

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND MIGRATION IN EAST ASIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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I. INTRODUCTION

East Asian societies are experiencing a rapid social transformation due to population shrinking, aging, fertility decline, gender imbalance, and the concomitant inflow of foreign nationals through labor migration and interethnic marriages. The influx of migration sets to accelerate social change by bringing different cultures to more homogeneous mono-ethnic societies such as Japan, South Korea (hereafter Korea), and Taiwan.¹ With the shrinking of the economically active population due to a rapid decline of fertility and an aging population, the governments have to address the problem of subsequent domestic labor shortages with the inflow of labor migration to fill the gap between the demand and supply of labor. In addition to the domestic need for labor, migration could naturally occur across Asian borders due to a

¹ Korea had over 1 million foreign residents, exactly 1,145,660 by the end of June, 2008, composing of around 2.36 4 percent of the total population of 48.5 million. In the last ten years, the number has been almost tripled from 386,972 in 1997. It is projected to have 1.5 million by 2012. Japan had around 2 million foreign residents composing of 1.6 percent of the total population of 127 million by the end of 2005. Among them, almost a million are Koreans and Chinese. Japan is expected to rapidly decline its total population size and thus has to overcome prejudices against foreigners and open the doors to immigration for are rapidly becoming matters of national survival. Taiwan with the population size of 23 million also shows the similar pattern of demographic transition due to a rapid decline of fertility and population ageing, which in turn attracts a rapid influx of foreign labor of 346,000 in 2007. The three East Asian societies show the similar patterns of population transition, the concomitant inflow of migration, and migration-related governance and policy, but reveal differences in local contexts.

widening difference in income between the countries.² It is obvious that labor migration across borders can be attributed to the combined factors of income disparity and population dynamics.

Not only the influx of labor migration, but also international marriages are the second significant inflow of migration and become a new force for the opening of mono-ethnic East Asian societies (Constable, ed. 2005; Douglass, 2008; Drumm, 2001).³ They began to grow in the 1980s, first in rural areas and then rapidly increased in urban areas. The marriage industry is seizing on a marriage market and sending comparatively affluent bachelors searching for brides in the regions of China, Southeast, and Central Asia. In particular, gender imbalance due to son preference in Confucian based societies has led to the shortage of potential brides and created a disproportionate number of men. A surplus of bachelors, a lack of marriageable brides, and the rising social status of women have combined to shrink the domestic marriage market for males.

The drastic change in demographic composition and the concomitant inflow through labor migration and international marriages reflects how the nation is fast becoming a multicultural and multiethnic society and importantly it also indicates that accepting ethnic diversity has become inevitable in a society (E. Kim, 2005; S. Lee, 2008). In order to govern the inflow of foreign

² According to World Bank (2006), rich countries had incomes about 10 times greater than the poorest ones. In recent years, the ratio went up to about 50 times. In the region of East Asia, the path of intra-Asian migration to the three rich countries has been intensified. On the other hand, those poor countries behind in the spectrum of economic achievement struggle to find employment for ever-expanding populace (Martin et al., 2006). For example, the Philippines is Asia's biggest source of labor migration with some 8 million - more than 10 percent of the total population working abroad.

³ In 2000, there were 36,263 international marriages in Japan, or 4.5 percent of the total registered marriages. It is six and a half times the figure just 30 years ago. In the last decade, the number of Chinese spouses rose about tenfold. Korea tripled the number of international marriages from 3.7 percent in 2000 to 13.6 percent of the total marriages in 2005. Taiwan also shows a rise in international marriages over the past decades. Of Taiwan's 23 million population, 388,000 foreign-born brides were mainly from southeast Asia and mainland China in 2007. According to Eyton (2003), almost half of them came from mainland China for marriage in Taiwan. On

nationals residing in each society, the government proposes a series of migration policies to facilitate and regulate the inflow of foreign nationals. Migration policies in the region, however, continue to be premised on temporary migration and the refusal to consider the integration of migrants (Asis, 2004; W. Kim, 2004; Lee and Park, 2005; Russell, 2003). Even as the number of migrant workers has rapidly grown, the three Asian countries remain deeply ambivalent⁴ about their presence and continue to keep exclusionary migration policies.

East Asian migration policies have been designed to facilitate labor migration but at the same time regulate labor imports on the basis of rotation. This means that migration policies prevent migrant workers from permanent residency, only allowing for temporary stay before returning to their countries (Asis, 2004; J. Kim, 2003, 2005; Lee et al., 2003; Lim, 2003). Foreign workers are supposed to be rotated simply to temporarily fill labor shortages at the workplaces where local workers have turned their backs to dirty, dangerous, and difficult (3-D) jobs in small- and medium-sized industries. Even though they have become an increasingly important component of economies across East Asia, migrant workers face institutional discrimination, human rights violation, and often exploitation at workplaces, including delayed payment (M. Lee, 2006; Liem, 2007; Lim, 2003; Narayan, 2006). The governance of migration in East Asia continues to maintain the exclusionary policy framework on the principle of temporality in admitting migrant workers, further preventing permanent settlement. In this vein, the flow of East Asian migration is only loosely and passively linked to local market conditions and further weakly connected to the dynamics of global migration. In order to obtain global competitiveness in the 21st century, the East Asian countries should build up a multi-layered framework of governance

⁴ It is generally argued that the inflow of migrant workers can induce some costs to the host country either by taking jobs or by lowering domestic wages. However, the influx of migration reduces rigidities in the labor market since they do not usually replace domestic workers, not putting any downward pressure on the overall wage level. In particular, high-skilled workers become great assets for global competitiveness.

to preemptively make migration transit into a symbiotic mutual form of coexistence in a society as well as to actively engage in an inter-state coordination for global migration dynamics.

II. MULTIPLE FRONTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTH KOREA: FERTILITY DECLINE, POPULATION AGING, AND GENDER IMBALANCE

Over the last half century, Korea attained the status of being a ‘model country’ of the East Asian miracle and pursued a series of modernization projects: economic development, political democratization, and national reunification (Kim and Song, eds. 2007; Kim et al., 2000). During this period, Korea experienced unprecedented change in every aspect of society. In particular, demographic changes could be one of the major dynamics Korea has ever experienced. A steep decline in the fertility rate is probably the most significant demographic change in the last four decades. Korea reached the lowest fertility rate of 1.08 in the world in 2005 from 6.2 in 1960, much lower than the 1.56 average for OECD countries in 2005 and significantly lower than the 2.1 needed to maintain the current population level. This decline was directly due to a rapid increase of female labor force participation and late marriages. It was also related to socioeconomic changes brought by the rapid economic development, the aftermath of the economic crisis in 1997, and the legacy of the family planning program still deeply rooted in Korean society. Coupled with a rapid decline of fertility, increased longevity has swollen the ranks of the older population. As shown in Table 1, Korea thus raised the average age of the population rose from 23.1 in 1960 to 33.1 in 2000 and is projected to be 53.4 by 2050.

Korea has fewer young people and more elderly than ever before. The population of 0-to-14 year olds decreased to 19.2 percent of the total population in 2005, from 42.3 percent in 1960; the elderly population increased to 9.1 percent in 2005 from 2.9 percent in 1960. In this transition, Korea reached an aging society as of July 1, 2000 when more than 7 percent of its total population

was sixty-five years or older. By 2018, Korea is expected to become an aged society with its projected elderly population at more than 14 percent of its total population and a post-aged society by 2018 when the elderly population will account for 20 percent of the total population. In this rapid transition, Korea is expected to have 38.2 percent of the elderly population which is the highest in the world by 2050. By that time, Japan and Italy show 36.5 and 34.4 percent of the elderly population, while the global average is 15.9 percent. This rapidly changing pattern of age structure shows that Korea is projected to take 18 years to move from an aging society to an aged society, much faster than the experience of other developed nations.⁵ In relation to this demographic transition, Korea is also on the rise of celibacy and childlessness in a very rapid rate due to surging real estate prices and education costs. This indicates that Korea is now experiencing the world's quickest aging society. Increases in age and decreases in the economically active population have dramatically affected workforce dynamics, depleting the labor force as well as reducing economic viability.

Table 1: Changes in Age Structure

unit: 1,000/ %

	1960	1980	2000	2005	2018	2030	2050
0 - 14	(42.3)	12,951(34.0)	9,911(21.1)	9,241(19.2)	(12.7)	(11.4)	(8.9)
15-64	(54.8)	23,717(62.2)	33,702(71.7)	34,530(71.7)	(72.9)	(64.4)	(53.0)
65 and over	(2.9)	1,456(3.8)	3,395(7.2)	4,367(9.1)	(14.3)	(24.3)	(38.2)
Average Age	23.1	25.9	33.1	35.5	41.8	46.7	53.4

Source: National Statistical Office (NSO) (2008).

⁵ According to NSO (2008), France took 115 years to reach an aged society in 1979 from the aging society in 1864; Italy took 61 years from an aging society in 1927 to an aged society in 1988; Germany took 40 years from 1932 to 1972; Japan took 24 years from 1970 to 1994 to reach an aged society; US is projected to take 73 years to reach an aged society by 2015.

After entering the 1990s, Korea showed the pattern of rising sex ratios despite socioeconomic changes of a rapid rise of female education and labor force participation. As shown in Table 2, this imbalanced sex ratio peaked in around 1990 due to newly introduced sex-selection technology (Park and Cho, 1995). On average, there have been unbalanced sex ratios at birth at least from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. After early 2000, there has been a steady decline of sex ratios on average and Korea is now to reverse the trend in rising sex ratios at birth (Chung and Das Gupta, 2007). However, sex ratios at third and fourth births still show much unbalance reflecting the continuity of Confucian-based son preference in Korean society.

Table 2: Sex Ratio at Birth

unit: per 100 females

	1981	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2020	2025
Total births	107.2	109.5	116.5	113.2	110.2	107.7	108.2	106.4	106.0
First birth	106.3	106.0	108.5	105.8	106.2	104.8	105.8	105.0	105.0
Second birth	106.7	107.8	117.0	111.7	107.4	106.4	106.7	105.4	105.2
Third birth	107.1	129.0	188.8	177.2	141.7	127.7	128.4	122.1	120.2
Fourth birth +	113.5	148.2	209.2	203.9	167.5	132.6	136.1	127.0	124.1

Source: NSO (2008)

As Table 3 indicates, those who were born around the 1990s are in three age cohorts from 5 to 19 by 2005. The age cohort of 5 to 9 shows an unbalanced ratio of 109.21; the one of 10-14 shows the highest unbalanced ratio of 112.22 and next cohort is 110.33. Those in the cohort of 10-14 coincide with the 1990-1995 period, where the total number of male births had reached its height. Those cohorts will soon enter into the marriage market and experience a large saturation in which they will have to seek out brides from abroad.

Table 3: Sex Ratio by Age Cohort in 2005 %

	2005			
	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Sex ratio</i>
Total	47,041,434	23,465,650	23,575,784	99.53
0 – 4	2,382,350	1,237,301	1,145,049	108.06
5 – 9	3,168,887	1,654,228	1,514,659	109.21
10 – 14	3,434,891	1,816,318	1,618,573	112.22
15 – 19	3,100,523	1,626,378	1,474,145	110.33
20 – 24	3,662,123	1,915,902	1,746,221	109.72
25 – 29	3,671,847	1,858,332	1,813,515	102.47
30 – 34	4,096,282	2,059,913	2,036,369	101.16

Source: NSO (2008)

III. MIGRATION: MIGRANT WORKERS AND INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGES IN SOUTH KOREA

1. Historical Trend of Migration

Korea was originally a country of origin, sending workers to countries of destination such as Germany, the Middle East, and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1970s and early 1980s, many migrated to the Middle East during the construction boom. In the 1980s, more than 30,000 Koreans migrated abroad annually, but by 1993, the figure declined (S. Lee, 2008; Seol, 2005a; Yoo, 2004). Until the late 1980s, there had been almost no foreign migrant workers. Since then, Korea began experiencing a migration transition from being a labor donor to being a labor importer. Labor shortages called for the introduction of migrant workers in 1987, particularly serving in small- and medium-sized firms with 3-D jobs (Kwon, 2004; Park, 1994). The mid-1980s brought Korea a decelerated labor force growth as the rural labor surplus disappeared and the young economically active population shrunk. Labor shortages become more serious in smaller firms than in larger firms, and in unskilled jobs than in highly skilled jobs (Lee et al., 2003). In particular, after the financial crisis in 1997, the inflow of migrant workers into Korea was stagnated due to deportations and voluntary repatriation. However, it was short-

lived, since the labor shortage in the small-and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises continued to rely on migrant workers. As a consequence, the number increased rapidly since the 1990s with the largest increase in the inflow of ethnic Koreans from China. After entering 2000, Korea has become a country of destination, receiving over a half million foreign migrant workers.

1.1. Labor Migration

Korea had over 1 million foreign residents, exactly 1,145,660 by the end of June, 2008, composing of around 2.36 percent of the total population of 48.5 million. In the last ten years, the number has been almost tripled from 386,972 in 1997. It is projected to have 1.5 million by 2012. Among them, 47.4 percent are foreign workers. As shown in Table 4, in the last twenty years there has been a ninety-fold increase of foreign workers from 6,409 in 1987 to 542,670 in 2008, with a significant influx of migrant workers from 1993 to 1997. The total amount of foreign workers tripled in a mere three years and that number has since doubled. As Figure 1 shows, by the end of June 30, 2008, out of the half-million employed foreign workers including industrial trainees, almost 90 percent (89.8 percent) are ‘non-professional’ migrant workers with 65.0 percent (292,786) on working visit status (H-2 visa holders) and 33.4 percent (149,778) on employment permit status. A third of the authorized migrant workers are on an employment permit (149,778) and a small fraction work as entertainers (0.8 percent).

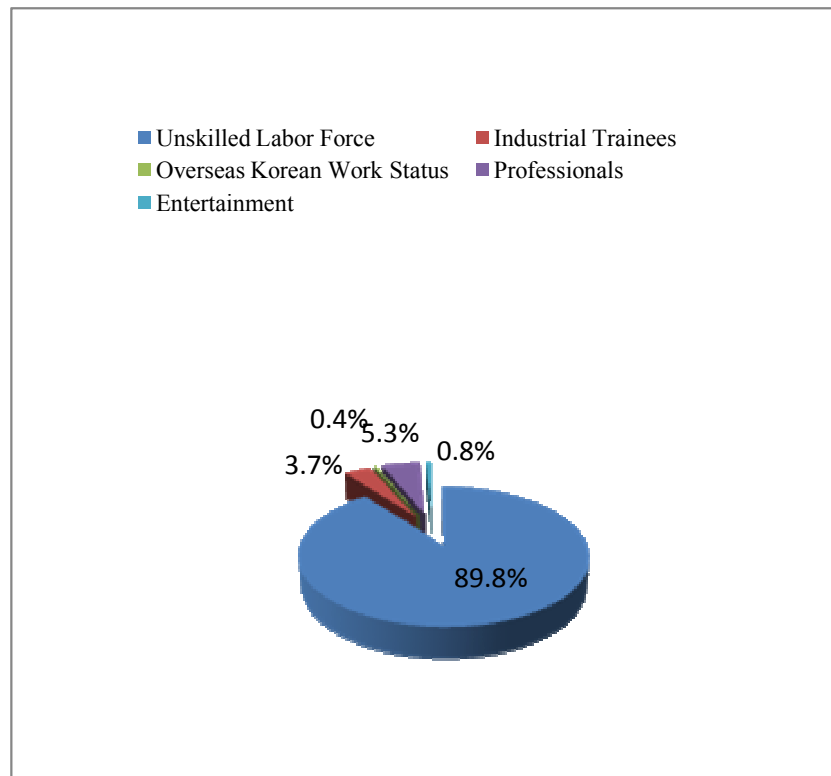
Table 4: Foreign Workers by Status as of June 30, 2008

	Professional	Non-professional		Unauthorized Foreign Workers	Total
1987	2,192			4,217	6,409
1990	2,833			18,402	21,235
1993	3,767	10,225		54,508	68,500
1995	8,228	38,812		81,866	128,906
1997	15,900	81,451		148,048	245,399
2000	17,000	79,511		188,995	285,506
2003	20,089	230,671		138,056	388,816
2008	29,027 ¹⁾ (5.34%) ²⁾	448,344 ³⁾ (89.8%)	3,226 ⁴⁾ (0.8%)	62,073	542,670 ⁵⁾

*Source: Korea Immigration Service (KIS) (2008 and various years);
Seol (2005a,b).*

Notes: ¹⁾ Among them, 18,062 are E-2 visa holders (foreign language instructor); ²⁾ Indicated in the parentheses is the percentage of the foreign workers; ³⁾ Among them, 292,786 are H-2 visa holders by the working visit system(WVS) and 149,778 through the employment permit system (EPS); ⁴⁾ Those who work for the entertainment business; and ⁵⁾ 2,029 (0.4%) F-1-4 visa holders (overseas Korean work status) and 21,210 (3.7%) D-3 visa holders (industrial trainees) are excluded from the total.

Figure 1: The Percentage of Foreign Workers by Occupation



In the percentage figure, the additional 3.7 percent of the half-million who work as industrial trainees (D-3 visa holders) or the 0.4 percent (2,029) who reside in Korea on ‘overseas Korean’ status (F-1-4 visa holders) are included. In comparison, 5.34 percent of the total number of foreign workers is ‘professionals,’

with almost 60 percent working as foreign language instructors (E-2 visa holders; otherwise known as the “teaching visa”).

Table 5: Foreign Residents by Nationality as of June 30, 2008

	2003 Total	2008 Total	Authorized Foreign Residents	Unauthorized Foreign Residents
China Korean Chinese	237,497	559,771 (325,976) 377,616 (299,384)	458,122 345,704	101,649 (18.2%) (9,347) 31,912 (8.5%) (8,715)
U.S.A	106,390	125,436 (8870)	119,390	6,046 (4.8%) (158)
Vietnam	24,908	78,948 (44,526)	62,856	16,011 (20.4) (9,245)
Philippines	32,451	50,129 (33,810)	35,788	14341 (28.6%) (7,565)
Thailand	27,545	45,956 (30,405)	30,578	15,378 (33.5%) 4,825
Mongolia	16,824	34,470 (15,477)	20,126	14,344 (41.6%) (4,093)
Japan	42,504	32,544 (1332)	31,589	955 (2.9%) (16)
Taiwan	25,725	26,113	24,977	1136 (4.4%)
Indonesia	31,475	25,722 (21,512)	19,636	6086 (23.7) (3,744)
Uzbekistan	14,712	21,421 (10,474)	12,299	9122 (42.6%) (2,391)
TOTAL	678,687	1,145,660		

Source: KIS (2008).

Note: The number in parenthesis is the number of foreign workers.

As shown in Table 5, the number of foreign residents from China doubled from 2003 to 2008, with almost 60 percent of that total number living in Korea as migrant workers . In particular, 325,976 Chinese residents were migrant workers in 2008. This is including the 377,616 ethnic Koreans from China, almost 80 percent of which reside in Korea today as migrant workers. In the year 2000, only 88,995 foreign residents out of the total number of 481,611 were working and living in Korea illegally, compared to the authorized 292,616 foreign residents who were living in Korea, 97 percent of which were registered as migrant workers. The number of foreign residents increased to 678,687 in 2003 and further to 1,145,660 in 2008, almost doubling up the size in a less than 10 years.

When looking at the total percentage of unauthorized foreign residents in 2008, Uzbekistan takes the lead with 42.6 percent, with Mongolia trailing behind at 41.6 percent, and Vietnam and China at 20.4 percent and 18.2 percent, respectively. Although Mongolia and Uzbekistan are recorded as having the highest percentage of authorized foreign residents, Vietnam in comparison is double the number than that of the Philippines, Mongolia, and Thailand, and five times than that of Uzbekistan when it comes to foreign residents who come to live in Korea legally (apart from the United States and China). The number of foreign residents has increased due to the inflow of foreign workers and the increase in international marriages.

1.2. International Marriages

With Korea's population shrinking and a gender imbalance, international marriages become a new force for the opening of a mono-ethnic country. International marriages began to grow in the 1980s in response to the emptying of the rural areas. According to NSO (2007), in rural areas with farms and fisheries, the percentage of international marriages went up from 35.9 percent to 41.0 percent. In the case of marriages between Korean men and foreign women in the rural farming sector, almost 70 percent were matched

with Vietnamese women in 2006 (Kim and Shin, 2008). Next was with Chinese women with 20.4 percent. This is due to a staggering decline of the male-female ratio. This trend is also expected to continue. However, today's growth in international marriages does not have any regional bias, but applies to all areas.

As shown in Table 6, during the past fifteen years, there has been an 11 times increase in the total number of international marriages, which reached 43,121 in 2005 and accounts for 13.6 percent of total marriages in Korea. The number of international marriages has increased from 3.7 percent of all total marriages in the year 2000, tripled to 13.6 percent of all marriages in 2005, and dropped to 11.1 percent in 2007. After the peak of 43,121 in 2005, it dropped to 38,491 in 2007, composed by a decrease of 3.1 percent of marriages between Korean men and foreign women and of 20.6 percent of marriages between Korean women and foreign men. This reduction was attributed to the inflow of Korean-Chinese after the introduction of the "Working Visitor System (WVS)," especially in the case of Chinese residents of Korean descent who sought to take advantage of the newly established visa entry system.

Table 6: International Marriage, 1990 – 2007.

Year	Total Marriages	International Marriages		Foreign Wives		Foreign Husbands	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1990	399,312	4,710	1.2	619	0.2	4,091	1.0
1995	398,484	13,494	3.4	10,365	2.6	3,129	0.8
2000	334,030	12,319	3.7	7,304	2.2	5,015	1.5
2001	320,063	15,234	4.8	10,006	3.1	5,228	1.6
2002	306,573	15,913	5.2	11,017	3.6	4,896	1.6
2003	304,932	25,658	8.4	19,214	6.3	6,444	2.1

2004	310,944	35,447	11.4	25,594	8.2	9,853	3.2
2005	316,375	43,121	13.6	31,180	9.9	11,941	3.8
2006	332,752	39,690	11.9	30,208	9.1	9,482	2.8
2007	345,592	38,491	11.1	29,140	8.4	9,351	2.7
1990- 2007		318,936		219,290 (68.76)		99,646 (31.24)	

Source: NSO, Population Statistics (Marriages) 2007

Gender imbalance has led to the shortage of potential brides and the thriving international marriage industry found in Korea. The marriage industry is seizing on an increasingly globalized marriage market and sending comparatively affluent Korean bachelors searching for brides in the poorer corners of China and Southeast and Central Asia. The marriage tours are fueling an explosive growth in marriages to foreigners in Korea, a country whose ethnic homogeneity lies at the core of its self-identity. More and more Korean men are finding wives outside of Korea, where a surplus of bachelors, a lack of Korean brides, and the rising social status of women have combined to shrink the domestic marriage market. A combination of factors such as the rising social status of Korean women and a surplus of bachelors resulting from a traditional preference for sons, is forcing many Korean men to seek brides from abroad, particularly from Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam, as well as Chinese-born Koreans from the rural areas.⁶

The profound implications of gender imbalance, which is considered one of the highest in the world, are as follows: As previously shown in Table 2 and 3, gender imbalance shows an average 100 females to every 113 males. As a consequence, those age cohorts from 5 to 15 years old born in the 1990s showed an unbalanced ratio in 2005. According to recent statistics, the ratio of

⁶ The Ministry of Health and Welfare is now moving to regulate the international marriage industry.

men to women in Korea is expected to increase at least three percent within the next 10 years. When these age cohorts get into the marriage market, this unbalanced ratio leads further to the inflow of foreign wives. It reflects how the nation is fast becoming a multicultural society.

When looking at the number of foreign husbands compared to the number of foreign wives from 1990 to 2007, one can see that females outnumbered males 2 to 1. Even more striking is the sharp contrast between males and females in the five year period between 1990 and 1995, the same time that Korea's imbalanced sex ratio peaked and began a steady decline of total births. As shown in Table 7, the international marriages hit its stride in 2005 when it reached 43,121, with an estimated 70 percent of those marriages being to foreign wives, and foreign males only accounting for one-fourth of that total number.

Table 7: International Marriages by Nationality (1990 – 2006)

		Japan	China	USA	Vietnam	Philippines	Mongolia	Uzbekistan	Total
Foreign Wives	1990 - 1999	10,118	37,171	3,629					55,627
	%	18.19	66.82	6.52					
	2000-2006	8,271	84,771	2,053	20,523	6,780	2,367	1,515	134,523
	%	6.15	63.02	1.53	15.26	5.04			
Foreign Husbands	1990-1999	19,266	2,010	12,209					37,436
	%	51.46	5.37	32.61					
	2000-2006	21,748	13,171	8,890					52,859
	%	41.14	24.92	16.82					

Source: NSO (2008) and KIS (2008)

From 2000-2006, a total 134,523 marriages to foreign brides took place, with the majority of the women, 63.02 percent, coming

from China, which doubled the number from the previous decade. Vietnamese females accounted for 15.26 percent of marriages to Korean men from 2000-2006, while Filipino women only accounted for 5.04 percent. Marriages between foreign men and Korean women were but almost half the total number of foreign wives, although the total number of marriages with Japanese men from 2000-2006 was six times that of Japanese women, and the total number of American men was four times that of American women. As of June 30, 2008, as Table 8 indicates, the majority of international marriages was between Korean men and South East Asian women, 72.4 percent of foreign spouses were Chinese, followed by Japanese, Vietnamese and Filipinos, 4.8 percent, 3.8 percent, 2.0 percent, respectively.

Table 8: Foreign Brides by Nationality

	Total	Male	Female
Total	118,421	14,131	104,290
China (Korean Descent)	37,126 (31.4)	5,975	31,151
China	29,860 (25.2)	2,859	26,947
Vietnam	24,194 (20.4)	128	24,066
Japan	5,564 (4.7)	519	5,045
Philippines	5,442 (4.6)	156	5,286
Cambodia	2,726 (2.3)	7	2,719
Mongolia	2,274 (1.9)	31	2,243
Thailand	1,980 (1.7)	34	1,946
USA	1,498 (1.3)	984	514
Other (more than 110 countries)	7,757 (6.6)	3,438	4,373

Source: Ministry of Justice, "Total Number of Foreign Brides by Country", 08.6.30

2. Changes in Migration Policy

Korea's immigration policy has gone through roughly two-phases of transition. First, with the recognition of a labor shortage in the manufacturing industry, the government introduced a visa issuance guideline in 1991 in response to the inflow of migrant workers, and initiated a program called the Industrial Technical Trainee System that strongly resembled the Japanese system in 1992 (Lee and Park, 2005; S. Lee, 2008; Seol, 2005b). The Industrial Technical Trainee System (ITTS) which stipulated a quota of 10,000 foreign trainees who had recommendations from the Trade and Industry minister was strongly aimed to provide employers in small- and medium-sized industries with cheap unskilled labors. Faced with an economic downturn in 1993, the government terminated the program in April, only to resume it in December. In 1995, the minimum wage law was extended to foreign trainees, and insurance for injuries at work was introduced in 2000. In 1996, the agency took official charge of the issue and introduced the program wherein trainees were employed following the completion of the training. Implemented from 2000, the program required two years of training and thereafter, one year of employment. Two years later, the program changed to one year of training and two years of subsequent employment. ITTS continued for roughly 10 years since the introduction.

ITTS came to an end in 2003. ITTS was criticized as a modern slave system often exploiting trainees at workplaces. The trainees received the least in terms of wages, even less than the undocumented worker. ITTS basically prevents them from acquiring proper working status and benefits, but undocumented workers have the least protection from abuse since employers routinely threaten them with deportation (M. Lee, 2006; Lim, 2003; Narayan, 2006). Protests in the mid 1990s forced the implementation of a measure ordering employers to pay at least the minimum wage directly to the workers, reducing the chances of exploitation by agencies handling remittances (Lee et al., 2003; J.

Kim, 2003, 2005). In 1998, the Working after Training Program for Foreigners, which allowed trainees who pass certain skills tests after a two-year period to enjoy workers' rights under the Standard Labor Act and the Minimum Wages Act, was introduced amid protest. Civil society activists in cooperation with migrant workers were seeking the implementation of the Employment of Foreign Workers Act as an alternative scheme to maximize the economic benefits from the inflow of unskilled migrant workers without discriminating against them economically and socially.

The work permit system was implemented in August 2004 based on the Employment of Foreign Workers Act that was passed in July 2003. The system, known as the Employment Permit System (EPS) aims to prevent discrimination by employers against foreign workers at the workplace and has made few significant progress compared to ITTS; it has secured proper wages for regular (registered) migrant workers and provided a basis for the protection of migrant workers' rights by explicitly stating Foreign Workers' Legal Status (www.eps.go.kr).⁷ Their provisions explicitly call for the protection of migrant workers' rights to enjoy the same legal status as native Korean workers as stipulated in labor related laws. By ensuring the protection of registered foreign workers, the EPS has escaped from the criticism of it being the modern form of slavery. According to the revised Foreign Workers Employment Law in 2008 (KIS, 2008), they are able to work for up to five straight years without having to make the obligatory one-month sojourn outside Korea to extend their contracts.⁸

⁷ <http://www.eps.go.kr/wem/eh/inf/eh9901010b01>. Under this system, employees should attend a 20-hour training session and are mandated to apply for social insurance programs such as health insurance and industrial accident compensation insurance. The national pension application depends on whether an agreement for pension exemption was signed between the governments. Instead, employers are obligated to pay migrant workers at least the nation's minimum wage with 40 hours work per week at companies with 20 or more employees.

⁸ The current EPS requires foreign workers to leave the country for one month before renewal. In addition, job transfer is allowed if there are delayed wages and violations of the labor law at the workplaces. For the employers' side, they can recruit qualified manpower directly via interviews overseas.

In 2007, the government initiated a system called the Working Visit System (WVS) to broaden the opportunities for overseas Koreans residing in regions of the former Soviet Union and China, whose ancestors were forced to migrate because of the Japanese colonization and the Soviet's policy. The WVS offers more freedom and convenience to those who are clarified to have Korean ancestors.⁹ Through this new system, they attain the Working Visit (H-2), a transitional status which is to be given to Koreans in China and former Soviet territories before they are given the Overseas Korean (F-4) status (KIS, 2008).¹⁰ Ethnic Koreans from China called 'dongpo,' which means compatriots, are particularly favored. The estimated two million ethnic Koreans in China pursue their "Korean dream" at the lowest rung of Korea's labor market. The WVS broadens its scope to include overseas Koreans without a domestic family register or surviving relatives and thus increases their employment opportunities. Those without relatives are also granted entry after a Korean proficiency test and random drawing within a yearly quota (KIS, 2008). It also issues multiple-entry visa and improves employment procedures.

A bill on the Treatment of Foreigners Act concerning issues such as the welfare of migrant workers, education for children from interethnic marriages, illegal migrant workers and Korean descendants with foreign nationality, was passed at the National Assembly in May, 2007. Every five years, the government will also set up a long term plan to improve the policies on immigration and laws regarding foreigners and offer more practical help for them with the participation of 20 different ministries. Legalization of reform bills of "Overseas Korean Law" would allow overseas

⁹ Due to this new system, Korean descendants that wish to legally enter Korea no longer need to pay five to ten million KRW to brokers. However, the system does not effectively act upon those people whose ancestors are not verifiable.

¹⁰ The Overseas Korean (F-4) status is a multiple entry visa that remains valid for 5 years and allows up to 3 years of stay per visit. With this visa status, they can freely enter and depart the country and also seek employment if they wish. The status can be obtained if the applicants are over 25 years old and meet certain qualification.

Korean visa (f-4) holders to stay for maximum 3 years while the present rule for 2 years (KIS, 2008).

The WVS was introduced in light of the fact that Koreans with foreign nationality have been relatively neglected when it comes to immigration and employment privileges. These changes have certainly brought improvements in Korea's approach to migrant workers. Its legislation has, in a sense, brought light to migrant workers' issues and secured proper working status for migrant workers. However, few fundamental problems still lie in its provisions. Both EPS and WVS are constantly challenged and tested by the dilemma. For EPS, for whom the system must be beneficial is still in question. For WVS, the value of which the system is judged can be alterable. For instance, one could say that the system is an appropriate and an innovative invention of the government since it is aimed to compensate those who have suffered from the ashes of the history. But others could say that making distinctions according to ethnicity is racial discrimination, specially aiming to discriminate one ethnicity from another. The judgment of values inherent in the system is still controversial.

3. Contested Governance of Migration: Issues and Challenges

In the last twenty years, we have seen the Korean civil society blossom (J. Kim, 2005; H. Kim, 2004, 2007; Kim and McNeal, 2005; Lee et al., 2003). In the governance of migration since the early 1990s, migrant workers used to rely upon Korean-led NGOs as a source of empowerment, protesting against the government policies and working conditions imposed on them. In parallel with civic activism orchestrated by the NGO sector, migrant workers themselves also organized into migrant-led grassroots organizations, such as the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) founded on April 24, 2005. They began in the mid-1990s protesting against the industrial trainee system (ITS). The Joint Committee of Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK) was established as a form of coalition. Migrant workers first became directly involved in unionism in May 2001 through the establishment of the Migrant Branch of the

Equality Trade Union (Liem, 2007; Lim, 2003). The migrant branch campaigned for the revision of laws on migrant workers and the legalization of undocumented migrants against deportation as well as for protecting labor and human rights. One of the most important organized campaigns is to transform the EPS into a work permit system. According to them, the EPS does not sufficiently protect the human and labor rights of migrant workers because it ties migrants to their employers, limits residence terms to three years and prohibits migrants from bringing their families to Korea (J. Kim, 2003, 2005; Lee et al., 2003; Lim, 2003). According to MTU, a work permit system that would allow migrants to stay in Korea for up to 10 years from 3 years, guarantee their freedom to choose employers and provide various other social protections, is key to reducing the high number of undocumented workers. MTU is working with other labor and civil society organizations to make the implementation of the work permit system feasible. In particular, religious and civil society organizations became sympathetic to the plight of migrant workers and actively advocate the revision of laws.

Korea needs to set up a much proper governance mechanism to manage, coordinate, and forecast the current and future needs of migrant workforce in order to act as a player in the global labor market. There should be considerable efforts being made to facilitate admission of a variety of ethnic groups, including ethnic Koreans abroad. Both EPS and WVS and subsequent inflows of migration are only loosely linked to local labor market conditions in Korea and weakly connected to the dynamics of global migration. Migration policies should be redesigned to facilitate labor migration not just to fill labor shortages on the basis of rotation but to engage in the dynamics of the flows of global migration. The governance of migration in Korea is now being highly contested and needs to be systematically managed and coordinated in such a way to balance supply and demand in labor market and to further fuel Korea's global economic edge and competitiveness.

It is obvious that the degree of the positive contribution of foreign workers depends on the quality of labor force with a certain skill level. High-skilled foreign workers accounted for only 5.3 percent of total foreign workers in 2008. Currently, EPS and WVS address the lower-stratum of skills spectrum. It is certain that the composition of high-skilled foreign workers should be increased to sharpen Korea's international competitive edge. For this, Korea should grant lawful permanent residence for highly skilled workforce immediately. With regard to this urgent need, the government plans to introduce various visa incentives including permanent-residence visas for qualified foreign professionals and investors and to allow switching jobs within the same industry and profession. For this, the government will reduce the required length of stay from the current 10 years to five by December 2008. Immigration can thus lead to a win-win outcome for Koreans and foreigners.

There is an old Aesop fable regarding a fox and a crane, in which the fox invites the crane over for dinner but rather than show the crane hospitality, she takes advantage of the crane only for her own benefit without providing any sense of symbiotic mutualism. The act is then reciprocated by the crane when he invites the fox over for dinner. Similarly, Korea has invited foreign labor and spouses into its borders, but as the fox took advantage of the crane, so too has Korea taken advantage of the foreigners for its own benefits. The invited foreign workers on a temporary rotated basis, much like the dinner in the story is but a farce and they inevitably suffer. For instance, ITTS is a prime example of a dastardly way to increase foreign labor under the auspices of positive working conditions and mobility, but in reality it simply extracted cheap labor and provided very little incentives to the workers. However, it will be these foreign workers, the crane, who will now invite Korea, in a sense, to their homes, but rather than provide jobs for Koreans they have the ability to provide opportunities for trade between Korea and their home countries. Therefore, in order to entertain and stop the crane from playing a similar trick on the fox,

Korea must reconsider its treatment of foreigners in its borders and envision the relationship between Korea and its neighboring peoples a mutually symbiotic relationship.

IV. CONCLUSION

Korea, together with Japan and Taiwan in the region of East Asia, is currently going through a drastic paradigm shift to open its door to foreigners and more actively embrace them as members of and contributors to society. Due to the aging of society, a record low fertility rate, and gender imbalance, Korea continues to prosper with the influx of migration by foreign workers and brides. Ever-increasing and ever-mixed flows of migration become an important component of the economic and social life of Korean society. Although the government tried to maintain a system of rotating foreign workers on a short-term basis, the program has systematically generated long-term, unauthorized workforce. There is no doubt that the Korean society should envision the future around the question of diversity and multiculturalism. For this, Korea needs to build up a multi-layered framework of governance on migration. The government should not just react when approached by a foreign government with a request for labor market access, but preemptively foster regional partnerships to actively engage in inter-state coordination for migration with neighboring states. Furthermore, the government should take the leadership in terms of social integration and cultural diversity. As indicated in the story of the fox and the crane, Korea should make migration transit into a symbiotic mutual form of coexistence in a society.

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