as many as 30.4 percent thought that sharing the same bloodline is *not* important to being Korean.”<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added)

Nevertheless, caution is necessary when assessing survey data that show increased acceptance of ethnic and other forms of heterogeneity in South Korea. First, despite the fact that the ROK changed its citizenship law in 1997 from patrilineage to bilineage (meaning that a child born to a female Korean citizen and non-Korean male is eligible for Korean citizenship), most Koreans in everyday life, old and young, still consider “bloodline” to be determined by the father. In this context, children in multicultural families might be viewed as “Korean” if their father is a native Korean, which would reinforce the notion of Korean ancestral continuity. Second, given the growing numbers of older Koreans and their generally conservative tendency in voting behavior and policy preferences, their continued emphasis on traditional forms of Korean identity—bloodline and singular ethnic ancestry—reflects significant obstacles to social acceptance and equal treatment of immigrants and their mixed-ethnic families.

The 2009 Hyundai Research Institute report on the steps needed to develop South Korea into a mature, multicultural society bears heeding. At

the time, their assessment of South Korean society’s acceptance of other cultures was one of the worst in the world.<sup>50</sup> The study by Asan Institute in 2014 revealed that 32 percent of Koreans view mixed-race families as a “threat to social cohesion.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, a study by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2012 revealed that 86.5 percent of South Koreans emphasize the importance of blood lineage, and only 36 percent answered favorably about the coexistence of diverse races, religions, and cultures in South Korea, which is less than half of the average 74 percent among 18 European countries.<sup>52</sup>

These examples point to social and political fault lines within the South Korean polity. Whether and how Korean democracy might accept New Koreans as true citizens and compatriots with equal access to the assertion of rights, interests, and voices to influence the future of South Korean politics and policies is a critical question. Whether and how currently marginalized New Koreans might not only exercise the rights of citizenship, but also take responsibility for improving the conditions of their respective groups and develop a more robust democracy is a companion question.

Public education that offers accurate, thoughtful information from multiple perspectives, especially those of migrants and immigrants and their families, and debates that encourage the exchange of such perspectives are key to developing a culture of sociopolitical tolerance and inclusion. Jiyoon Kim observes that “well-publicized

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<sup>49</sup> Jiyoon Kim, “National Identity under Transformation: New Challenges to South Korea,” *Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, January 25, 2014, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.theasanforum.org/national-identity-under-transformation-new-challenges-to-south-korea/>.  
<sup>50</sup> “Characteristics and Implications of Domestic Multiculturalism [국내 다문화 현상의 특징과 시사점],” *Global Economy Crisis: Hyundai Research Institute* 373, no.09-44 (2009): 8.  
<sup>51</sup> Jiyoon Kim, Chungku Kang, and Euicheol Lee, “Issue Brief – Closed off Korea: South Korean Perception of Multiculturalism and Policy [닫힌대한민국: 한국인의다문화인식과정책],” *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, February 4, 2014, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://asaninst.org/wp-content/themes/twentythirteen/action/dl.php?id=28587>.  
<sup>52</sup> Yoo-hyun Chang, “86.5% of Citizens Stress ‘Blood Lineage,’ Negative on Multiculturalism [국민 86.5% ‘한국인혈통 중시,’ 다문화에 부정적],” *JoongAng Ilbo*, April 19, 2012, accessed April 29, 2015, [http://article.joins.com/news/article/article.asp?Total\\_Id=7939576](http://article.joins.com/news/article/article.asp?Total_Id=7939576).

propaganda distributed by the government to treat multiethnic and multicultural families well has facilitated accommodating civic nationalism instead of ethnic nationalism to a certain extent.”<sup>53</sup> The Korean government’s efforts to make available school textbooks that address multiculturalism would also facilitate public understanding of demographic and related social changes.

But Mi Ok Kang, author of *Multicultural Education in South Korea*, explains the growing politics over multicultural education.<sup>54</sup> As more teaching resources become available and scholars, teachers, book publishers, business leaders, and the central and local governments get involved in determining “appropriate content.” She finds worrisome the trend since 2010 to reduce the number of government-authorized Korean language arts textbooks and the related narrowing of ways to teach and learn multicultural curricula and argues for “critical multicultural education” as a way to develop “a full dimension of multicultural/multilingual others’ identities without transmitting distorted images of migrant others.”<sup>55</sup>

The learning gap and social discrimination are high. A study by the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, published in 2012, found that 40 percent of multiracial children had difficulty speaking Korean because their immigrant mothers lacked fluency. The study found that youngsters who had attended childcare support centers or had accessed other such public services

scored higher on the language test.<sup>56</sup> The Korean government stepped up to fund daycare centers, special kindergartens, and other educational support programs for the children. The *Korea Times* reported in March, 2015 that the Ministry of Education runs “80 education institutes where multi-racial students can learn the Korean language and culture for six months before starting their education in ordinary schools” and that the number would rise to 100 in 2015. Given the current figure of 121,000 preschool students from multicultural families, such programs are expected to expand to the higher grades to accommodate the children’s educational development.<sup>57</sup>

The government has also designated 150 schools to offer programs to raise awareness about multiculturalism with all students. In the late 2000s, multiple government ministries (Education, Science and Technology or MEST; Gender Equality and Family; Justice) and provincial governments jointly established projects to develop teachers, curricula, and school environments that would foster multicultural education. MEST initiated the “Multicultural Family-Student Education Support Project” in 2009 and funded selected university education schools (departments) to develop teacher-training and courses for the future. A total of about US \$1.4 million were invested, “more than one-fourth of the total budget for multicultural children in 2009.”<sup>58</sup> Nancy Abelman and her co-authors, who published an assessment of the project’s planning process concluded that the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Mi Ok Kang, *Multicultural Education in South Korea: Language, Ideology, and Culture in Korean Language Arts Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Also see Andrew Eungi Kim, “Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, February 1, 2009, accessed October 21, 2014, [http://www.japanfocus.org/-Andrew\\_Eungi-Kim/3035/article.html](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Andrew_Eungi-Kim/3035/article.html).

<sup>56</sup> Bo-eun Kim, “40% of multiracial children have difficulty with Korean,” *The Korea Times*, June 13, 2012, accessed April 12, 2014, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/06/117\\_112997.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/06/117_112997.html).

<sup>57</sup> Min-ho Jung, “Ministry to run 30 kindergartens for multiracial children,” *The Korea Times*, March 17, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.koreatimesus.com/ministry-to-run-30-kindergartens-for-multiracial-children>.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Abelman et al., “Makeshift Multiculturalism: The Transformation of Elementary School Teacher Training” in *Multiethnic Korea? Multiculturalism, Migration, and Peoplehood Diversity in Contemporary South Korea*, ed. John Lie (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2015), 99.

development of multicultural education in South Korea was in a “makeshift” state, characterized by “considerable confusion and a space for generative activity, honest reflection...or even [positive] unintended consequences.”<sup>59</sup>

Various media outlets serve an important function as informational and cultural mediators through multilingual programming via television, radio, internet, and mobile devices, including public service news to assist foreign workers and multicultural families, as well as entertainment. Migrant World Television (MWTV), a multi-ethnic broadcaster, is operated by immigrants and temporary foreign workers. Major Korean outlets such as TBS, EBS, Arirang, and Woongjin Foundation, in addition to regional outlets, are engaged in diversifying and cross-fertilizing information and cultural content among the growing heterogeneous Korean population. Multicultural Music Broadcasting was established by the Woongjin Foundation in 2008 for the explicit purpose of serving the needs of migrant workers and marriage immigrants. “DJs from China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Mongolia, Russia and Egypt provide Korea-related information and useful living tips, while also introducing popular music from around the globe. Starting in November [2010], the Woongjin Foundation aired 60 animated children’s tales from China, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia and Thailand through their satellite TV station.”<sup>60</sup>

Laws that establish the boundaries between freedom of expression and association and outright

racial/ethnic discrimination and violence are urgently needed. After Bonojit Hussain, a research professor at Seoul’s Sungkonghoe University was racially accosted by an ethnic-Korean man in July, 2009, he brought the case to the police to file charges and to the attention of the ROK National Human Rights Commission. His one-man activism to address the injustice took him to the National Assembly, whose members were forced (or inspired) to debate legislation that bans discrimination and racist acts. Although bills were considered several times, the last in 2012, no anti-discrimination law has been passed. Virulent opposition, especially by right-wing Christian groups, forced an end to the debate in the legislature, and some politicians who had supported such legislation backed off in the face of threats by the conservative activists.<sup>61</sup>

The ROK will be pressured from within and by the international community to develop legal standards and safeguards against racism and discrimination as the population grows more diverse. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on racism issued a call in October, 2014 for the Korean government to step up and pass comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and to “fight racism and discrimination through better education, as well as ensuring that the media is sensitive and conscious of the responsibility to avoid racist and xenophobic stereotypes and that perpetrators are punished where appropriate.”<sup>62</sup> He and others have urged the ROK government to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>60</sup> Sojung Yoon, “Radio stations help spread multiculturalism in Korea,” *Korea.Net*, March 11, 2011, accessed July 18, 2015, <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Society/view?articleId=85600>.

<sup>61</sup> “Indian pushes Korea to right race wrongs,” *IndiaToday*, September 30, 2009, accessed September 17, 2015, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/Indian+pushes+Korea+to+right+race+wrongs/1/64140.html>; Sang-Hoon Choe, “South Koreans Struggle With Race,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2009, accessed September 17, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/02/world/asia/02race.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/02/world/asia/02race.html?_r=0); Ji-hye Jun, “Legal protection needed against racial discrimination,” *The Korea Times*, June 26, 2013, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/common/printpreview.asp?categoryCode=116&newsIdx=138155>.

<sup>62</sup> “Republic of Korea: UN rights experts urges adoption of anti-discrimination law,” *United Nations News Centre*, October 9, 2014, accessed September 22, 2015, [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49038#.VgRLCl\\_D\\_ct](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49038#.VgRLCl_D_ct).

## New Koreans and Political Participation

The ROK government does not have affirmative action-type programs for naturalized Koreans and other legal immigrants to serve in government, as it does for defectors from North Korea. Immigrants generally do not have easy access to understanding the South Korean political system, process, or norms, and because most work in the private sphere as wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and housekeeper, they are not necessarily expected to become political or participate in public life. The ROK government provides a domesticated acculturation program for foreign brides: Textbooks that teach Korean language and programs that teach Korean culture focus almost singularly on cooking Korean dishes, relationships within the family, especially with the mother-in-law, and looking after children and their school work.

Immigrants and migrant workers have taken initiatives to organize their own civic, cultural, and religious groups, and some have organized politically and engaged in activism for better labor conditions, anti-discrimination education for the Korean society, and legal protections for women who are abused by their Korean husbands or parents-in-law. They also have South Korean advocates and supporters from a broader political spectrum of civil society than do the defectors

from North Korea. Foreign wives, documented and undocumented foreign workers, and native Korean activists together claim public space for social and political interaction and interest-formulation regarding immigration policy, the promotion and protection of foreign nationals' rights, and the transformation of educational and cultural institutions to prevent discrimination against multicultural families.

The prevention of violence against foreign wives (by their family members) and legal punishment of perpetrators is a pressing demand. A rash of violent crimes, including aggravated battery, rape, and killing of marriage migrants, particularly from Vietnam,<sup>63</sup> heightened both the native and non-native communities' awareness of the serious problems of the foreign-born and their mixed-ethnic children.<sup>64</sup>

Like in Japan, local governments in areas with large numbers of immigrants and migrant workers have taken initiatives to include foreigners in communal life and respond to their particular needs. Ansan City is a good example, where the local government has been supporting foreign nationals and immigrants through a variety of community services, including language, sports and driver's license classes as well as legal advice on visa status and employment.<sup>65</sup> Wongok village in

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<sup>63</sup> The following are examples of violence against Vietnamese women: 2007, Daejeon: 47-year-old Korean man beats to death 19-year-old woman after one month of marriage; 2008, Tran Thi Lan, 22, commits suicide by jumping off high-rise within one month of marriage; 2010, Busan: a mentally ill Korean husband beats and stabs to death his 20-year-old wife on her eighth day in Korea; 2011, Kyeongsangdo: Hoang Thi Nam, age 23, stabbed 53 times by her 37-year-old husband, Lim Chae Won. Hoang had lived in a shelter for abused foreign wives during most of 2010; 2014, Busan: Vo Thi Minh Phuong, 27, committed suicide with her two children by jumping out of her 18th floor apartment. She blamed her husband for beating her.

<sup>64</sup> "Another Vietnamese Bride Murdered in South Korea," *NamVietNews*, May 29, 2011, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://namvietnews.wordpress.com/2011/05/29/another-vietnamese-bride-murdered-in-south-korea/>; Si-soo Park, "Murderer of Vietnamese Wife Gets 12-Year Jail Sentence," *The Korea Times*, March 13, 2008, accessed March 2, 2014, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/04/117\\_20693.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/04/117_20693.html); "Vietnamese Woman in South Korea Commits Suicide with Two Children," *VietNamNet*, November 26, 2012, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/53366/vietnamese-woman-in-south-korea-commits-suicide-with-two-children.html>; Jennie Le, "Til Death Do Us Part: Foreign Vietnamese Brides Killed in South Korea," *One Vietnam, Vietnam Talking Points*, June 8, 2011, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://talk.onevietnam.org/til-death-do-us-part-foreign-vietnamese-bride-killed-in-south-korea/>.

<sup>65</sup> Si-soo Park and Rachel Lee, "Ansan – ghetto or multicultural enclave?," *The Korea Times*, April 17, 2013, accessed February 18, 2015, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2013/04/386\\_134111.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2013/04/386_134111.html); Sun-min Lee, "Multiculturalism matures in Ansan," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, October 1, 2011, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=2942822>.

Ansan has gone so far as to declare itself a “borderless village” in recognition of two-thirds of its population being non-Korean.<sup>66</sup>

In recent years, electoral politics has become a new venue for the articulation of immigrants’ interests. Judith Hernandez, originally from the Philippines, was the first foreign-born naturalized Korean citizen to run for a seat in the 2008 ROK National Assembly election. Hernandez’s commitment to a multicultural Korean society won her support from the immigrant community, as well as from those political parties that were seeking the support of foreign-born residents in South Korea. But Jasmin Barcunay Lee (Jasmin Lee), another Philippines-born immigrant, was the first to achieve a seat in the National Assembly in 2012 as a naturalized Korean. She is a member of the Saenuri (ruling) Party and succeeded through proportional representation.

Like Hernandez, Lee is the widow of a Korean man and the mother of multicultural children. Her election was hailed by some Koreans and observers around the world as path-breaking, but South Koreans’ ethno-nationalistic and xenophobic sentiment was also apparent on internet sites. The protestations ranged from a form of economic protectionism against public funds being spent on foreigners (“Korea gives foreigners benefits which it doesn’t even give to its nationals”) to anti-multiculturalism (“Unlike the United States or China, Korea has been a racially homogeneous country. I don’t know why we need multiculturalism.”).<sup>67</sup>

The new immigrants’ relationships with political parties are tenuous. Many naturalized Koreans do not vote or vote according to their husbands’ or

in-laws’ preferences. Whether they exercise their voting privileges as their linguistic and cultural adaptation to South Korean life advances is an important question. Research is needed on how the Korean-born multiethnic children view their relationship with Korean democracy as they come of political age and whether they press political parties to represent their interests over time. Like in many in-migration societies, it is more likely for the second generation of multicultural family members to exercise more fully their political rights than the immigrant generation.

It is also possible that immigrants and their offspring will insert their interests more clearly through party representation as their numbers continue to grow and South Korea confronts more fully the complexities of identity and minority politics. Thus far, conservative and liberal parties cautiously render support for a multicultural Korea, but prejudices remain high barriers to actual electoral participation by immigrants. It is also possible that political parties will woo and recruit minority groups as the latter’s political presence and voice grow. In the context of unification politics, anti-immigration and ethnically identified parties might emerge.

Immigrants’ experience with different types of democratic procedures and norms prior to entering Korean political life will significantly affect their capacity to adapt to Korean democracy. Because the home countries of many migrants range from authoritarian systems as in China and Uzbekistan, democracies like the Philippines, fledgling democracies like Mongolia, and reform-oriented systems like Vietnam, New Koreans are not at the same starting point for understanding and acculturating to Korean political life.

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<sup>66</sup> Park and Lee, “Ansan.”

<sup>67</sup> Rahn Kim, “Jasmine Lee faces racial backlash,” *The Korea Times*, August 15, 2012, accessed May 12, 2013, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/04/117\\_109014.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/04/117_109014.html).



## Impact on Foreign Policy

There are inevitable impacts, both positive and negative, that the experiences of New Koreans have on South Korea's diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people relations with the respective sending country. The mistreatment of foreign women, in particular the violent abuse by their Korean family members or labor/marriage brokers, can strain bilateral relations. Foreign workers who are denied their wages or basic health and safety protections can pressure their embassies and NGOs in Korea and their home country to advocate on their behalf. The negative impressions of South Korean society that foreign nationals and naturalized Korean citizens pass on to their kin and friends in their country of origin can generate distrust and animosity toward Korea and Koreans. Also, foreign policy tensions affect relations among different types of Koreans. There are reports that when Korea-Japan competition over Dokdo/Takeshima Japan flares up, ethnically Korean school children blame Japanese-Koreans, and "[w]hen disputes with China rise, Chinese-Koreans become the target."<sup>68</sup> The actions of non-state actors also apply as in the case of Islamic State (IS). Pakistani and other Muslim residents in Korea have grown fearful of a backlash against them by Koreans because of the shock and concern among East Asians following the execution of two Japanese nationals by IS in January, 2015. As Koreans realize that such terror threats can be linked to their own country, especially because the government supports U.S.-led anti-terror policies, Muslims and those who are assumed to be

Muslim feel more vulnerable. The *Korea Times* reported that "[i]n 2013, a Taliban operative who came to Korea under the guise of a migrant worker was deported for his role in organizing rallies against the United States and a war against the West."<sup>69</sup>

### *Philippines*

President Park Geun-hye, who was elected in December 2012, has pursued enhanced trade, aid, and security cooperation with the "VIP" countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. President Benigno Aquino of the Republic of Philippines (PR) was the first foreign head of state to visit the ROK in the first year of Park Geun-hye's new presidency. On October 17, 2013, the first day of the visit, the two presidents signed three agreements, including military sales to the Philippines, sports cooperation, and US\$80 billion loan for a flood mitigation project in Pampanga province.<sup>70</sup> Jasmin Lee was commended "for her efforts in securing the approval of relief and rehabilitation assistance from the Republic of Korea for the victims of Typhoon Pablo in the Philippines."<sup>71</sup>

When President Aquino met with representatives of the 50,000-plus Filipino community in Korea on his second day of the state visit, he especially congratulated Jasmine Lee for "fostering warm and cordial bilateral relations between the Philippines and the Republic of Korea, and promoting the rights of migrant women through her civil society work and public service." She was recognized for her leadership of the Filipino community in

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<sup>68</sup> Young-won Kim, "Korean society struggles."

<sup>69</sup> Hyun-kyung Kang "Pakistanis in Korea Fear Backlash from IS," *The Korea Times*, February 8, 2015, accessed February 22, 2015, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/02/176\\_173197.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/02/176_173197.html).

<sup>70</sup> Marlon Ramos, "PH, South Korea sign 3 agreements on 1st day of Aquino state visit," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 18, 2013, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/88127/ph-south-korea-sign-3-agreements-on-1st-day-of-aquino-state-visit>.

<sup>71</sup> "Aquino confers 'Order of Lakandula' on 1st Filipino South Korean National Assembly member Jasmine Lee," Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), Republic of the Philippines, October 19, 2013, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.pcoo.gov.ph/southkorea2013/news.htm>.

Korea and “for bringing pride to the Philippines through her election to the 19th National Assembly, and becoming the first naturalized Korean to be a member of the Korean parliament.”<sup>72</sup> The Philippines president conferred “the Order of Lakandula with the rank of officer in recognition of her achievement and efforts to champion the cause of Filipinos and other foreigners living in South Korea” at a ceremony in Seoul.<sup>73</sup> The accolade included recognition of her “role as a member of the Committee on Foreign Relations, Trade and Unification and the Committee on Gender Equality and Family of the National Assembly.”<sup>74</sup>

President Park also praised Lee and introduced her at the state dinner as a human bridge between the two countries.<sup>75</sup> She also expressed gladness that the peoples of the two countries can become part of the same family as well as close neighbors, noting that the volume of people-to-people exchanges surpassed 1.3 million and that the number of Filipino spouses married to Koreans reached 15,000<sup>76</sup> last year.<sup>77</sup>

Lee has assumed prominent positions in the National Assembly and is recognized as a hardworking dedicated lawmaker. She sees her primary mandates as representing immigrant families in Korea in the policy arena: “I was nominated to represent the growing number of immigrants in Korea, being their voice in policy making decisions as well as to be the link to help Korea in the transition to a multicultural society.” Her professed main goal is to design and implement a workable roadmap for multiculturalism in Korea by establishing a congressional department within the next ten years that can develop and oversee legal and policy changes toward multiculturalism.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Lee has a varied portfolio of interests. Rather than the single issue of multiculturalism, she extends her efforts to support Korean veterans of war as well as lawsuits filed by “comfort women.” She also works with other immigrants to help children of North Korean defectors.<sup>79</sup>

Prior to Lee, another naturalized immigrant from the Philippines, Judith Hernandez, had run for

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<sup>73</sup> Honors Code of the Philippines (Executive Order 236, 19 September 2003). In Section 5, II of the Honors Code, the following is provided as the criteria for the conferment of the Order of Lakandula:

“The Order of Lakandula is conferred upon a Filipino or foreign citizen:

- a. who has demonstrated by his life and deeds a dedication to the welfare of society;
- b. whose life is worthy of emulation by the Filipino people;
- c. for deeds worthy of particular recognition, including suffering materially for the preservation and defense of the democratic way of life and of the territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines, for devoting his life to the peaceful resolution of conflict, or for demonstrating an outstanding dedication to the fostering of mutual understanding, cultural exchange, justice and dignified relations among individuals; or
- d. for acts that have been traditionally recognized by the institution of presidential awards, including meritorious political and civic service.”

<sup>74</sup> “Aquino confers,” Presidential Communications Operations Office.

<sup>75</sup> “President Park hosts State Dinner in honor of President Aquino in South Korea,” Office of the President of the Philippines, Republic of the Philippines, October 18, 2013, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://president.gov.ph/news/president-park-hosts-state-dinner-in-honor-of-president-aquino-in-south-korea/>.

<sup>76</sup> Separately, by the end of 2012, there were 9,334 marriage migrants and 5,481 naturalized spouses. By the end of 2013, close to when the summit took place, there were 10,039 marriage migrants and 5,912 naturalized spouses. See Republic of Korea’s Ministry of Interior annual reports on foreign residents at [http://www.mogaha.go.kr/frt/bbs/type001/commonSelectBoardList.do?bbsId=BBSMSTR\\_000000000014](http://www.mogaha.go.kr/frt/bbs/type001/commonSelectBoardList.do?bbsId=BBSMSTR_000000000014).

<sup>77</sup> Tack-whan Wi and Sojung Yoon, “Korea, Philippines move toward deeper cooperation,” *KoreaNet*, October 18, 2013, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=113844>.

<sup>78</sup> Jonathan M. Hicap, “Jasmine Lee: A Filipino in South Korea’s Assembly,” *Manila Bulletin*, May 10, 2014, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://www.mb.com.ph/jasmine-lee-a-filipino-in-south-koreas-assembly/#lirp8eGdbg2BgoM3.99>; Dohun Kim, “How Jasmine Lee, One Of The Most Hated Women In Korea, Is Changing The Country,” *Huffington Post Korea*, May 7, 2015, accessed July 10, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/07/jasmine-lee-korea\\_n\\_7214186.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/07/jasmine-lee-korea_n_7214186.html).

<sup>79</sup> Sang-hwa Lee, “Jasmine Lee’s First Year as First Naturalized Korean Lawmaker,” *Korea Focus*, June 29, 2013, accessed July 10, 2014, [http://www.koreafocus.or.kr/design2/layout/content\\_print.asp?group\\_id=104903](http://www.koreafocus.or.kr/design2/layout/content_print.asp?group_id=104903).

the National Assembly in 2008.<sup>80</sup> Both Hernandez and Lee were active leaders for migrants' rights and welfare before entering politics. They earned the political and moral support of immigrant communities in Korea even though the women do not represent them officially by district or party. Migrant communities are becoming established as a de facto interest and identity group in Korean electoral politics, a trend that is likely to grow.

The ROK and the PR enjoy strong and friendly relations. Since 2006, Korea has been the number one source of tourists to the Philippines with about 1.2 million a year.<sup>81</sup> In 2014, a total of 1,175,472 Koreans visited the Philippines, contributing to about a quarter of total tourist arrivals to the country, followed by the United States with 14.95 percent and Japan with 9.59 percent.<sup>82</sup> As of July, 2015, the ROK was the fourth largest trading partner of the Philippines after the U.S., Japan, and China, and exports from the Philippines to Korea increased 40 percent between 2009 and 2013. Both countries have been improving security ties as the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines over Scarborough Shoal has intensified.

Closer government-to-government ties apply also to the education sector as the ministries of education started in 2012 to exchange teachers between the two countries to educate students in both

places about the history, language, civics, and social studies of each country. The teachers are expected to share best practices and help develop teaching materials on multiculturalism. Upon returning home, they are expected to raise cultural awareness of one another's societies. The ROK Ministry of Education hosted the Asia-Pacific Teacher Exchange for Global Education program from September to November, 2014, when teachers from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines were deployed to Korean schools. At the same time, twenty Koreans went to the Philippines and fifteen to Indonesia to teach in the respective country's schools.<sup>83</sup>

In April, 2015, the government of the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Woongjin Foundation and its partner Digital Sky-net Inc. to raise public awareness of Filipino migrant issues and to promote Philippine culture to the broader South Korean public.<sup>84</sup> The embassy staff participate as guests and provide information to the Filipino diaspora in Korea. Gennie Kim, a Filipina-Korean, works as the DJ for the signature program, Philippines Language Multicultural Family Music Radio and manages a Facebook page with information on Korean immigration and citizenship policies, information on vocational training, labor issues, multicultural civic organizations' events, and other information.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Caviteña vies for seat in South Korea parliament," *GMA News*, March 28, 2008, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/86677/news/cavite-a-vies-for-seat-in-south-korea-parliament>.

<sup>81</sup> Fernando T. Aldaba, "Enhancing the future of the Philippines-Republic of Korea economic relations," *BusinessMirror*, July 2, 2015, accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/enhancing-the-future-of-the-philippines-republic-of-korea-economic-relations/>; Andrea Chloe Wong, "Prospects in Partnership: The Philippines and South Korea," *Philippine Foreign Service Institute*, October 22, 2013, accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.fsi.gov.ph/prospects-in-partnership-the-philippines-and-south-korea/>.

<sup>82</sup> Ted P. Torres, "2014 tourist arrivals up 3.25% to 4.8 M," *The Philippine Star*, February 18, 2015, accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.philstar.com/business/2015/02/18/1424847/2014-tourist-arrivals-3.25-4.8-m>.

<sup>83</sup> Sojung Yoon, "Teacher exchange brings Asia closer together," *Korea.net*, September 25, 2014, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=121877>.

<sup>84</sup> "PH Embassy, multicultural radio in South Korea ink accord to push PHL issues," Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines, April 20, 2015, accessed July 18, 2015, <http://www.gov.ph/2015/04/20/ph-embassy-multicultural-radio-in-south-korea-ink-accord-to-push-phl-issues/>.

<sup>85</sup> "Multicultural Family Broadcast for Filipinos-DJ Gennie," Public Facebook Page, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Multicultural-Family-Broadcast-for-Filipinos-DJ-Gennie-587276964615980/timeline/>; "Wendyflor.com Blog," Public Facebook Page, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/wendyflorblog?fref=nf>.

## Vietnam

In contrast to the meteoric rise of Jasmin Lee, who has uplifted the spirits and status of the Filipino community in Korea, the violence against Vietnamese women, which has been publicized by various Korean, Vietnamese and regional media outlets and social network sites, became a sensitive foreign policy issue between the ROK and Vietnam. The *Korea Times* reported: “There is no doubt that the Vietnamese leadership is concerned about the alleged abuse of Vietnamese women by their Korean husbands. The Southeast Asian country has been hit by media reports that Vietnamese wives are the victims of various kinds of spousal abuse.”<sup>86</sup> In 2007, when Im Hong-jae, the newly appointed ROK ambassador to Vietnam, presented his credentials to the Vietnamese government, President Nguyen Minh Triet and other Hanoi officials requested that the ROK government better protect and improve the treatment of immigrant women from Vietnam. The president of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, an arm of the government and the Communist Party that oversees and conducts mass mobilization and encourages popular patriotism, urged Ambassador Im to “pay more attention to the Vietnamese immigrants so that they can better integrate into Korean society.”<sup>87</sup> Vietnamese ambassadors to Korea also have raised the need for the ROK government to “regulate international marriage brokers by laws as well as government policies.”<sup>88</sup>

But positive diplomatic developments also are apparent. Even thorny issues dating back to the history of Koreans’ involvement in the Vietnam

War have been kept at bay through the Vietnamese government’s efforts not to politicize issues between the two countries. Despite the knowledge that some Korean soldiers in the Vietnam War were brutal fighters, inflicting harm on civilians as well as combatants, including rape (and the fathering and abandonment of children), neither the government nor the Vietnamese public have made such history political.

In light of the new economic cooperation and people-to-people interactions with Korea, Hanoi emphasizes the present and future, rather than the past. On the 50th anniversary observation of the deployment of South Korean troops in the Vietnam War, Korean officials suggested that the focus of the ceremony be on multiculturalism and *Lai Dai Han* (a Vietnamese term for a mixed ancestry person born to a South Korean father and a Vietnamese mother including the victims of Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War), with a view to setting the stage for the two countries to get over their bloody past and move toward a bright future.<sup>89</sup> The Vietnamese-Korean women and their *Lai Dai Han* children represent in body and symbolism a shared past and future between the two countries.

In 2014, the ROK Ministry of Justice reported that 129,973 Vietnamese were living in South Korea, about 50,000 of whom are married to Koreans.<sup>90</sup> Although there is no authoritative count of *Lai Dai Han*, they are estimated at between 1,500 by the ROK government and between 10,000-30,000 estimated by humanitarian

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<sup>86</sup> “Abuse of Vietnamese Wives,” *The Korea Times*, November 2, 2007, accessed April 13, 2012, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2007/11/202\\_13039.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2007/11/202_13039.html).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; See also Vietnam Fatherland Front, “Law of the VietNam Fatherland Front,” <http://www.matran.org.vn/home/gioithieumt/luatmt/lmttqvn1.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> Choong Soon Kim, 63.

<sup>89</sup> “Vietnam Asks Korea to Cancel Vietnam War Celebrations,” *KoreanBang*, January 22, 2014, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.koreabang.com/2014/stories/vietnam-asks-korea-to-cancel-vietnam-war-celebrations.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Dong-seok Sah, “In Korea, Vietnam War revisited quietly,” *The Korea Times*, July 3, 2015, accessed July 22, 2015, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/07/618\\_182105.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/07/618_182105.html).

organizations working in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> Both the Lai Dai Han from the Vietnam War era and “New (新) Lai Dai Han,” mixed-Vietnamese-Korean children born after the two countries resumed economic engagement, are known to reside in South Korea, usually as undocumented migrants, but a reliable estimate is unavailable.”<sup>92</sup>

Vibrant trade, investment, and tourism between the two countries are evident. Since 2009, the diplomatic relationship between the two countries has evolved from a comprehensive partnership to a strategic cooperative partnership. South Korea is the third largest trade partner for Vietnam, and Vietnam is Korea’s fourth largest export market.<sup>93</sup> An estimated 90,000 to 130,000 Koreans have been residing in Vietnam over recent years and engage in trade and investment activities. In 2014, “Korea was the biggest foreign investor in Vietnam with \$7.3 billion, ahead of Japan. Last year, their bilateral trade surpassed \$30 billion for the first time, a surge of more than 60 times from the \$490 million recorded in 1992 when they were just beginning to restore diplomatic ties. Trade is expected to grow even more with their free trade agreement [which was signed in May, 2015], expected to take effect by the end of the year.”<sup>94</sup>

The ROK’s Korea Tourism Office opened its first office in Hanoi in August, 2013 to promote and manage the bilateral growth of people-to-people visits. It also created the “2013-Korea Tourism

Year in Vietnam” campaign to promote two-way trade and cultural exchange. In 2013, the number of Korean tourists to Vietnam ranked second (748,727) behind China (1,907,794) but ahead of Japan (604,050) and the United States (432,228).<sup>95</sup> In the same year, the ROK loosened visa requirements for Vietnamese tourists. The growing Vietnamese penchant for South Korean products (from small appliances, garments, and cosmetics to food and machines) are facilitated partly by tourism and Vietnamese migration to South Korea.

### *China*

China maintains a subtle interest in its citizens working and residing in South Korea. It is most sensitive to Korean policies that might disturb or threaten Chinese sovereignty. For example, when ethnic Koreans started arriving from China in the late 1980s, “the Korean state welcomed them and offered permanent residence and possibilities for citizenship for those descended from anti-Japanese activists.” But because “Chinese leaders opposed what they saw as an affront to Chinese sovereignty,” the policy was revised in 1990 to limit Chinese nationals to a three-month tourist visa.<sup>96</sup>

Even after the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in August 1992, Beijing remained sensitive to the national identity and loyalty of its citizens abroad, which limited Seoul’s ability to

<sup>91</sup> Kang-pil Lee, “The Sorrow of a Neglected Bloodline, Lai Dai Han [버려진 핏줄 ‘라이 따이한’은 서럽다],” *Donga*, August 6, 1998, accessed September 14, 2015, [http://www.donga.com/docs/magazine/news\\_plus/news145/np145ee050.html](http://www.donga.com/docs/magazine/news_plus/news145/np145ee050.html).

<sup>92</sup> According to Kim Min Chul, an employee at the Migrant Network Television, there are “more than 10,000 Lai Dai Hans in Korea. This is because for the past 10 years, the government has been harshly searching for illegal Lai Dai Han immigrants.” See Dong Kyun Yu, “History Repeats Itself,” *The Granite Tower*, July 16, 2013, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.thegrانيتower.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=586>.

<sup>93</sup> Vu Trong Khanh, “Vietnam, South Korea Complete Trade Pact,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2014, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/vietnam-south-korea-complete-trade-pact-1418272024>; “Vietnam emerges as major export market for S. Korea,” *Yonhap News*, September 15, 2015, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2015/09/15/0502000000AEN20150915002800320.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Dong-seok Sah, “In Korea, Vietnam.”

<sup>95</sup> “International visitors to Vietnam in December and 12 months of 2013,” National Administration of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, December 26, 2013, accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.vietnamtourism.com/en/index.php/news/items/7592>.

<sup>96</sup> Seol and Skrentny, 153.

advance the welfare of Chinese migrants and integrate them even slightly into the Korean labor force and society. Although the ROK legislature had intended to include *joseonjok* (ethnic Koreans of Chinese nationality) in the Overseas Korean Act of 1998, it refrained from any gesture that could be interpreted by China as “claiming” Chinese citizens. Korean sociologist Dong-Hoon Seol and his coauthor emphasize the importance of the geopolitical and diplomatic context in which cross-border migration of co-ethnics occurs. They remark that South Korea “does not want to anger China by luring Joseonjok away from China and thus challenging Chinese sovereignty.” They point out that although Japan has an ethnically tiered immigration policy, with descendants from Brazil and Peru (nikkeijin) placed at a low rung, the latter have “more freedom of movement than enjoyed by Joseonjok from China because the two Latin American countries are not great powers with the proximity and economic and military capacity to influence Tokyo.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, Japan does not have to be wary of slighting or offending Brazil and Peru; by contrast, South Korea does have to be wary of China’s perceptions and reactions.

Chinese workers in Korea have been at the receiving end of many humiliations and mistreatment. But the Chinese government has tended to ignore or overlook the plight of their compatriots. Chinese media coverage is sparse and vague on the plight of Chinese citizens in Korea. In 2014, *China*

*News* carried an article citing information from Busan City Hall, mentioning that “despite th[e] large population [of migrant Chinese in Korea], there are inadequate resources, centers, and policies for when these foreign residents have issues. Often there arise problems and disputes due to a lack of infrastructure to support foreigners.”<sup>98</sup> Rather, Taiwanese and Hong Kong media have reported on the discrimination against and mistreatment of mainland Chinese living and working in Korea.<sup>99</sup>

Chinese perceptions of gender roles in China and Korea color Chinese migrant wives’ experiences in South Korea. Women from China perceive Korea to be a place where women are treated poorly owing to “excesses of Korean patriarchy”<sup>100</sup> compared to men and women in China. They worry that highly rigid gender roles would force them to bear the burden of household chores, child-rearing, looking after parents-in-law, and providing for ancestral rites.<sup>101</sup> Joseonjok who visit their hometowns in China sometimes narrate stories about gender inequality and lack of freedom for women in Korea, which compound negative perceptions of life in Korea.

In this author’s view, Beijing would have good reason to address physical and social protections for its nationals working and living in the ROK, but it deliberately turns a blind eye because it does not want to raise attention to labor, political, and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> “Busan, South Korea number of foreign residents now over 50,000, disputes over inadequate infrastructure [韩国釜山外籍居民人数超5万 基础设施不足纠纷多];” *ChinaNews.com*, February 17, 2014, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/hr/2014/02-17/5846964.shtml>. Translation by Audrey Wozniak, Wellesley College.

<sup>99</sup> Ju-min Park, “S Korea snubbing badly needed immigration,” *Taipei Times*, December 8, 2013, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/biz/archives/2013/12/08/2003578520>. Other accounts include the following: Problems of foreign brides in Korea in general, including China, with biggest obstacles being cultural and for rural Chinese women, the hardship of living in Seoul ([http://www.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-06/13/content\\_8379746.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-06/13/content_8379746.htm)); Online newspaper *Dongbei Wang* (Northeast [China] Online) reported that reports a story of a Chinese woman from the countryside tricked into marrying a Korean she thought was from the city, only to be stuck in Korean countryside with no escape (<http://heilongjiang.dbw.cn/system/2013/05/12/054761383.shtml>); Online posting from a Chinese woman in Korea wanting a divorce because of her Korean husband’s excessive drinking, physical abuse (<http://www.babytree.com/ask/detail/3345760>).

<sup>100</sup> Caren Freeman, *Making and Faking Kinship: Marriage and Labor Migration between China and South Korea*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 111.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, Ch.3.

human rights. It would be contradictory for Beijing to protest the poor treatment of Chinese nationals in Korea when the Chinese government keeps domestic demands for such rights at bay.

### **Inter-Korean Relations:**

Any process of peninsular unification must be based on the fact that South Korea is now a multi-ethnic and multi-national society whose democracy must expand and protect equal citizenship and human rights for all New Koreans. Yet such a premise would face opposition from North Koreans, given the decades-long extreme ethnonationalism and xenophobia officially propagated by Pyongyang. It is conceivable that race-based conflicts might poison the inherently complicated contestation over power and resources that any unification process would entail.

North Koreans have criticized the South for permitting the racial and ethnic mixing of Koreans through marriage migration. The Korea Workers Party newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* condemned the ROK's turn toward a multicultural society as an "unpardonable crime" and "poison" against the Korean nation and the prospect of independent unification.<sup>102</sup> DPRK delegation member Kim Young-chul told his counterpart at the 2006 inter-Korean military talks that "the purity of the Korean people has been intact since the beginning of history" and that the South's policies and practices were corrupting such purity. Kim declared that "not even a droplet of ink should be permitted" to stain the river of the ethnic nation.<sup>103</sup>

Christopher Hitchens recounted in *Slate* magazine the North Korean racism he encountered upon his visit to the DPRK, which included the condemnation of South Korean society as a "mongrelized" society.<sup>104</sup> Brian R. Myers, author of *The Cleanest Race*, argues that racist nationalism is the driving ideological force of the DPRK regime, abetting the "celebration of racial purity and homogeneity" that assumes moral superiority.<sup>105</sup> Such xenophobia and hostility to diversity of people, lifestyles, and ideas would certainly make unification difficult. For North Koreans, unification still means the ethnic nation; how they would deal with the different or mixed ethnicities of the South Korean society today is a big unknown.

This author wrote in an earlier publication that the ROK government policy toward migrant workers has been "held hostage by the yet unfinished nation-state-building project on the Korean peninsula." Specifically, the possibility of opening up the north to South Korean-controlled manufacturing and services is an obstacle to creating regularized (if not permanent) and predictable foreign labor practices. In 1996, around the time the ROK government was struggling to institutionalize and rationalize the first version of migrant worker policy, the Korea Labor Institute recommended that "Korea should not open its labour market on a large scale" in part because "in North Korea, about 50 per cent of the labour force is still employed in the agricultural sector" and "could be a major source of unskilled labour when Korean reunification occurs."<sup>106</sup> At the time, the Federation of Korean Industries and the Korea Federation of

<sup>102</sup> "The Idea of a Multinational, Multiracial Society Means Destruction of the Korean Nation [다민족, 다인종사회론은 민족말살론]," *Korea Central News Agency*, April 27, 2006, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://kcna.co.jp/item/2006/200604/news04/28.htm#7>.

<sup>103</sup> Won Joon Jang, "Multicultural Korea: South Korea's changing national identity and the future of inter-Korea relations," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 10, no.2 (2015), 94.

<sup>104</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "A Nation of Racist Dwarfs," *Slate*, February 1, 2010, accessed May 12, 2015, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/fighting\\_words/2010/02/a\\_nation\\_of\\_racist\\_dwarfs.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2010/02/a_nation_of_racist_dwarfs.html).

<sup>105</sup> B.R. Myers, "North Korea's Race Problem," *Foreign Policy*, February 11, 2010, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/02/11/north-koreas-race-problem/>.

<sup>106</sup> Katharine H.S. Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism," in *Korea's Globalization*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

Small Businesses concurred in their opposition to a worker permit system with the argument that it would jeopardize the ROK's unification efforts toward the North: "The employment permit system is expected to make it difficult for the government to send foreign workers back to their countries when there arises the need for Seoul to hire a massive number of North Koreans after Korean reunification."<sup>107</sup>

The political acculturation and integration of New Koreans are critical to building national cohesion and identity, as well as to improving the newcomers' access to economic and social well-being. But their capacity for political participation in Korea's democracy and the institutional and procedural capacity of the political system—government and civil society—to incorporate their interests and activities are underdeveloped. Expanding political participation and institutionalizing norms of multiculturalism now are imperative. Doing so will help make democracy more robust for the future when new challenges of political contestation and inclusion emanating from the process of unification arise. Otherwise, a disenfranchised and alienated immigrant population plus economically and politically dispossessed migrants from the DPRK will most likely destabilize democracy and fracture society severely.

Immigrants and multicultural families provide South Korea with unique opportunities to expand and deepen democracy as well as foreign relations. Many seek inclusion and search for ways to contribute to South Korea's security and prosperity. Private Jae-min Lebatard, aged 21, is a good example. Born in Cheongju to a Korean mother and a French father, he became the first mixed-ethnic member of

the ROK military to serve as a border guard at the DMZ in Paju in February, 2015. As a dual citizen, he could have given up his Korean citizenship to avoid military service, but he chose to be conscripted "because he wanted to live as a 'true' Korean."<sup>107</sup>

## Implications for U.S. Policy

The United States has a stake in how well South Korea embraces sociocultural diversity and deepens its democracy, given that democratic values and institutions are acknowledged by both countries' leaders to be a common glue that helps bind the alliance. The health and robustness of democracy in South Korea, which has a close economic but guarded political relationship with China, which tends to repress ethnic and religious minorities, are also important symbolically and practically for the projection of U.S. leadership in promoting and safeguarding democracies and cosmopolitan values.

With regard to the U.S.-ROK alliance, there is the possibility that a demographically diverse but ethno-politically fragmented ROK can become unsteady as a partner if national solidarity regarding the primary importance of the bilateral relationship cannot be maintained over time. Might New Koreans, who do not share with the majority of South Koreans the history of the Korean War and the alliance, consider the U.S.-Korea relationship less or more of a priority in the future? How will Koreans of mixed ethnicity and cultural identity as they come of age in the next couple decades identify the national interests of the ROK? How should the United States and the ROK work together to encourage continued support of the alliance and other aspects of American-Korean relations as the demographic terrain of Korea changes? How

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>107</sup> Jae-won Kim, "French-Korean Soldier to Guard Border with North Korea, Korea Times," *The Korea Times*, February 23, 2015, accessed May 12, 2015, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/people/2015/02/178\\_173946.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/people/2015/02/178_173946.html).



might the U.S. and the ROK share lessons about best practices and pitfalls regarding immigration and political integration of newcomers?

The Americans need to think ahead about how internal demographic changes in South Korea could affect the country's foreign policy and security

relationships and how Americans and other stakeholders of democracy and tolerant multiculturalism might fashion policies toward the ROK that support political pluralism and further democratic consolidation, including public diplomacy and outreach to new leaders among the New Koreans.

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