



## Demography, Migration and Multiculturalism in South Korea

Andrew Eungi Kim

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*More than a million foreigners reportedly reside in South Korea now, with unskilled migrant workers accounting for a majority. Although the country's reliance on imported foreign labor is likely to continue unabated, the country prides itself as an ethnically homogenous society and insists on almost zero-immigration policy. However, this paper shows that Korean society is rapidly becoming a multicultural society and this process is inevitable and irreversible. In support of this argument, the paper examines various social factors that are contributing to the making of a multiethnic Korea, including the continuing influx of migrant workers, rapid aging of the population, low fertility rate, and shortage of brides. The paper also assesses the applicability of various theories and trends of migration to the Korean context. The Korean case suggests a need for a paradigm shift in understanding multiculturalism. This is because the dominant perspectives and theories on multiculturalism have been western-centric, based on western experience and focusing on racial differences and tensions.*

*Multiculturalism in Korea as well as in its neighboring countries like China, Japan, and Taiwan is fundamentally different, as it involves people of similar physical appearances and historical cultural bonds, and it entails ethnic rather than racial differences.*

### Key Words

Korea, multiculturalism, migrant workers, immigrant brides, intermarriage, and aging

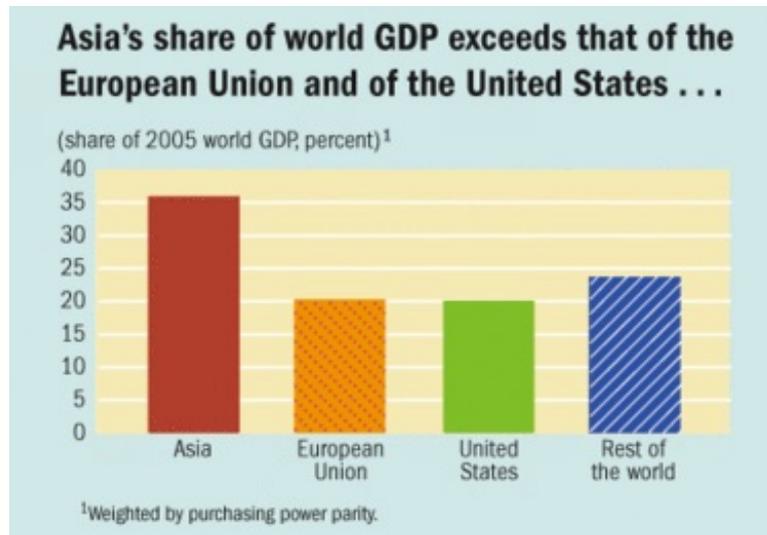
### Introduction

A report by the U.N. (2006) shows that the number of people who live and work outside their countries of birth has doubled over the last 35 years to 191 million in 2005 (see International Organization for Migration 2005). The total represents about three per cent of the world's population or one in every 35 persons. About 6 out of 10 international migrants live in high-income economies, including 22 prosperous developing countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar (United Nations 2006, p. 12).

Other findings by the report include the following: around 75 per cent of international migrants lived in just 28 countries, with one in five living in the United States; international migrants comprise at least 20 per cent of the population in 41 countries; women comprise nearly half of all international migrants and they outnumber male migrants in developed countries; about a third of the 191 million international migrants has moved from one developing country to another, while another third has migrated from a developing country to a developed country, indicating that the number of "South-to-South" migrants approximates that of "South-to-North" migrants (United Nations 2006, p. 12).

As in other parts of the world, international migration in Asia is an important social issue. Most countries in the region are affected by temporary labor migration as either labor-exporting or labor-importing countries. Only a handful of Asian countries or territories, the richest ones,

have a net import of labor. These are Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Since the 1980s Japan has been importing foreign workers to meet the demand for cheap labor from small- to mid-sized firms. The country now has about two million registered foreigners (1.57 per cent of the population), including 600,000 Korean descendents of colonial immigrants,[1] and the issues of citizenship, nationhood, and national identity have become important and controversial political issues (see Yamanaka 2000, 2004a and 2004b; Lie 2000, 2001; Arudou and Higuchi 2008).



GDP of Asian countries (PPP) in global perspective

South Korea (henceforth Korea) has been importing significant numbers of migrant workers since the early 1990s. As of the end of 2007, registered foreigners totaled 1,066,273, accounting for 2.2 per cent of the total population. The number of foreigners in Korea jumped 2.75 times since 1997 from 386,972. If the current trend continues, the number of foreigners in Korea would reach 1.5 million in 2012, 2.5 million in 2020, and 4.1 million by 2050 or 9.2 per cent of the total population, which would be similar to the proportion of foreign-born residents in England (9.7 per cent) in 2005.

A large majority of foreigners in Korea have entered the country with work visas and the number of foreigners with work visas, as of May 2008, amounted to more than 700,000. The 2008 total represents an annual increase of nearly 100,000 new arrivals since late 2004, when the figure was 460,000. Most of those who entered Korea with work visas, including more than 200,000 overstaying migrant workers, have been unskilled migrant workers.

The demand for foreign labor has largely come about as better-educated and wealthier Koreans began to turn away from certain occupation categories, especially the so-called 3-D (difficult, dirty, and dangerous) manual jobs, prompting the Korean government to utilize several labor-importing schemes since 1992 to both secure and control foreign workers. The number of foreigners in Korea will increase further as the anticipated bride shortage brings in more foreigners.

The presence of growing numbers of unskilled migrant workers, along with a substantial number of foreign brides and professional foreign workers, marks a significant departure from the proverbial image of Korea as an ethnically homogenous society. Although foreigners constituted only a little over one per cent of the total population of 48 million as of the end of 2005, the country is on its way to becoming a multiracial and multiethnic society. This paper examines the factors that will generate substantial inflow labor migrants and brides, notably rapid aging of the population and the resulting labor shortage, and son preferential practices

and shortage of brides. It also assesses the applicability of existing migration theories to the Korean context and analyzes international migration in Korea in light of general trends in global migration.

### Unskilled Migration Workers: History of Labor Importation Policies in Korea

Korea was a labor-exporting country from the early 1960s to the late 1980s.[2] Thousands of Korean workers emigrated annually in the 1960s and 1970s, notably to Germany, when miners and nurses made up the bulk of the outgoing migrant workers. During the “construction boom” of the 1970s and early 1980s, tens of thousands of Koreans were sent to the Middle East to work as construction workers for Korean companies. In the 1980s, more than 30,000 Koreans migrated annually as laborers to other countries. By 1993, the figure had dwindled to 18,000 (Ministry of Justice 1982-1993).

Since the late 1980s, Korea changed from a labor-exporting nation to a labor-importing nation (Park 1994). When foreign migrant workers began arriving in Korea in 1987, the shortage of manual workers was estimated at 100,000, mainly in small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms (Kwon 2004, p. 1). Since the mid-1980s, Korea has experienced a deceleration in the growth of the domestic labor force as the rural labor surplus was exhausted and the participation rate of youth (15-19 age group) in the labor force declined significantly due to longer schooling. The labor shortage was also caused by the booming construction industry, which drew Korean workers out of relatively low-paying factory jobs into higher-paying construction work. Moreover, growing labor market segmentation since the early 1990s brought about uneven labor shortages: large firms subcontracted some of their labor-intensive production lines to small firms (5-29 employees) to cope with growing national and international competition, leading to an increase in the percentage of employees in small firms from 18.3 per cent in 1980 to 27.6 per cent in 1995. The labor shortages in Korea were and are thus “more serious in smaller firms than in larger firms, and in unskilled jobs than in highly skilled jobs” (Lee, H. 1997, p. 357). The labor shortage in manufacturing became very serious in 1991 when unfilled production jobs totaled 222,000.



Migrant workers in Korea organize

Perhaps more important than the migration transition and labor market segmentation in explaining labor importation in Korea is a demand for cheap, unskilled labor to fill jobs shunned by Koreans. In congruence with dual labor market theory, the demand for foreign

labor in Korea came about as relatively better-educated, more status-conscious, and wealthier Koreans began to turn away from low-paying and less prestigious manual jobs. To mitigate the labor shortage in unskilled, manual jobs, since 1992 the Korean government has sought to bring in and control the inflow of unskilled migrant workers. [3] The number of such workers entering Korea increased from 33,861 in 1994 to 49,345 in 2000, and 106,688 in 2004. Korea attracted workers from a dozen or so Asian countries, including China (predominantly ethnic Koreans), Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Recently, however, unskilled migrant workers have come from dozens of countries from throughout the world, including Russia, Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan, Brazil, and Nigeria. They are employed in agriculture, fishery and service industries as well as in 3D jobs in industries including construction, metal work, dyeing, auto-parts, tanning, textiles, furniture-manufacturing and other small- to medium-scale manufacturing industries (see Seol 1999, 2000; Seol et al. 1999; Kim, W. 2004).

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

The Industrial Training System (ITS) was implemented in January 1994. In the inaugural year, 31,830 Asian workers arrived. Since then, the number of industrial trainees fluctuated between 25,000 and 52,000. The training program consists of a one-year training and two-year work permit system: trainees are eligible to apply for a work permit after completion of the training program. If they are successful in obtaining a work permit, they can work as regular workers with the full range of labor rights. Four main sectors in which these trainees work are manufacturing, construction, agricultural, and inland and coastal fisheries. However, the trainee program created many problems: trainees often became undocumented workers as they ran away from the trainee program for better pay elsewhere (trainees were paid barely more than the minimum wage and were often forced to work overtime with no overtime pay); there were many reports of abuses as trainees were not protected by the Labor Standard Law. The Industrial Training System was discontinued in January 1, 2007.

The Employment Permit System (EPS) for less-skilled or unskilled foreign workers was implemented on August 17, 2004 to ultimately replace the problematic ITS. Unlike the ITS, which was controlled and operated by business associations, all activities of the EPS—registration of potential migrant workers, selection, pre-departure orientation, post-arrival orientation, job placement, return and reintegration, and monitoring—are strictly regulated by government agencies. The new system is aimed at providing equal treatment to foreign workers, including basic labor rights, employment insurance and legal minimum wages, while ensuring a stable supply of manpower for Korean employers. However, foreign workers are banned from changing workplaces on their own and are allowed to work in Korea for a maximum of three years. To establish labor migration through bilateral agreements between the sending and receiving countries, the government entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with six Asian countries—Thailand, Viet Nam, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines—from which about 25,000 workers arrived in 2004. In 2006,

three other countries were added—Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Cambodia—followed by MOU with China, Bangladesh, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Myanmar and East Timor in 2007. More than 100,000 workers arrived from these countries in 2007 alone. The Korean Ministry of Labor assigns annual quotas to all sending countries according to employer preference, evaluation of sending procedures, and the number of illegal workers. Consequently, sending countries compete for quotas, which is expected to bring higher quality workers to Korea and guarantee fairness in recruiting in the sending countries. Eligibility is restricted to manufacturing companies with less than 300 workers who can prove that they previously tried to employ Korean workers.

In addition, an Employment Management System (EMS) for overseas Koreans has been implemented since December 2002 for overseas Koreans who have foreign nationalities. To be eligible, they have to be at least 30 years old and have a relative living in Korea (there are plans to bring down the age restriction to 25). The occupation categories for EMS are accommodation and restaurant, cleaning service, assistance with household affairs, and the like. EMS permit holders were originally allowed to stay for up to two years, but from August 2004 permission was extended to three years.

Through these labor importation schemes, several hundred thousand foreign workers, skilled and unskilled, have been brought into Korea, ushering in the dawn of a multiethnic Korea.

### **Korea's Aging Population and Labor Shortage**

Korea is one of the world's most rapidly aging societies and its fertility rate is falling at a record pace to a level well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per family. In 2000, Korea became an "aging society," in which 7 per cent of the population consists of the elderly (those 65 years or older). If current population trends continue, the country will transition to an "aged society" in 2019, when 14 percent of the population will be elderly. Korea will become a "superaged society" by 2026, when the elderly would make up 20 per cent of the population.



Korea's aging population

While economically advanced nations took decades to transit from an aging society to an aged society, Korea will do so within a generation (roughly 19 years). It took France 115 years (1864-1979) to make the transition, Sweden 85 years (1887-1972), and England 45 years (1930-1975) (see Table 1). Korea's 19-year mark will break the world record of 26 years set by Japan (1970-1996). Korea is expected to take just 7 years to pass from an aged society to a super-aged society, again beating the Japanese record of 12 years. The United Nations projects Korea's elderly population to rise to 24.1 per cent of the total in 2030 and 37.3 per cent in 2050, the highest in the world (Korea Times 2005a). The U.N. forecasts that Japan's aged population will rise to the second highest level with 36.5 per cent in 2050, followed by Spain (35 per cent), Italy (34.4 per cent) and the Netherlands (33.2 per cent). Demographers have coined the term "agequake" to refer to the dire economic and social impact of Korean aging.

Phase	Target	Number Purged	Period
1	Administrative reorganization	10,930	December 1948~ May 1949~
	Corporate reorganization	3,145	
2	Public school teachers and staff University faculty	1,113 30~40	April 1949 ~ April 1950
3	Private firms	10,972	July ~ November 1950
	Public servants	1,177	
Total		27,267~27,377	

Rapid aging is a product of Korea's increasing life expectancy and above all its low fertility rate. Due to significant improvements in health care and nutrition, the average life expectancy

of Koreans rose by more than 10 years in the two decades between 1983 when it was 67.14 to 72.83 in 1993 and 77.46 in 2003. A UN report projects South Korea's life expectancy to increase to 81 years in 2020 and 83.3 years in 2050 (Korea Times 2005b).

The most significant reason for this rapid aging is the falling fertility rate. Korea's total fertility rate was 1.08 in 2005, one of the lowest, if not the lowest, in the world (see Figure 1). [4] The decline from 1.47 in 2000 to 1.17 in 2002 is the largest two-year drop on record, far below the replacement level of 2.1 children. Korea took just 16 years for its fertility rate to drop from the replacement level of 2.1 in 1983 to 1.42 in 1999 compared with Japan (30 years) and the Netherlands (29 years). If the low birthrate persists, as demographers anticipate, the National Statistical Office projects a total population of 42.35 million in 2050, falling from the current 48.29 million.

Figure 1. The Developmental Path of the North Korean SEZs



As a consequence, the proportion of the economically active population (15-64 year olds), which was 61.4 per cent in 2003, will rise to 62.7 per cent in 2010 and 64.0 per cent in 2020 before falling to as low as 53.7 per cent by 2050 (Donga ilbo 2005). This portends a declining labor supply. According to a report by the Korea Labor Institute (2005), Korea will face a severe labor shortage beginning in 2010. Assuming that Korea's economic growth averages 4.5 per cent and that there will be an annual 1.51 per cent increase in demand for labor during the next 15 years, there will be a shortage of 586,000 workers in 2015 and 1.23 million in 2020. A Bank of Korea estimate is even higher, projecting a shortage of up to 4.8 million workers in 2020 (Bank of Korea 2006).

In addition to acute labor shortage, the low birthrate poses many economic problems. Whether in the context of real estate or consumer spending, economic growth and population have always been closely linked. In fact, Korea's remarkable economic development of the last forty years was in part fueled by a large young cohort who provided a sizeable labor pool (Lee, H. 1999, pp. 82-85). Other problems associated with low birthrate are declining tax revenues for (IMF estimates for every one per cent increase in the elderly population, there will be .46% deterioration in fiscal balance), declining savings rate, diminishing consumption, waning investment, and budget deficits (government expenditure on the elderly in Korea is expected to soar from 2 per cent of GDP in 2002 to 8.5 per cent in 2050). Also, pension funds can dry up and funding for health insurance can become insufficient.

This leaves Korea with little choice but to import increasing numbers of foreign laborers. The Korean government may be forced to grant permanent resident status to migrant workers in order to secure a stable supply of labor. The availability of a large pool of migrants, coupled with the government's wish to mobilize foreign labor, will facilitate a flow of migrants into

Korea.

The expected increase in labor importation is not a welcome prospect for the government, which remains fixated on the ideology of an ethnically homogenous nation. Consequently, there have been active debates about extending the retirement age of workers, although the current global financial crisis and the concomitant rise in the unemployment of college graduates is putting a damper on the issue. The government has also implemented various policies to facilitate a higher fertility rate. These include: 1) an allowance to every pregnant mother for medical check-ups; 2) free vaccinations to all newborns and free medical and dental check-ups until the age of six; 3) childcare allowances for low-income families; 4) expansion of public childcare facilities; 5) for low-income families, waiving monthly health insurance fees for newborns until the age of five; 6) subsidies for after-school programs for the children of low-income families; and 6) incentives for companies to extend, and offer more benefits for, maternity leave. Public advertisements on television and in newspapers promote having a larger number of children for each family.

Many local governments have introduced incentives to encourage more births. Some provide childbirth allowances, such as a one-time payment of between one and three million won for every second or third newborn, while some municipalities offer gift certificates for families to buy clothes, diapers, baby food and other childcare supplies for newborns. Some local governments provide state-hired babysitters for up to 30 days to families giving birth to a third child. The babysitter service is also provided to low-income families for children aged between three months to 12 years. To date, however, these measures have failed to slow Korea's declining fertility rate.

### **Immigrant Brides: Bride Shortage and Increasing Intermarriage**

In addition to the continuing influx of foreign laborers, there is yet another factor conducive to the emergence of a multicultural Korea: the influx of foreign brides. As with migrant laborers, the vast majority of foreign brides have come from Asian developing countries .

The proportion of intermarriages in total marriages in Korea has jumped more than ten-fold since 1990, accounting for nearly 14 per cent in 2005. This coincided with the growing number of migrant workers in Korea (see Table 2). The soaring number of international marriages is also due to a significant growth in the number of "picture brides" from abroad.



Korean men marry Vietnamese women in Vietnam

Rapid urbanization has largely drained the countryside of young women in search of better educational and job opportunities. Many men in the countryside, on the other hand, stayed behind to carry on family farming. These men have had great difficulty in finding marriageable

partners who were willing to give up the comfort of urban life to marry farmers or fishermen. Unable to find brides in Korea, many looked outside the country. In 2005, 35.9 per cent of rural men who married wed foreign brides from such countries as China (ethnic Koreans), Vietnam, the Philippines, and even Uzbekistan.[5] As Table 3 shows, most foreign brides are Asians with more than three-fourths coming from China and Vietnam in recent years, attesting to increases in cross-border hypergamy.

**Table 2: The development of KIC by stages**

		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Extended area	Kaeseong Urban area	Total
Area (acres)	Industrial zone	817	1,225	2,859	1,634	–	6,536
	Supporting zone	–	817	1,634	4,085	3,268	9,805
Tenant Firms		300	700	1,000	–	–	2,000
Employees (thousands)		70	130	150	350		700
Development schedule		2003–2007	2006–2009	2008–2012			

Source: The Ministry of Unification of the Republic of Korea, "Introduction to and Implications of Kaeseong Industrial Complex Project," [www.keia.org](http://www.keia.org) on July 14, 2006.

**Table 3 Origins of Foreign Wives**

Year	Total	Japan	U.S.A	China	Philippines	Vietnam	Thailand	Russia	Mongolia	Others
2001	10,006	976	265	7,001	510	134	185	157	118	660
2002	11,017	959	267	7,041	850	476	330	241	195	658
2003	19,214	1,242	323	13,373	944	1,403	346	297	318	968
2004	25,597	1,224	344	18,527	964	2,462	326	318	504	925
2005	31,180	1,255	285	20,635	997	5,822	270	236	561	1,119
2006	30,208	1,484	334	14,608	1,157	10,131	273	206	593	1,422

(Source: National Statistical Office, 2007b)

The number of foreign brides will rise significantly over the next decade, with Korean son preference, which has led to a serious imbalance in favor of males since the late 1980s, resulting in an acute shortage of brides. Table 4 reveals the seriousness of sex imbalance in Korea:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sex Ratio</b>
1987	108.8
1988	113.3
1989	111.7
1990	116.5
1991	112.4
1992	113.6
1993	115.3
1994	115.2
1995	113.2
1996	111.6
1997	108.2
1998	110.1
1999	109.6
2000	110.2
2001	109.0
2002	110.0
2003	108.7
2004	108.2
2005	107.7
2006	107.4

(Source: National Statistical Office, 2007).

The data are even more startling for the birth-order-specific sex ratios: the sex ratio at birth for the family's third- and fourth-born children has hovered between 130 and 140 in Korea (see Park and Cho 1995). It goes without saying that such a skewed sex ratio at birth has been obtained through sex-selective abortions. The proportion of married women aged 20-44 years old who have had at least one induced abortion has been high: 39 per cent in 1976; 48 per cent in 1979; 52 per cent in 1988; 49 per cent in 1994; 44 per cent in 1997; and 40 per cent in 2003 (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs 1976-2003).

The normal sex ratio at birth is around 105, with extra males accruing rapidly, especially between 1988 and 1996. As a consequence, Korea is facing a serious shortage of brides. For example, the sex ratio of men and women in their most "suitable" years for marriage—i.e., 26-30 year old males and 24-28 year old females—is expected to be 118.9 in 2010, 112.0 in 2020 and 116 in 2030 (National Statistical Office 2001). This means that hundreds of thousands of males in their teens and early 20s will be unable to find Korean wives.

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

Korea is not alone when it comes to bride shortages. Other Asian countries with strong son preference, particularly China and India, also face serious bride shortages. For example, China's sex ratio at birth in 2005 was 118 and there are an estimated 30 million extra men in China. The number of extra males in India may be within the same range (see Hudson and Den Boer 2005). As of 2002, other countries with high sex ratios at birth were Guam with 114, Taiwan 110, China 109, and Singapore 108. What this portends is increasing competition to lure brides in countries suffering from bride shortages, particularly China, India, Korea, and Taiwan.

The Korean government has discouraged abortions in general and sex-selective abortions in particular. In fact, abortion has been illegal in Korea, except in cases of pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, involving deformities of fetuses, and endangering the lives of pregnant

women. And doctors are prohibited from informing the mothers about the sex of the fetus. The harshest penalty for violating this law for doctors is loss of their license to practice, but no doctor has ever been “convicted” to that degree of penalty. Thus far no country has successfully prevented sex-select abortions.

The issue of bride migration in Korea is further complicated by the growing number of bi-ethnic/bi-racial children from “international marriages.” Among the offspring of inter-racial and inter-ethnic unions, the most numerous are offspring of Korean individuals and persons of other Asian heritage. They are called Kosians, with the prefix “Ko” deriving from the term “Korean” and the suffix “sians” from the term “Asians.” Estimates vary, but their number reportedly stood at around 50,000 as of the end of 2006. Nearly a third of all children born in 2020 are expected to be Kosians and their accumulated total will soar to 1.67 million or 3.3 per cent of the population by that year (JoongAng Daily 2006). In addition, the number of bi-ethnic/bi-racial children in elementary and secondary school reached 13,445 in 2007, up 68.1 per cent from the previous year (7,998). The proportion of bi-ethnic/bi-racial children in total enrollment is expected to rise to 16 per cent in 2118 and to more than 870,000 or 26 per cent in 2050. Elementary textbooks will soon include a section on bi-ethnic/bi-racial children and multicultural families, highlighting the need to understand their cultural backgrounds and to develop more tolerant attitudes toward them. This is a major change from the emphasis on ethnic homogeneity, which presented Korea as a consanguineous community comprised of the descendants of one common ancestor. Major television networks have started to program shows featuring immigrant brides and multicultural families. Evidently, Korean society is starting to implement measures to accept the multicultural reality, at least for those who share “Korean blood.”



Bi-ethnic and bi-racial children in Seoul

## Multicultural Korea: Issues and Implications

This article sheds light on several important issues in the study of international migration, and reveals many implications for broader theoretical debate in the field. First, in congruence with neoclassical economics, those who come to Korea as unskilled migrant workers are from developing countries, prompted by differentials in wages and employment conditions. Push-pull factors also play a role in prompting international migration, including by foreign

brides. Consonant with world systems theory, international migration to Korea can be seen as an impact of economic globalization in which an ever-increasing number of people are incorporated into the world economy, ultimately engendering migration flows. The historical-structural approach is also applicable, since Korea, having achieved remarkable economic development in the last four decades, is utilizing labor importation/migration to mobilize labor. In addition, hypergamy, i.e., marrying someone of higher status, is evident for most of the foreign brides who marry Korean men, the vast majority coming from relatively poorer countries in Asia.

The Korean case points to a new trend: the regionalization of international migration. The influx of foreign workers and brides illustrates the growing predominance of intra-Asian migration as opposed to the early postwar decades in which the primary Korean migrant flows were to North America. The region's persisting economic disparities and demographic differentials—i.e., the declining labor supply due to rapid aging in the more developed economies, and the large pool of the economically active population in less developed countries—suggest that international migration will continue. What will be different is that the destination will increasingly be within the Asian region. As Asia further transforms itself as a region of growth and prosperity, intra-regional immigration is likely to increase even more, given geographical proximity and cultural similarities between the migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries. The increasing economic and cultural integration of the Asian region will facilitate this trend.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has examined factors that are making Korea a multiethnic society, as the inflow of migrant workers addresses labor shortage resulting from rapid aging and low fertility. The rapid rise in intermarriage, initially limited to farmers and blue-collar workers, will proliferate into wider social classes as the decades-long practice of son-preference results in a shortage of females. As a consequence, interracial and interethnic births are on the rise. Taiwan, which seems to be ahead of Korea by about ten years in experiencing labor importation and bride importation, provides a glimpse into changes that are in store for Korea in the near future: cross-border marriages accounted for 20.1 per cent of total marriages in Taiwan in 2005 (the figure reached its peak in 2003 when it was 31.9 per cent), while births of bi-ethnic and bi-racial children accounted for 12.9 per cent of total births (Kojima 2006).

These patterns generally correspond to the five general trends in international migration identified by Castles and Miller (2003, pp. 7-9): 1) the globalization of migration—more countries are affected by migration and migrants come from more diverse areas; 2) the acceleration of migration—international migration of people is growing across the globe; 3) the differentiation of migration—most countries have a range of types of immigration, including labor migration, refugees and permanent settlement; 4) the feminization of migration—women are playing a greater role in most types of migration, in both labor and marriage migration.; and 5) the growing politicization of migration—international migration is having a greater impact on domestic politics and national security policies of states as well as bilateral relationships among them. The growing multiethnic character of Korea is consistent with broad trends of migration; the growth in the number of migrant workers and foreign brides in Korea indicates the acceleration of migration; the influx of foreigners into Korea began with migrant workers, but expanded to include foreign brides, illustrating the differentiation of migration; in addition to the sizable number of female migrant workers, the growing number of foreign brides is emblematic of the feminization of migration; and the Korean government's

monitoring of labor-and bride-sending countries is indicative of the growing politicization of migration.

Despite all the indications that the country is rapidly becoming a multicultural society, the Korean government still insists on almost zero-immigration. In contrast to such “immigration countries” as the United States, Canada, and Australia that have extended citizenship to many new residents and encouraged their integration and assimilation, Korea remains a “non-immigration” country, much like Japan and many Western European countries, its policy objectives centering on controlling inflows, restricting long-term stays, discouraging permanent residence and limiting citizenship.

The current Lee Myung-bak government is continuing to promote the previous administration’s goal of changing policy toward foreigners from “control and management” to “understanding and respect.” But if changes in law are to be effective, there will have to be accompanying changes in the mindset and attitude of Koreans to embrace the multiethnic society that is emerging.

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## **Notes:**

[1] Flows of immigration from Korea to Japan have been minimal in the post-WWII period. A part of the reason for this is that Japan grants citizenship based on jus sanguinis or the law of blood, meaning that it ascribes citizenship by blood, not by place of birth (jus soli). This has made it difficult for Koreans in Japan to become full-fledged citizens and the discriminations against them has become popularly known in Korea.

[2] The focus of this article is on temporary migrant workers in post-war Korea. The earliest labor migration in modern Korean history actually took place at the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1903 and 1905, more than 7,000 Koreans migrated to Hawaii to work as laborers for sugar plantations. The contact between Koreans and recruiters for Hawaiian sugar planters was largely provided by American missionaries stationed in Korea at the time. These migrant workers came from a wide range of social classes. Later, during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), hundreds of thousands of Korean “migrant” workers were sent overseas by Japanese authorities to work in mines and factories and many others migrated to Manchukuo.

[3] It must be noted that even before the government formally began implementing labor-importing policies, a considerable number of transnational migrant workers were in Korea. This was a result of the fact that the Korean government eased conditions for tourist visas in preparations for the Asian Games in 1986 and the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

[4] The reasons for the low fertility rate in Korea include the following: 1) people are marrying

at older ages due to longer schooling and working; 2) more people are staying unmarried; 3) the stress of raising children, particularly due to education frenzy; 4) high living costs; 5) high education costs (Korea's per capita private spending on education is the second highest in the world after the United States); and 6) high childcare costs. A noteworthy fact about the relationship between the low fertility rate and high living costs is that Korean women with higher levels of educational attainment, hence higher socio-economic class, actually have higher fertility rates (around 1.5 for women with college education and less than 1 for those with elementary education). This is at odds with a universal trend which shows that educational attainment is negatively correlated with fertility rate, meaning that the higher the educational attainment, the lower the fertility rate.

[5] Both of the patterns, i.e., migration of mainly unskilled Asian laborers and foreign brides, took place earlier in Japan.

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