



SOUTH KOREA'S MIGRANT POLICIES AND DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES AFTER THE CANDLELIGHT MOVEMENT

By Darcie Draudt

Abstract

South Korea's deliberate liberalization of migration controls has facilitated the entry and stay of new types of residents from various ethnic, political, and national backgrounds. With this demographic shift comes new questions for the South Korean polity in terms of its expectations of rights and duties of residents in the country. South Korean citizenship has, until the past decade, been largely premised on belonging in two fields: shared ethnic descent and contributions to the nation-state development project. However, new residents, who are ethnically diverse and who contribute to the national project, are seeking greater rights and social welfare provisions just as Korean nationals are ambivalent about their inclusion in the democratic body politic. As a result, the migrant policies bring into sharper relief the contours of democratic discourse in South Korea today. Drawing from six months of immersive fieldwork conducted in South Korea, this paper analyzes the relevance of migrant rights and expectations in understanding the broader democratic challenges in South Korea. Examining the government's institutionalization of certain migrant "categories"—namely, temporary labor migrants and so-called "marriage migrants"—the paper argues that South Korea's treatment of diversity and the protection of individual rights should be analyzed more deeply to understand current trends in South Korean civil society and democracy.

Key Words: *South Korea, democratic deepening, citizenship, migration policy, demography*

Introduction

South Korea's deliberate liberalization of migration controls has facilitated the entry and stay of new types of residents from various ethnic, political, and national backgrounds. With this demographic shift comes new questions for the South Korean polity in terms of its expectations of rights and duties of residents in the country. South Korean citizenship has, until the past decade, been largely premised on belonging in two fields: shared ethnic descent and contributions to the nation-state development project.¹ However, new residents, who are ethnically diverse and who contribute to the national project, are seeking greater rights and social welfare provisions just as Korean nationals are ambivalent about their inclusion in the democratic body politic. As a result, the migrant policies bring into sharper relief the contours of democratic discourse in South Korea today. Numerous studies of political development in the developmental states of East Asia have demonstrated how the focus on procedural rather than substantive democracy has occluded serious popular and policy discussion about the character of democracy in these post-developmental states.² This paper aims to dig into these gaps by addressing a new phenomenon emerging in South Korea, namely, the large variety of new residents—some status citizens, some not; some with familial ties to Korean families, some not—in the nation-state who bring to the fore new questions and puzzles about what it means to be a member of South Korea's democracy today.

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This paper takes a holistic approach to understanding shifts in Korea’s foreigner policies. It examines how the government’s institutionalization of certain migrant “categories”—namely, temporary labor migrants and so-called “marriage migrants”³—has unsettled the original terms of citizenship in modern South Korea. Specifically, the paper argues that in order to better understand impending challenges for citizenship in South Korea’s democracy, South Korea’s treatment of diversity and the protection of individual rights should be analyzed more deeply to understand current trends in South Korean civil society and democracy.

This paper draws from six months of immersive fieldwork conducted in South Korea to describe and analyze the relevance of migrant rights and expectations in understanding the broader democratic challenges in South Korea. First, it provides an overview of Korean citizenship by outlining the terms of membership in the nation-state as well as the rights and duties that comprise the nation-state project since democratization. Shifting to the contemporary foreigner policies, it then examines the “frames” that policy elites⁴ have used to establish and revise migrant policies. These frames are put in conversation with the two sets of earlier frames vis-à-vis minority group rights in South Korea to suggest why further expansion of rights is unlikely to gain popular reception. The approach to understanding the issues at hand are analytical, not normative. However, the content of the paper will certainly have implications for ethical and political discussions about South Korea’s democratic values going forward. Some of these will be discussed further in the conclusion.

Citizenship and Democracy in South Korea

Understanding citizenship and democracy in South Korea must begin by examining its historical context. As has been argued in greater detail elsewhere, the nation-building project of post-war South Korea has had an indelible impact on the narrative of South Korean citizenship.⁵ At its core, being a South Korean has been first premised on sharing Korean blood and being part of the “imagined community”⁶ of ethnic homogeneity, common descent, and cultural practices that transcends modern nation-state borders to include, in different fashions, brethren in the North as well as members of the Korean diaspora in North America, China, central Asia, and beyond. The consummate developmental state, South Korea had the political capacity to impress upon society the state’s developmentalist logic in order to successfully carry out their project.⁷ Naming the economic

and security battle with North Korea and backed by the protection and financing of the United States, the South Korean military dictatorship under Park Chung-hee used “Koreanness”—ethnically limited—to unite and motivate a workforce that would be loyal to the modern nation-state and obliged to labor for national development.⁸

During this era of modern South Korean history, individual rights were contingent on contributions to the state’s developmental objectives.⁹ In the classic European imagining of citizen rights conferral that still forms the backbone of citizenship scholarship today, rights were won by working men in an evolutionary fashion: first civil rights, then political rights, then social rights.¹⁰ The logic of the conventional progression of rights was usurped in the South Korean case: The South Korean autocratic state provided social provisions in exchange for citizens forfeiting claims to civil and political rights (save the right to work). The state cared for its citizen-workers, the citizen-workers benefited economically (at the individual or national level), and resistance to that arrangement was met with overt or covert retribution through a pervasive system of coercive institutions.¹¹

This state-citizen trade-off has been conceptualized as *developmental citizenship*, wherein citizens “have expected the state to concentrate on economic development so they [the citizens] can *benefit as private economic players*—be they workers, industrialists, or self-employed entrepreneurs—in the market system.¹² The result has been a “path dependent” mindset for a citizenry:

...for whom progressive political alternatives such as comprehensive social citizenship have never been historically experienced with serious theories, ideologies, or substances. Hence, developmental revivalism [that is, the desire for a full return to developmental citizenship] has failed to clearly alleviate diverse tendencies of personal and social withdrawal—including labor market desertion, marriage aversion, suicide, etc., all at alarming rates.¹³

In other words, the economic liberalization that coincided with democratic consolidation in the 1990s—and which was exacerbated by the 1997 Financial Crisis and its fallout—left mainstream citizens outside the economic field of citizenship. In fact, the continued close relationship between big business and government through the 2000s has arguably led to further disenfranchisement of workers. The focus on economic development led to neoliberal policies that relaxed restrictions on temporary workers which, coupled with continued



mechanization of production, further increased unemployment and underemployment.¹⁴ In the developmental state “citizen-making may mean a disciplinary social process in which citizens experience state rule as caring for them as a population and as individuals.”¹⁵ But in the post-developmental state confronting an economic downturn, residents cannot find employment, and the state-citizen social contract (wherein individual productivity results in inclusion and protection) is likewise broken.

Discussions of changing national identity often uphold the now-outmoded divide between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism.¹⁶ As other political scientists and scholars of nationalism have argued, this sort of divide is a bit of a straw man not only because the two “categories” are not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive of membership in a nation-state.¹⁷ Instead of the culturally constructed civic-ethnic divide, looking at *fields* of membership in the nation-state can better analyze the substance of state-individual relationship. Moving past merely explaining the legal terms of status citizenship (e.g., who can hold a passport or who can vote), looking at the relational placement on different fields of membership allows greater analytical understanding into the variations of a country’s residents; why certain people can hold passports or work in full-time jobs or vote or stay in a place and how that changes over time. This paper focuses on two types of national membership relevant to the case of citizenship in South Korea. The ethnocultural field has been the traditional focus of studies of Korean citizenship and identity.¹⁸ A separate academic literature, mostly sociological or anthropological, has looked at how workforce participation affects individual identity in South Korea, particularly in response to state views of membership in the national project. Observing the two in tandem helps to better analyze the complex and path-dependent contours of state-society relations.¹⁹

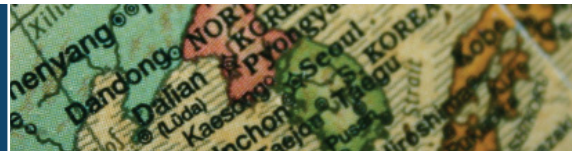
Mainstream Politics and Minority Group Rights in South Korea

The 1980s democratization movement rerouted the terms of citizenship in South Korea. While the conditions for its success are still debated and outside the scope of this paper, it is worth noting here that at least part of the movement’s success drew from its being large-scale, in a sense serving the “lowest common denominator” of claims for rights. The democratization movement in the 1980s, compared to earlier instantiations in South Korea, was large-scale, centralized, and served the majority of smaller groups’ claims. The movement brought together South Koreans of different socioeconomic classes—

poor, middle, and upper-class intelligentsia. Importantly, the movement also exploited coalitions of NGOs, religious groups, and youth organizations including high school and university student groups, many of whom were on the front lines of protesting.²⁰ Despite encompassing so many of South Koreans’ claims for political and civil rights, the large-scale movement strategically incorporated marginalized groups to empower the movement, while also dispensing those smaller groups’ particular rights claims. This meant that efforts for minority protections—coming from the voices of feminists and other women’s groups, leftist labor unions, disability activists, and others—were watered down or even dismissed by the popular counter-regime movement.²¹ Smaller movements that seek to expand such rights in South Korea historically have often been subsumed by larger movements against corruption or by ideological conflict between South Korea’s conservative-progressive divide.²²

The historic treatment of marginalized groups seeking greater official recognition and legal protection is important when analyzing South Korea’s democratic challenges, as it sets the frame for successful social movements that challenge national politics—in this case, particular rights claims—in South Korea. Its resonance can be seen in contemporary national politics in South Korea. Despite the success of the 2016 candlelight movement in ensuring accountability of government officials, the claims made were essentially increased scrutiny of corruption, not of the rights of individuals in South Korean democracy. This point is often overlooked in popular accounts of the protests and Park Geun-hye’s impeachment that laud how far the young democratic country has evolved since moving past decades of dictatorship in 1989.²³ Indeed, South Korea’s mass mobilization effort that resulted in removing a president from office does signify the country’s status as a procedural democracy—or, in Robert Dahl’s classic minimalist definition, a political regime that exhibits full participation of citizens and full rights to participate in elections and hold office.²⁴

But, accountability to voters and the institutional checks on politician corruption is only one aspect of analyzing regime trajectory and assessing the extent of democratic deepening for a given state. South Korea professes to be a *liberal democracy*²⁵—by definition, one that promotes not only free elections, separation of powers, rule of law, and a market economy with private property, but also equal protection of human rights, civil rights, and civil liberties. The difficulty of protecting minorities challenges all democracies. As political scientists Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl wrote, “The most



common and effective way of protecting minorities, however, lies in the everyday operation of interest associations and social movements.²⁶ Historical movements for political change in South Korea, as discussed above, have sidelined movements seeking to promote minority issues. Contemporary movements in South Korea that do seek to make claims on behalf of marginalized and minority groups—including various migrant groups, Korean adoptees, North Koreans living in South Korea, the disabled, the homeless, women, and LGBTQ issues—have not coalesced into a broader movement and cannot refer to larger claims for individual rights.²⁷

The basis on which each migrant group claims rights and recognition benchmarks different aspects of Korean citizenship. The differences in these bases have precluded any sort of alliance or joint movement. Research conducted about North Koreans living in South Korea, for example, has found that these defector-migrants largely base their claims as belonging and access to official rights and provisions based on their shared blood and pre-modern heritage with mainstream South Koreans. Not only are these claims incommensurate with those of various migrant groups, including marriage migrants with Korean families by law, but the North Koreans actively juxtapose their sense of Koreanness with those of the migrants, claiming that theirs is “closer,” more authentic, or more justified.²⁸ As discussed below, this differentiated hierarchizing of what constitutes “Koreanness” is at the very crux of the contemporary debate about not only the foreigner plans and migrant policies in South Korea, but also gets to the heart of the dissonance about what it means to be a *member* of the Korean (ethnic) nation as well as a *citizen* of South Korean democracy.

Immigration Policies in South Korea

With a decreasing birth rate and an aging population, Korea is among the most rapidly aging societies in the world. Fertility has quickly declined from an average of six children per woman in the 1960s to 1.2 children in 2005.²⁹ This demographic trend has serious implications for the country’s economy, as the number of citizens able to participate in the work force is dwindling and the increased burden for elderly care is put on those in younger age cohorts. Demographers project Korea will face a 9 percent

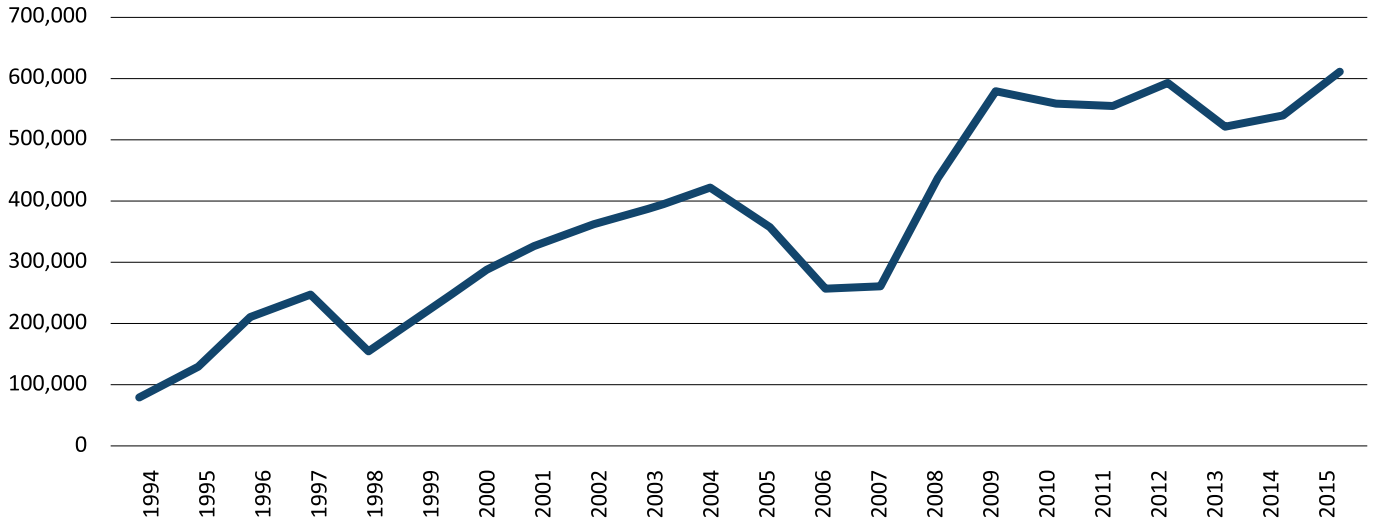
decline in its working-age population from 2005 to 2030, and a further decline of 26 percent from 2030 to 2050.³⁰ To maintain the 2015 ratio of workers per retiree, demographers suggest that the retirement age in Korea will need to be deferred until age 80.³¹ Fertility decline in Korea has been attributed to greater female educational attainment and workforce participation.³² Some efforts have been made to address the structural or social factors, such as supporting women’s participation in the workforce. However, the South Korean government frames the demographic problem as an economic one, and correspondingly has used immigration as a quick fix to gaps in the labor market and the “bride shortage.”³³ The migration solution—to import temporary or short-term labor via strategic immigration policies—is likewise framed as an economic one, but implementation has met political reaction that not only unearths the political nature of immigration but also forces the Korean people and government agencies to confront the legacies of the country’s complex ethnic and economic components of citizenship practices.

Labor Migration Policy

Migration until the mid-2000s was managed on an ad hoc basis. In the 1980s and 1990s, low-skilled labor migrants were recruited at the company level to meet labor shortages in manufacturing and industrial sectors, including shipbuilding and construction. Faced with a growing influx of migrants who were falling through the legal cracks, the South Korean government introduced the Industrial Skill Trainee System in 1991 and grew into the Industrial Trainee Program (ITP) in 1993. Since beginning to import labor twenty years ago, the annual migrant worker population has grown six-fold (Figure 1). The ITP served small- and medium-sized enterprises (with 300 or fewer employees) in manufacturing and, from 1997, fisheries and construction. The ITP labor migrants—legally “trainees” and not “workers”—faced harsher conditions and lower pay than the Korean workers on the same floor. With support from religious groups and human rights NGOs, the migrants themselves organized the Migrants Trade Union (MTU). To draw greater attention to their harsh treatment and claims for legal protection, labor migrants in the mid-1990s staged several sit-in protests at Myeongdong Cathedral—an important visual symbol tied to Koreans’ own struggle for democracy a decade prior.



Figure 1: Total Migrant Workers in Korea

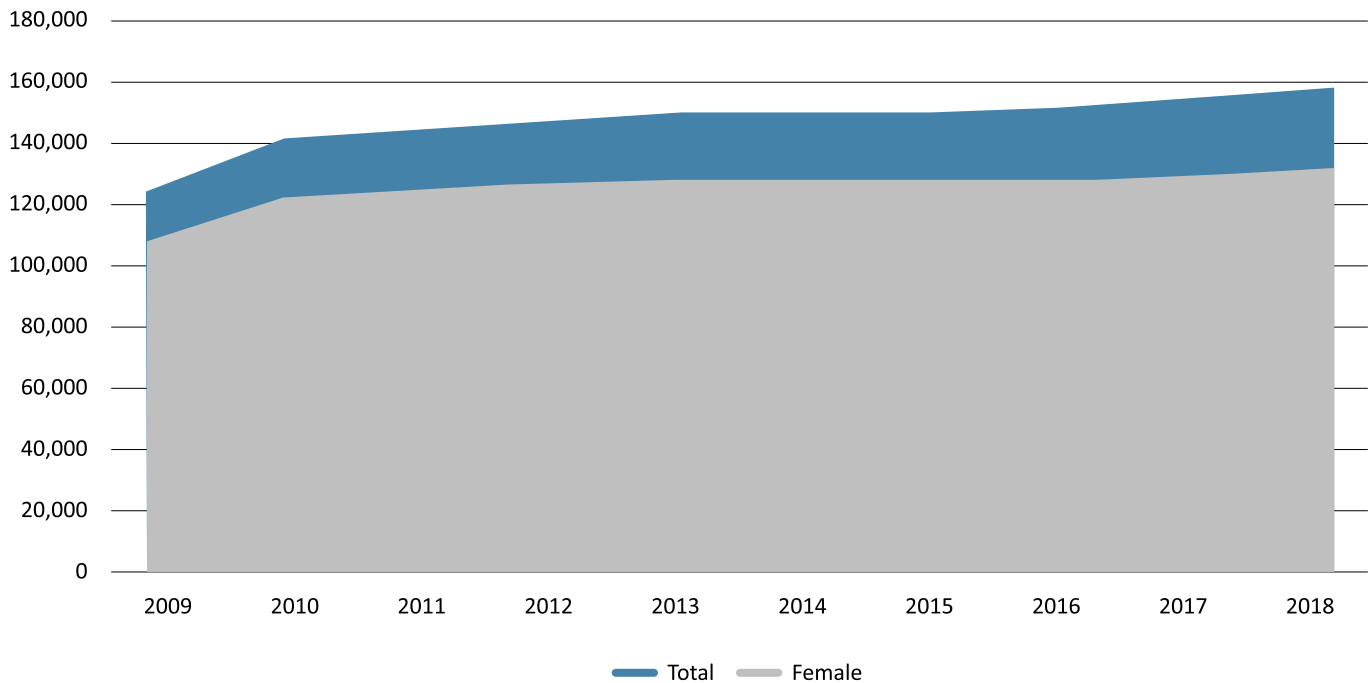


Source: Korean Statistical Information Service

Figure 2: Total Joseonjok Workers in Korea



Source: Korean Statistical Information Service


Figure 3: Women as the Majority of Marriage Migrants in Korea


Source: Korean Statistical Information Service

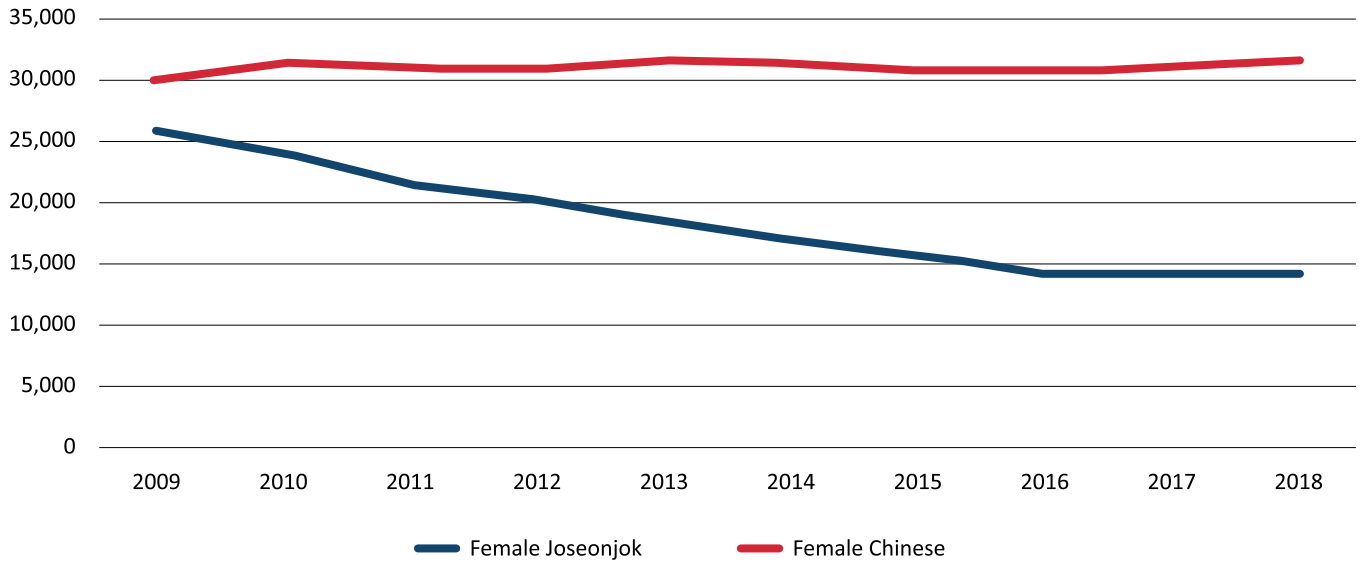
For its part, the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which represents Korean workers via industry unionism, initially resisted importing foreign labor, but later offered assistance via human capacity and strike funds to help mobilize protest rallies.³⁴ However, over time the MTU has lost its independence and has become subsumed under KCTU leadership, dependent on the latter's supervision and funding.³⁵ In 2003, the South Korean government overhauled its regime controlling labor migration, replacing the ITP with the Employment Permit System, which provides greater legal protection and oversight for the working conditions of foreign laborers. However, the program keeps the migrant's visa tied to his employer, a practice scrutinized by the UNHCR.³⁶ Moreover, the labor visas are given in one-year terms and are renewable until just shy of the five years needed to apply for long-term residency, which critics allege is an intentional legal barrier to long-term settlement of migrant laborers. One government strategy for alleviating domestic pressures against unskilled foreign workers has been to employ ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship, or *Joseonjok*, to assuage public and governmental concerns about integration. For the past ten years, approximately 40-50 percent of labor migrants each year have been *Joseonjok* (Figure 2).

Marriage Migrants

While comparatively a smaller portion of the migrant population, the government strategy provides special pathways for integration for foreign spouses, based on the perception that these new residents and their partially-Korean progeny will have longer-term effects on the Korean body politic. As other scholars have explained, Korea's growing regional visibility, greater relative level of economic development, and the influence of Korean cultural products in China and Southeast Asia has created a desire of many in those countries to move to South Korea. At the same time, South Korean demographic trends have also changed the patterns of marriage. In particular, more Korean women have moved to the city to find work and "marry up," and men in rural areas statistically find fewer people available for marriage partners.³⁷ The first wave of marriage migrants, in the early 2000s, was informal and handled by local governments and agricultural associations.³⁸ Since the mid-2000s, private companies specializing in international marriage (*gukjae kyeolhon*) provide matchmaking services, meet-ups in the potential spouse's host country, and counseling for the legal process of immigrating for marriage. Marriage migrants are overwhelmingly female (Figure 3) and most come from China (including *Joseonjok*) or Southeast Asia as well as Japan (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

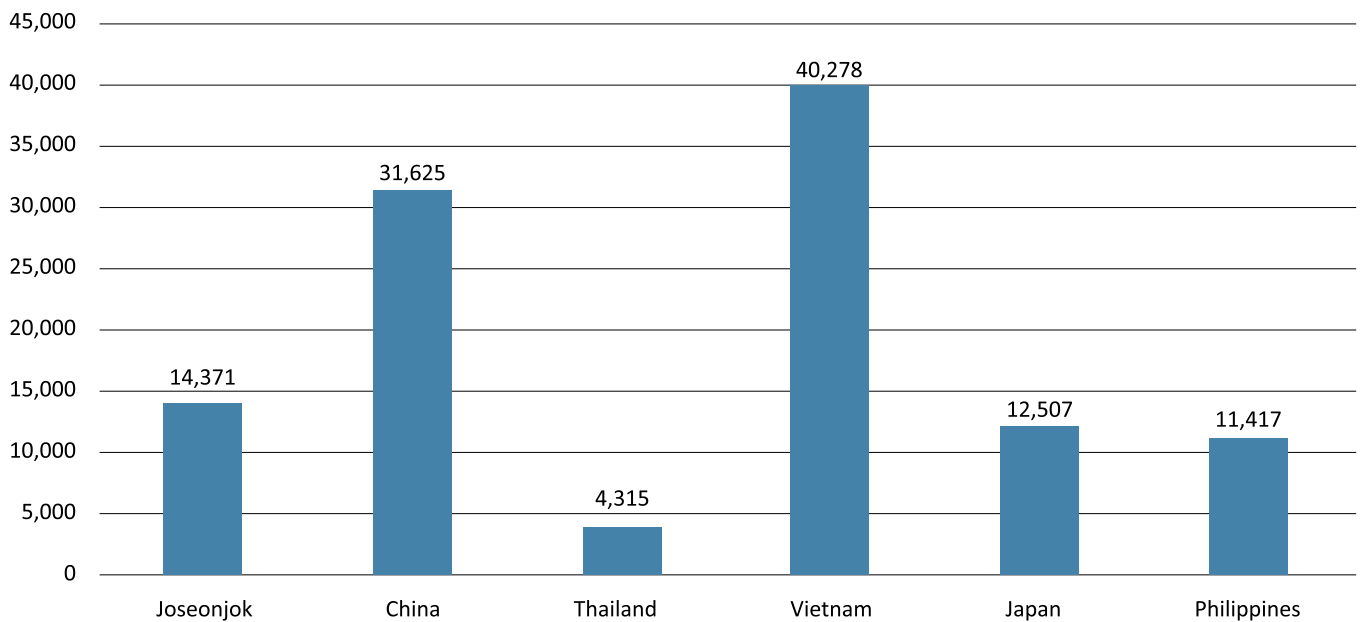


Figure 4: Female Joseonjok and Chinese Marriages to Korean Men



Source: Korean Statistical Information Service

Figure 5: Female Marriage Migrants in Korea (2018)



Source: Korean Statistical Information Service



Marriage migrants and their families have been gaining greater attention in South Korea since 2006, when then President Roh Moo-hyun took an interest in the issue of migrants and their families, likening their struggles and contributions to those of other Korean minority groups. Roh created a Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion to investigate and recommend policy changes to accommodate the increase in ethnically dissimilar marriage migrants who were facing hardships integrating into their new Korean families. A neologism “*damunhwa*”, created by translating “multiculturalism” into Korean, emerged as part of the discourse surrounding who these mixed-race Koreans were and how they fit into the Korean citizenry. With it came new national- and city-level programming, including language and cultural classes, employment advising, daycare, and special libraries for migrants and their children. Governmental support for *Damunhwa* families (families with one immigrant parent) also includes financial support and educational assistance programming, a contentious point in contemporary South Korean politics, as some South Koreans view these families as getting preferential treatment and support in a time of growing inequality and educational competition. As a *JoongAng Ilbo* article reported in 2014, support for the multicultural families grew from about \$195,000 (200 million KRW) in 2005 to \$170 million (181 billion KRW) in 2014.³⁹

Similarly, popular awareness and attitudes toward mixed-race Koreans was also changing. The “homecoming” of the half-Korean football star Hines Ward was the watershed moment for mainstream attention to Korea’s *damunhwa*.⁴⁰ Ward is the son of an African American father and South Korean mother and was raised in the U.S. by his single mother. When his Pittsburgh Steelers won the U.S. NFL Super Bowl in 2006, Ward was named Most Valuable Player and met with great fanfare back in South Korea; where he was named an honorary Seoul citizen by then Mayor Lee Myung-bak and met with President Roh for a meal at the Blue House. In his own words, “The Korean community has supported my mother and I for the first time in my life,” Ward said at the news conference.⁴¹

Despite this growing visibility, the programming related to *damunhwa* concepts are in fact narrowly defined to serve as a descriptive category, denoting the marriage migrants and their partially-Korean children. In effect, the programming—which derives its legislative foundation from the 2008 Multicultural Families Support Act passed in the National Assembly—supports the integration of some foreigners, but not others. In a UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination discussion

about the country report for South Korea, Rapporteur Gay McDougall assessed that the Multicultural Families Support Act “stigmatized and excluded from support certain unions based on ethnocentric notions rather than extending programmes of support to all migrants.”⁴² South Korea’s official multicultural push, then, draws into sharper relief the conversation about belonging in the fields of membership—in democratic citizenship and the protection of minority groups—in South Korea.

Official Multiculturalism and Minority Rights in South Korea

One of the most puzzling aspects of South Korea’s relatively new foreigner plans is its nominal embrace of multiculturalism, which has been introduced as a new concept in Korean as *damunhwa*. The puzzle of Korea’s official adoption of *damunhwa* is even more striking when compared to the experience of nearby Japan, which has similar demographic challenges, strong sense of ethnic identity, and comparable political economic institutions. In Japan, changes in the migrant governance regime have been carried out at the local level, leaving spotty coverage for migrant rights and idiosyncratic pathways for legal integration.⁴³

South Korea’s foreigner plans were organized from the top down and overseen by the Ministry of Justice, making widespread controls formal nationally and, purportedly, at once. During the first decade of multi-ministerial Foreigner Plans, migrant governance has been described as a product of “bureaucratic competition,” using a variety of logical arguments to gain political support and budgetary control of different categories of migrants. Most notably, the Ministry of Justice retained leadership of immigration policy planning in the name of safety and security; the Ministry of Employment and Labor runs the Employment Permit System in order to monitor and regulate temporary workers in consideration of Korean businesses and employees; and the Ministry of Gender and Family Equality runs programming related to marriage migrants and their families in consideration of maintaining social cohesion with the traditional family unit as benchmark.⁴⁴ Following a decade of negotiation and practice, the result has been the bureaucratization of migrant control and limitations on citizen (and resident) discussion about *damunhwa*.

Worldwide, multiculturalism as a policy framework has mainly been utilized in two contexts: to govern in nation-states already comprised of different ethnic groups (e.g., Greece, Turkey, the Soviet Union) and to limit exclusion and promote tolerance in newly diversifying countries facing a critical mass of migration



flows (e.g., Canada, Australia, Germany, England, etc.).⁴⁵ The historical trajectories of these cases vary widely, largely based on each nation's experience with empire and colonization, modern immigration, and nation-state bordering. The effectiveness of multicultural frameworks and normative consequences are both up for debate. No discussion of multiculturalism can transpire without being bookended by the European experience: from Swiss writer Max Frisch's 1977 declaration that "We asked for workers; we got human beings instead," to German Prime Minister Angela Merkel's 2010 claim that multiculturalism has "utterly failed" and that immigrants need to do more to integrate into their host society.⁴⁶

The remarks of the latter—seen by German political observers as a placation to the more conservative people in her party⁴⁷—has been used to support what some have called the "assimilationist" policies of South Korea's foreigner plans. There is no *immigration* plan in South Korea, only *foreigner* plans, through its three successive five-year "Basic Plans for Foreigner Policies", which are produced by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with over a dozen other government agencies.⁴⁸ Bureaucrats and politicians still feel that "immigration" is a politically sensitive topic and, in their words, that the Korean public is not "ready" to become a country of immigration.⁴⁹ However, the migration trends say otherwise. According to the OECD, migration flows to South Korea increased an extraordinary 23 percent year-on-end—from 453,000 to 556,000—from 2017 to 2018.⁵⁰ That means that approximately 2.3 million foreigners resided in South Korea in 2018, or 4.1 percent of the overall population.⁵¹

To date, South Korea has implemented three successive Basic Plans for Foreigners (2008-2012, 2013-2017, and 2018-2022). As overviewed above, the official foreigner plans in South Korea target certain migrant populations and lock others into precarious visa regimes without many legal protections or social provisions. Mainstream attitudes toward migrants' social integration aside, South Korea's official *damunhwa* framework has in effect separated and hierarchized categories of migrants and families with migrant backgrounds. South Korean society shies away from legal or political categories for "minorities."⁵² Likewise, South Korean official foreigner plans likewise downplay racial and ethnocultural differences, instead focusing on social integration and economic contributions of the migrants.

Nora Hui-Jung Kim, associate professor of sociology at the University of Mary Washington, interprets South Korea to be a sort of norm-taker when it comes to immigration policy reforms, and that *damunhwa* is a means to improve South Korea's

standing.⁵³ There is a learning process from other countries that South Korea wants to benchmark. The opening salvos of the Foreigner Plans include a review of past South Korean policies as well as comparisons to other countries' immigration reform, especially drawing contrasts to traditional countries of immigration like Canada and Australia (which use a "cultural pluralist" framework) and more recent countries of immigration with homogenous domestic populations, like Scandinavian countries or Japan.

The limits of international norms in Korean migrant policymaking come to the fore when considering the 2018 case of Yemeni refugee treatment in South Korea. Around 550 Yemenis fleeing conflict embarked on a long journey that led them through Malaysia and to Jeju Island, an outcome made possible because of the 30-day visa-free entry system there. South Korea is a 1992 signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and adopted its own refugee law in 2013—the first Asian country to do so. The Yemenis' arrival prompted a popular backlash, fueled by media hype around "fake refugees"—highlighting xenophobic fear of the Yemenis being Muslim before being refugees.⁵⁴ Whether the veracity of their claims to asylum were "real" or not, South Koreans feared for their personal safety and social stability, and over 700,000 South Koreans signed a petition to the Blue House to expel the Yemeni refugees.⁵⁵ Historically (1994-June 2018), only 4 percent of asylum seekers in Korea were granted refugee status, and another 7 percent were accorded humanitarian status.⁵⁶ This example suggests that norms and international conventions only carry so much weight when it comes to the racialization of migration policy. Left in the cracks of migrant governance, the asylum-seekers cannot make successful claims for sojourn based on human rights and minority status.

The bureaucratization of South Korea's migrant governance under the Ministry of Justice has led to better control and protection of migrants, and also allowed politically unpopular "multiculturalism" to be feasible, while precluding wider claims for rights for the migrants and their offspring. Rather than being an issue relevant to the government as a whole, the political arena for contestation over migrant rights has been rather narrowly defined. Migrant policies and governance of diversity has fallen under the purview of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), with respective groups of migrants (including the Korean diaspora) and their offspring overseen by specific agencies or ministries under the MOJ including, notably, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) and the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL).⁵⁷ The dominant policy networks in South



Korea are comprised of bureaucrats, politicians, and researchers from elite universities and who share workplace histories. Many have been educated in North American or European universities, are armed with seminal normative arguments about multiculturalism (benchmarking or critiquing Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship*⁵⁸ is typical), and draw comparisons to cases of immigrant incorporation that succeeded and failed.

The bureaucratized patterns of governance and policy revision are important for consideration of South Korea's democratic challenges in the post-Candlelight era. As in other issue areas in South Korea's political economy, the national policymaking process for migration reform is insulated from civil society action. Moreover, the institutionalized programming and budget afforded to migrant categories—especially the *damunhwa* families—make cross-group alliances difficult to form. Governance dispersed across ministries and other government agencies are difficult to for civil society actors to target, especially marginalized groups that make up small voting bases. As discussed above, civil society movements that have been historically successful in formalizing lasting political change in South Korea were largescale and mainstream. Furthermore, the highly bureaucratized governance of migrants illustrates another aspect of the relatively autonomous state in contemporary South Korean democracy. South Korea's national strategies all originate within the Blue House. In other words, migrant governance in South Korea today suggests the continuing “developmental” factors in South Korea's political economy.

Conclusion

South Korea, like other small post-industrial societies, faces an increasingly acute demographic crisis: a rapidly aging population and declining birthrate foreshadow further decreases in working-age population. Sixty percent of Korea's post-industrial workforce is employed in the services sector, but its economy still maintains strong industrial and agricultural sectors in need of imported labor. To meet these gaps in the labor market as well as the shortages in the so-called “bride market” (the imbalance between men and marriage-age women, mainly in smaller cities and rural areas), this framework suggests that the Korean government has found it advantageous to recruit and support stable flows of immigrants. The migrant policy will be

in effect for the near- to mid-term. As such, how South Korea treats its migrant populations is not only inherently important, but it also can resonate in its bilateral relations with sending countries as well as its international reputation in global governance organizations, particularly those where human rights are scrutinized.

The question of liberal rights is one that the South Korean populace will need to adjudicate itself. The fact that marginalized populations are gaining new and expanded avenues for voice and protest (including social media and alliances with transnational rights organizations) is and will continue to be a factor in South Korea's democratic future, particularly as South Korea's millennials enter decision-making positions in the near future. With foreigners at 4 percent of the population, South Korea's demography is already changing. Moreover, as of this year, one million biracial Korean children (or, “children from multicultural backgrounds”) are in the South Korean school system—about one in 50 students nation-wide. While migrant rights are only one type of minority rights claims in South Korea, the possibility of new alliances between marginalized groups making claims for further protections against discrimination and recognition of their differences is likely in the near future.

The debate over citizenship and belonging in South Korea has broader resonance, given the worldwide retreat from multiculturalism and rising xenophobic populism in the supposedly “liberal” West. Theories of immigrant incorporation in homogenous and non-Western societies tend to credit the diffusion of Western-derived liberal norms of tolerance regarding ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity for changes to immigrant incorporation regimes. More than merely a liberal norm laggard that is catching up to international norms, the policy debates in South Korea demonstrate that immigrant integration policies are not just debates that are “pro-immigration” vs. “anti-immigration”. Though the South Korean public is reticent toward opening the country to foreigners, national sentiment is relatively agnostic toward migrants—largely invisible in everyday life in South Korea, save for the debate over Yemeni refugees. South Korean policymakers have infused international norms regarding immigrant incorporation with legacies of strong centralized national planning and ethnic nationalism in the policymaking arena, and these lessons can inform leaders in other contexts.

Endnotes

- ¹ Darcie Draudt, "Multiculturalism as State Developmental Policy in Global Korea," in *Korea and the World: New Frontiers in Korean Studies*, ed. Gregg A. Brazinsky (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). See also Gi Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Kyung-sup Chang, "Economic Development, Democracy and Citizenship Politics in South Korea: The Precipitation of Developmental Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 1 (2012): 29–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X06005280>.
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- ⁴ In my study, policy elites comprise politicians, bureaucrats, academics, researchers, intelligentsia, and migrant advocates who are members of the policymaking network.
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- ¹¹ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
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