

# The Role of Multicultural Families in South Korean Immigration Policy

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## **Introduction**

Since 2000 there has been a global trend towards expansion and inclusion in immigration policy. South Korea is no exception to these global changes. Since 2004 South Korean immigration policies have changed significantly. The first change has occurred within the policies concerning the import of foreign workers, and the other is the initiation of trials with an integration policy for immigrants, the first such scheme since foreigner workers began migrating to Korea in the late 1980s.

This paper examines; 1) why and how the Korean government changed its immigration policy from the notorious “industrial trainee program (1993–2006)” to the “employment permit system (2004–)” for foreign workers, and 2) what caused the desire for an “integration policy” geared at establishing a multicultural society. In order to deal with the first issue, the last 20 years will be divided into 3 phases: the early phase (1987–1994), the middle phase involving the struggle for reform towards the Employment Permit System (1995–2003), and the institutionalization phase since 2004. Attempts will then be made to illustrate; 1) what factors inspired immigration policy change and, 2) why this shift has speed up considerably since 2004. In order to deal with the second issue, an examination will be made of the increasing trend of marriage migration to South Korea and its impact on immigration policy, i.e., the social integration policy.

In order to present the above issues in this IRCJS-GCOE Joint Symposium, I have reorganized my three current papers: two which deal with Korean immigration policies and the other which examines the issue of international marriage in South Korea.<sup>1</sup> Instead of summarizing the above three papers, I will highlight only the relevant issues in this presentation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lee (2008a; 2008b; 2008c). Although I discussed the issue of the Working Visit System for ethnic Koreans with other nationalities at the Symposium on January 8–10, 2009, I could not deal with this issue in depth in this paper due to the page limitation. If interested, please see Lee (2008b).

## **The Changes in Korean Immigration Policies**

Prior to the mid 1980's the work force in Korea was made up of predominantly Koreans. As there was no immigration into Korea at that time, there was no real immigration policy. During the 1980's the situation began to change and large numbers of foreign migrant workers began to pour into Korea. As a result an immigration policy was formulated and implementation began in late 1993 of what became known as the Industrial Trainee System. From 1995 efforts were made to change the system, but obstacles prevented a new systems implementation until 2004, when finally the Employment Permit System was adopted. More recently, in 2007, the Working Visit System was adopted in relation to ethnic Koreans of other nationalities. In order to review such policy change this paper highlights three main time periods; the early phase (1987–1994), the middle phase (1995–2003), and the institutionalization phase (2004 onwards).

### *The Early Phase (1987–1994): The Choice of the Industrial Trainee System*

The influx of foreign nationals into Korea began in the late 1980's. Initially the majority of immigrants were ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship. There were several factors behind the movement of these people. The first, and official reason, was the desire of migrants to visit relatives within Korea. The second was the improved relations between China and Korea, which made visitations possible, and the third was the desire of immigrants to improve their standard of living by seeking employment within Korea. Korea at that time was suffering from a severe shortage of manpower within the manufacturing and construction industries, which provided ample opportunities for employment for the new migrant groups.

While the influx of ethnic Koreans continued steadily, from the early 1990s other migrant groups also began to enter Korea. These were initially nationals of Bangladesh and the Philippines. Again several factors inspired the migration such as; the end of large construction projects within the Middle East, which led migrant workers to seek alternate destinations for employment and the 'Japan Rush' phenomenon, which was caused by a desire to migrate particularly to Japan, as a result of the high value of its local currencies (Lee 1994: 98–99; Lee 1997: 509–510). These first migrations were driven because of the economic need for these workers. However, the government was caught unprepared for the policy implications which came with a large influx of migrants into the country. Indeed the debate started 'after the fact' as to how these new groups should be treated in the society. Initially this debate began within the industries which employed these groups, and then spread to the academic world and finally to policy makers in the government. The government itself was hindered in its implementation of

any concrete policy because of a rising argument as to which government ministries' purview immigration policy should fall on. Eventually, the Commerce and Industry Committee seemed to gain the upper hand, and suggested a policy. In November 1991 the government officially introduced the "Overseas Investment Enterprise Trainee System" and, in November 1993, this name was changed to the 'Industrial Trainee System.'

*The Middle Phase (1995–2003): Efforts for Reform*

The Industrial Trainee System certainly helped the shortage of labor for small and medium enterprises involved in the 3D jobs. However, there was much criticism of the system as the classification of immigrants as "trainees," rather than workers, deprived many of the immigrants of benefits accorded to their Korean colleagues. The main organization championing greater protection of, and rights for, immigrants was the Foreigner Support Organization. However, it was not for this reason that a desire for a policy shift developed at the governmental level, but rather for the reason that the system resulted in large numbers of immigrants entering Korea to work illegally. As a result of this the Ministry of Labor soon joined the Foreigner Support Organization in calling for reform.

After the Nepalese Workers Strike in January 1995, the Ministry of Labor prepared a "Special Law Concerning Foreign Workers Employment and Management," which called for changes in line with what has since become known as the Employment Permit System. This law was sent to the regular session of the National Assembly in 1996 with the aim of becoming operational in July 1997. However, the KSMBI objected to a change in the status quo and used its influence to create opposition to the bill within a variety of government ministries such as; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Justice. The debate continued within the National Assembly until September 1997 when, instead of the Employment Permit System originally proposed by the Ministry of Labor; a slightly modified version of the existing system, dubbed the "Training Employment System" was adopted. All further debate on immigration policy within the National Assembly was then shelved as the financial crisis hit the region and took the attentions of the body politic. The issue was not again raised for debate in the Assembly for nearly three years.

By early 2000 many domestic and international human rights organizations had been publicly criticizing Korea's immigration policy and calling for change. Under pressure, President Kim Dae Joong directed that consultations commence between these organizations and the Ministry of Labor with a view to changing the immigration policy. These meetings went on periodically for several months and the Ministry of Labor thus assessed the majority

views of these organizations, while commissioning academic research into the feasibility of using employment permits (Yim and Seol 2000). The debate on changes to the immigration system was thus resumed within the National Assembly. According to Kim Sung Joong (Employment General Councilor and later the head of the Office for Employment Policy), who promoted legislating the Employment Permit System at that time, the Ministry of Labor had three main objectives for the proposed legislative reform. The first was the reclassification of foreign workers as employees, rather than trainees. The second was to force employers to first seek Korean workers before being allowed to look for foreign workers. The last was that the government would be responsible for the general administration of foreign manpower. In February 2003, the law was officially proposed by Assemblyman Lee Jae Jung in the National Assembly. Though the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy and the Ministry of Justice were still opposed to the bill, in the face of such staunch support for it, they conceded under condition the new Employment Permit System would run alongside the existing Industrial Trainee System. Thus, with bipartisan support, the bill was finally passed in the National Assembly in July 2003 (Kim 2004: 219–220).

*Since 2004: Institutionalization of Expansion and Inclusion*

The Employment Permit System operated alongside the Industrial Trainee System from 17 August 2004. The existence of these parallel systems inevitably created many problems. Some were administrative, others were related to the foreign workers themselves because they made difference in rights and privileges among foreign workers. As a result the Foreign Manpower System Improvement Planning Organization abolished the Industrial Trainee System from July 2005 and unified all administrative functions into the Employment Permit System from January 2007.

The Employment Permit System operates as follows: 1) employers attempt to find domestic Korean workers, but fail to do so. 2) Employers seek the issuance of a “Foreign Workers Employment Permit Form” in order to authorize foreign recruitment. 3) Employers select a qualified foreign worker from a list of applicants recommended by the Ministry of Labor. 4) Foreign workers & employers conclude a one year contract, renewable for up to three years. The implications of these changes are vast. Most importantly, the Ministry of Labor itself, not a private organization, is now responsible for the selection, introduction and management of foreign workers. This allows for expedience in the processing of immigrants and institutionalizes an open transparent immigration policy.

In the meantime, in April 2005, the “Gap between the Rich and Poor Distinction

Correction Committee,” under the direction of the previous President Roh Moo Hyun, began preparation for the “Foreigner’s Social Integration Policy.” The result of these policy discussions was announced, on 26 April 2006, as the “Female Marriage Migrant Family Social Integration and Support Policy” and the “Mixed Blood and Migrants Support Plan.” In addition, in December 2006, the Ministry of Justice proposed the “Foreigners in Korea Fundamental Treatment Law” to the National Assembly. This was passed by the Assembly Plenary in April 2007, and enacted into law in July 2007.

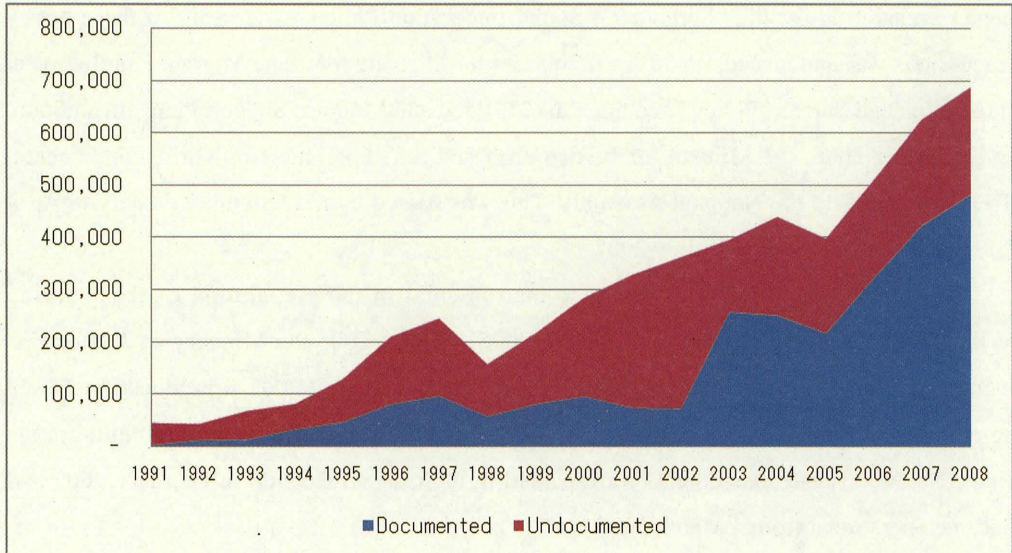
President Roh Moo Hyun was also instrumental in the preparation of the Working Visit System, which was proposed in June 2005. In May 2006 the Ministry of Justice was made responsible for the Working Visit System, and in January 2007 it produced proposed amendments to the “Law Concerning Foreign Workers Employment” and the “Immigration Control Law.” These amendments were passed in the Cabinet Council in February 2007 and became operational from 4 March 2007.

#### *Factors Influencing Korean Immigration Policy Change*

There are several factors which have influenced the changes in immigration policy in Korea. The judiciary did play an important role in these changes. For example, the judgments of the Seoul High Court on 26 November 1993, the Seoul High Court on 1 September 1994 and the Constitutional Court on 15 September 1995, all found that foreign industrial trainees, and undocumented foreign workers, were subject to the Labor Standards Act. These judgments gave power to organizations that supported foreign workers, and garnered support amongst the press, and hence the public, against the Industrial Trainee System.

Meanwhile, in the 1990s, as violations of the basic human rights of foreigners became more prevalent, so did activism on the part of organizations opposed to them. In July 1995, several organizations supporting migrants formed the “Foreign Migrant Workers Council” (FMWC), whose role was to push the government to improve foreign workers rights. When the Nationalist Government came to power in 1998, support for the FMWC’s goals, within the government itself, increased. Alongside this, there was a steady rise in the number of organizations supporting greater rights for foreigners. However, this had the net result in 2000, following disputes over leadership and direction, of dividing the FMWC into several factions (Seol 2005: 93). Despite this, under the more left-wing governments, i.e., under the former President Roh Moo Hyun’s (2003–2007) administration, several representatives of these organizations have come to work for government committees in an advisory capacity since 2004 (Kim 2004).

Figure 1



Number of Foreign Workers, 1991–2008

Source: the MOJ (Ministry of Justice), 1991–2008

As shown in Figure 1, the Industrial Trainee System produced huge numbers of undocumented migrants. The government had to change this system to reduce the number of such undocumented migrants and to mitigate internal and international criticism of its immigration practices from human rights organizations. Lee (2008a; 200b) showed how the changes in Korean immigration policy since 2004 can be explained through the prism of “professional competition among ministries” and “the perspective of the government.” I highlighted the competition between various ministries, notably those representing economic interests, and those representing the labor rights; an example of which was the competition between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labor. The significance of the perspective of the current administration was also noted, with major developments towards expansion and inclusion having occurred under the former President Roh Moo Hyun and his left-wing government.

Current President Lee Myeong Bak’s administration, established in 2008, is from the political right. The former Participatory Government emphasized ‘ideology’ and ‘nationhood’ for immigration policies, while the current administration aims at non ideological pragmatism. From this point of view, the former President regarded immigration policy as an issue for human rights and the rights of minorities, while current President tends to regard it as a

manpower issue. In the same way, the former President regarded the Working Visit System as an “overseas Korean issue,” while the current President tends to regard it as a “foreign manpower” issue. The latter President demonstrates this pragmatic approach with the advent of the recent economic downturn. Due to stated fears of rising domestic unemployment, the current administration has reduced benefits for foreign workers and made moves to restrict unchecked flows into Korea of ethnic Korean migrants (Lee 2008b: 19). However, both governments seem to use similar social integration policies towards families of international marriages, which will be discussed in the following section.

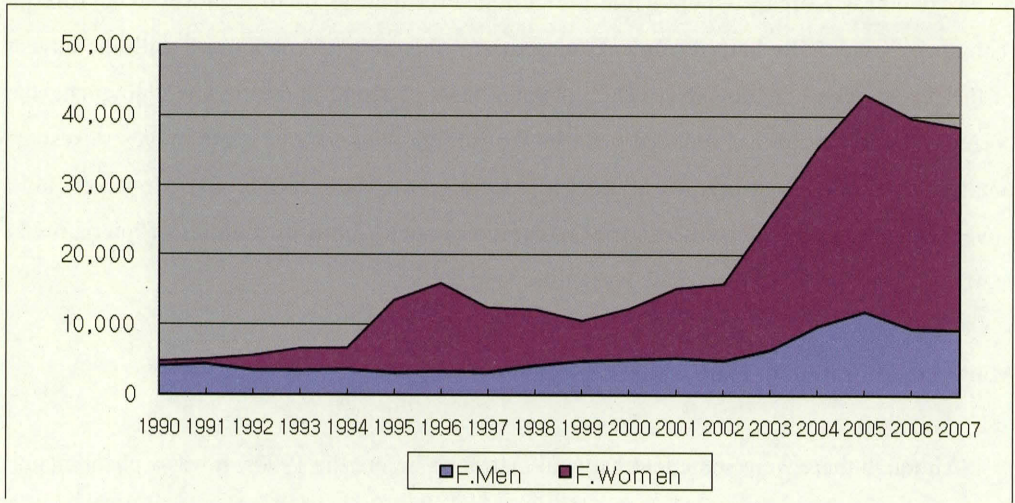
### **Marriage Migration to Korea: After the 1990s**

Although there were some international marriages before the 1990s, it was a phenomenon among females. Until then, only a few Korean men married with foreign women. Since the 1960s, the Unification Church has organized such marriages for Korean men, most brides were Japanese women. During the 1990s, the Church expanded to include Filipino and other Asians on its bride’s lists (Kim et. al. 2006: 11). Up until 2004, about 20,000 brides had come through such arrangements.

Figure 2 shows the trends of the post-1990 international marriages in Korea. It shows the number of foreigners, divided by sex, who married Koreans between 1990 and 2007. Up until 1990, international marriage was related mostly to Korean women, while Korean men were involved in merely 600 cases. However, the Korean men’s rate of international marriage started to increase in 1992, when Korea reestablished the official relations with China. From 1995, the number of men participating in international marriages surpassed that of women.

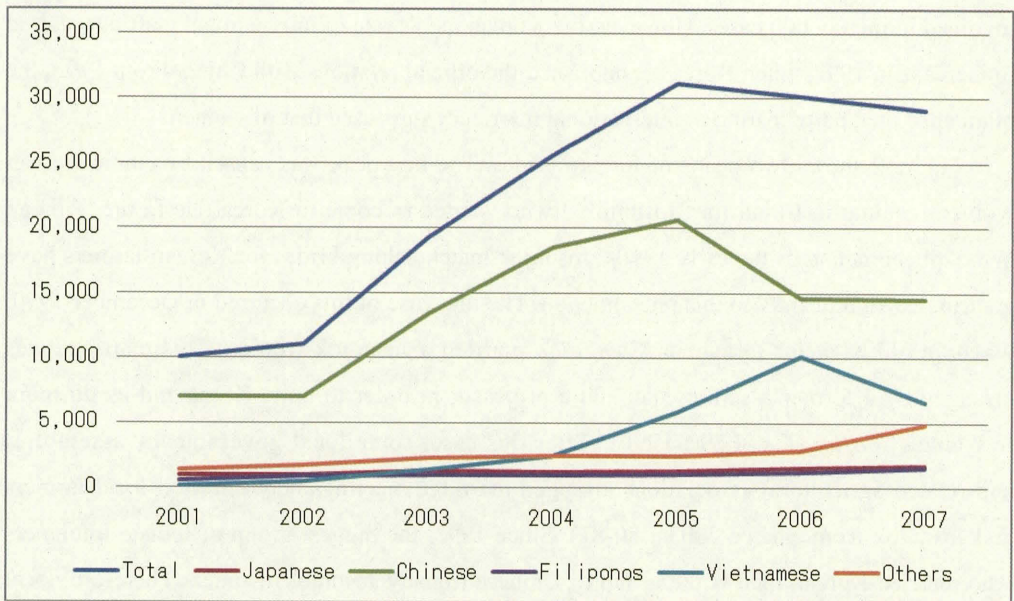
Figure 2 shows two peaks of foreign brides. The first peak was caused by ethnic Korean women residing in China (or “Josunjok”) who wanted to come to Korea due to the ‘Korean Wind’ phenomenon of the early 1990s. Josunjok matchmaking brides for Korean farmers have contributed significantly to this phenomenon. The first case of this occurred in December 1990, when an old bachelor farmer in *Kyunggido* married a Josunjok women. This marriage was arranged by a former assemblyman and a professor in order to unite Korea and its diaspora in China (*Chosun Ilbo*, 12/16/1990). After this case, some local governments, assemblies and related agricultural associations arranged marriage meetings between their local farmers and Josunjok women (Lee 2005a: 80-81). Since 1992, the biggest group of female foreigners who married Korean men is the group of Chinese (mostly Josunjok) women. Therefore, local governments have played an important role in promoting such cross-border marriages.

Figure 2



Trends of International Marriages in Korea, 1990–2007. Source: KNSO (Korea National Statistical Office), 1999–2007

Figure 3



Nationalities of Asian Wives of Korean Husbands, 2001–2007. Source: KNSO (Korea National Statistical Office), 2001–2007



Like other migrations in Korea, the marriage migration was led by Josunjok, but Josunjok women in latter cases. In the early 1990s, the Korean government had two different positions toward migration influx: 1) an open-door policy for Josunjok women as ‘cross-border’ brides, and 2) a closed-door policy for unskilled-migrant workers in general and Josunjok in particular. As many Josunjok, while visiting their relatives back in Korea in the late 1980s, became undocumented workers, the government began to find ways to reduce their influx, first by setting a minimum age limit on those intending to visit their relatives from 1992 and second by not issuing tourist visas to Josunjok in 1993 (Lee 2002: 179–183; Lee 2005b: 351). As some Josunjok returned home with their earnings, the rest of the people in their villages were eager to go to Korea. This phenomenon is called the ‘Korean Wind.’

Although the Korean government is anxious to limit the return of Josunjok, its promotion of cross-border marriages between Korean farmers and Josunjok has resulted in widening the doors for both young and older Josunjok women to enter the country. This means that international marriages have become not only an easy and important channel for Josunjok women, but also provide a route for others to return to Korea because Josunjok wives can send two invitation letters to their parents to come to Korea. Exploitation of the ‘invitation of parents’ visas appeared as the sale of invitations are common (Lee 2005b).

As the ‘Korean Wind’ became a typhoon during 1994 and 1996, and as international marriage became the easiest route to Korea, “fake marriages’ became a social problem in 1996 (Kwon 2005; Lee 2005a: 81–82). Then the government concluded a memorandum with China in 1996 which required the international marriage process between Korea and China to be more complex than it had been before. Later, these processes were simplified again from July 1 2003.

Therefore, the stagnation from 1996 to 2002 in Figures 1 reflects 1) the IMF Crisis in Korea during 1997 and 1998; 2) a change in the international marriage process between Korea and China from 1996 to 2003; and 3) a significant change in the “Nationality Law” in 1998.

The second increase in international marriages involving Korean men after 2002 can be explained by the flourishing of commercialized international marriage agencies. In August 1999, marriage agencies did not have to get licenses from the local governments and became free businesses. This allowed an increase in the number of such agencies as well as the number of mediated marriages. Since then, the nationalities of these “mail order brides” have diversified further to include Thais, Vietnamese, Mongols, and Russians. The limitations imposed on the unskilled and entertainment migrants accelerated the increase in the number of Josunjok and other Asian women who arrived as marriage migrants.

## **Policies on Internationally Married Families**

Although there has been a serious need for governmental assistance for international married families and their children, the Korean government only revised the Nationality Law in 1997. In the new millennium, several ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Gender Equality, tried to find ways to improve their situation. Finally, the Korean government announced plans for a comprehensive policy for the social integration of foreign wives and their families on April 26, 2006. The “Grand Plan” was produced in a national meeting with the President Roh Moo Hyun and 14 branches of governmental administration. As a result, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MGEF) became the leading department for coordinating policies for international married families and their children.

### *Background*

A number of problems have arisen from international marriage both locally and internationally. For example, human-trafficking by international marriage agencies and the situation of foreign wives in Korea have become a social problem. Abroad, for example, a Korean man seeking a potential foreign bride was arrested on the suspicion of being a trafficking broker in Cambodia (*Joongang newspaper*, 2/15/2005). In January 2005, the Philippine Embassy in Korea issued an urgent warning to Filipino women “to be extra wary, or avoid, applying for arranged marriages to Koreans” (Korea Times, 7/5/2005). Vietnamese women’s association criticized a Korean newspaper’s report on April 21 2006, titled “Vietnamese women wish to come to Korea, land of dreams,” including a photograph of a group of Korean men interviewing Vietnamese women as prospective wives. The women were standing in line with number tags (*Joongang newspaper*, 4/27/2006; 4/29/2006). In Korea, several women’s associations, female migrant support NGOs and the foreign wives’ self-help organizations have criticized the process and advertisement of international marriage agencies, such as “Bride Guarantee,” which means that the agency will replace the bride if she runs away. The “law to regulate marriage agencies” was submitted to the National Assembly on February 1 2005. Since and prior to then several government administrations have tried to improve the situation for foreign brides in Korea. However, all of these administrations have always worked independently until the “Grand Plan.”

First, the Ministry of Justice has tried to stabilize foreign spouse’s resident status allowing them to seek employment since 2002. Then it also mitigated the situation of foreign divorced

brides, lessening the documentation to prove that their Korean husband was responsible for their divorce. In addition, it began to allow them to apply for denizenship from 2005.

Second, since November 2002 the Ministry of Gender Equality has provided an interpretation service for migrant women who need professional counseling and shelter for sex trafficking, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. The service is available in English, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. The service is provided through a women's hotline. The Ministry of Gender Equality began to organize a service for foreign wives in 2005, after Amore-pacific Corporation donated 200 million Korean Won (about 200 thousand US dollars)<sup>2</sup> in order to assist foreign wives. The Ministry of Gender Equality took over child care and family services from the Ministry of Health and Welfare in June 2004. In June 2005, the Ministry of Gender Equality changed its name to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, to expand its services further.

Third, 16 congressmen and members of the Committee of Social Welfare within the National Assembly, most representing rural constituencies, submitted a law in February 2005 proposing the regulation of marriage agencies. Consequently, based on the findings of a nationwide survey (Seol et al. 2005), the Ministry of Health and Welfare planned to integrate poor foreign wives and their families into the social security program from January 1 2007.

#### *The "Grand Plan" of April 26, 2006*

According to the "Grand Plan" of April 26, 2006, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family became the leading and major coordinating department, and other ministries including the Ministry of Justice, Labor, Health and Welfare and local and central government departments had to participate in the "Grand Plan."

The vision of the "Grand Plan" is "a social integration of foreign wives and an attainment of a multicultural society." The major policies are seven-fold: 1) regulation of international marriage agencies and protection of foreign wives before entry into Korea; 2) support for victims of domestic violence; 3) support and orientation for newly arrived foreign wives, such as offering Korean language and culture classes; 4) support for children of international marriages entering schools; 5) providing social welfare to foreign wives; 6) raising social awareness of multicultural issues; and 7) making a comprehensive project by building networks among various administrations and between the central and local governments.

Of all these proposed innovations, two were directed at Korean people and their attitude towards internationally married couples and their children. By introducing the fourth policy,

<sup>2</sup> US\$=1,028 Korean Won in June, 2005.

the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development plans to revise and correct the contents implying racial discrimination in textbooks. It plans to make special programs for biracial children, including dual language programs. Furthermore, it will try to prevent racism. Regarding the sixth policy, the government will try to raise social awareness and move towards becoming a successful multicultural society. Since “mixed blood” or “biracial” implies racial discrimination, the government will replace them with more politically correct terms. Moreover, they are considering implementing a law banning prejudice against children of international married couples and immigrants.

#### *Factors Influencing the Governmental Change*

Although some NGOs supporting female migrants feel that the “Grand Plan” was a sudden change (Han 2006: 3), it can in fact be seen as the outcome of several internal and external factors. The external factors are the racial unrest in France and a visit of Hines Ward, a Korean-American football star. First, the government wants to prevent a “racial uprising” similar to the racial riot in France in November 2005. Second, the news that a Korean-American, Hines Ward, born in Seoul between the Korean mother and the African-American father, had become a sporting hero by leading his team to victory in the Super Bowl and becoming the MVP in February 2006, brought the “race” issue to the forefront of social debate. This raised public awareness about children of internationally married couples. A “law to support multi-cultural children and their families” was submitted to the National Assembly on April 6, 2006. In addition, the government wants to prevent any diplomatic embarrassment due to further violation of the human rights of foreign wives. However, were it not for the internal factor outlined next, these external factors would have been insignificant.

The major internal factor is the need for a more systematic immigration policy to handle foreigners in Korea. Since Korea began to absorb migrant workers some 20 years ago, the number of migrants has now become significant, the groups have diversified, and some of them have begun to settle down in Korea. As a result the Korean government has to deal with migrant issues in a more systematic way. The more recent phenomenon of international marriages has led to a further impetus for a shift from a restrictive standpoint to a relaxed one in immigration policy.

When the former President Roh took office, he announced 12 steps his government would take to improve Korea. One of these steps was elimination of prejudice against minorities such as foreigners, irregular workers and the disabled, and elimination of discrimination based on gender and education. As a result, they changed the notorious “Industrial Trainee Program”

to the “Employment Permit Program” in 2004. Due to a decreasing birth rate and an aging population, they had to constitute an immigration policy which guarantees a steady supply of foreign migrant labor. The government wanted to have a more systematic immigration policy. But instead of focusing on labor migration, they highlighted their policy for integrating multicultural families into Korean society. It was presented as a strategic move to elicit sympathy from Korean people and to reduce the opposition from Korea’s business leaders and the unemployed. By highlighting the misery of certain foreign wives, the government was able to utilize the public’s collective guilt, already at peak levels due to the emergence of NFL athlete Hines Ward, to quickly ratify their proposals.

The shift from a restrictive to a relaxed immigration policy has been greatly assisted by the strong NGO-lead social movements which have exposed the mistreatment of migrant workers in general and foreign wives in particular (Lee 2003). However, Lee (2008c) highlights the perspective and characteristics of the previous government itself and the hidden interests of several ministries within the cabinet.

First, the former president Roh Moo Hyun and many members of his cabinet were formerly leading activists in human rights movements. The president himself comes from an underprivileged background, and so is very sympathetic to minorities’ issues. Although the president and his cabinet have been criticized for their economic policies, they have improved human rights in Korea.

Second, the Grand Plan resulted in a shift in the responsibility for international marriages in Korea from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. On the one hand, as a small department within the Ministry of Justice, the immigration bureau tried to expand its sphere by highlighting the increasing number of migrants and foreign wives. On the other hand, as a recently established ministry, the Ministry of Gender Equality has been trying to gain more power, a larger budget and increased importance within the cabinet. The Ministry of Gender Equality has taken advantage of recent demographic restructuring to expand its remit. As the low fertility rate in Korea has become a serious social problem and as it is interpreted as a “women’s rebellion” in Korea, the Ministry of Gender Equality is required to perform more responsibilities. When it took over child care and family services from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, it also took their huge budget of 600 billion Korean Won (about 590 million US dollars) for its child care program and 25 billion Korean Won (about 24 million US dollars) for its family program in 2005. This 1400% increase in budget was hugely significant, instantly transforming the Gender Equality and Family into one of the most important and powerful ministries within the government. It can use some of the family programs budget to operate

several projects to assist foreign wives and their families. Therefore, the Ministry of Gender and Family gained a victory over the Ministry of Justice in terms of increased power within the government, although the latter also expanded its personnel and department size somewhat.

Since April 2006 the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family had taken a leading role in supporting internationally married families. However, this role has been diluted to a minor one, such as the maintenance of the women's hotline, since the current president Lee Myeong Bak's administration was established in 2008. All other matters have been returned to the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, which changed its name from the Ministry of Health and Welfare under the current administration. Internationally married family matters are primarily the concern of women, as most international marriages in Korea are with a foreign female spouse. The Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs has now begun to tackle issues related to families and their children, with less focus on related gender issues.

As has been shown in my papers (Lee 2008a; 2008b; 200c), the perspective of the government *per se* and competition between various government ministries greatly influenced such policy shifts. Immigration matters were the essence of conflict between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labor, and more recently integration policy has been fought over by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, Ministry of Gender Equality (and Family) and the Ministry of Justice. During 2008 debate was ongoing as to whether it was better to establish a separate Ministry of Immigration & Integration to alleviate these disputes; however such debate has been silenced since the economic downturn commenced in late 2008.

Given all of these factors, the perspective of the new right-wing government and the need for a pragmatic approach amidst unfavorable economic conditions, it would be expected that there would be changes in immigration policy practice. However, there have been, by and large, no such changes in social integration policy practice. The question therefore arises as to why there have only been minor changes in the practice of the social integration policy for international marriage families. In other words, why does the current government continue to provide a wide array of services for multicultural families?

The answer lies in the fact that both governments perceive the issues of international marriage and the resulting family as the issues of a "population" policy to alleviate the seriously low fertility rate and the increasingly aged population. Although the political perspectives between the current and former governments differs, both of them share a similar ideology geared towards a "patriarchal family." Therefore, both governments place emphasis on "family values," highlighting foreign brides' roles as "wives" and "daughters-in-law" instead of their more important role as "independent human beings."

The “Grand Plan,” or the social integration policy, began to expose a homogenous Korean society to the notion of “multiculturalism.” However the exact meaning of a multi-cultural society is still unclear and the “Grand Plan” tends to lean towards the assimilation of foreigners, rather than their integration into the society while maintaining their own cultural identities.

Another flaw in the implementation of the “Grand Plan” was that it instituted among the public a feeling of superiority over other Asian cultures. Koreans were encouraged to be benevolent to their “less fortunate” neighbors. Because the government led this trend, we can refer to it as “multiculturalism from above.” While I welcome the much-needed discussion and debate now taking place on the issues, I fear that no real change has occurred and that “multiculturalism” is just a passing trend that is fashionable at the moment without bringing about any real change in the public’s mind.

## Conclusion

Immigration policy itself acts as a kind of test of the level of liberalism within a state. Immigration organizations and foreign workers’ movements (NGOs), the judicial system and international laws, have all had an impact on Korean immigration policy change. However, since immigration policy is still set by the government in Korea, the sudden change of Korean immigration policy since 2004, is explained well by an examination of the perspective of the government, which Boswell (2007) emphasizes, and the competition for power between ministries, as illustrated by Rosenheck (2000). Although there is a “convergence effect” of immigration policies in the world towards inclusion, marriage migration has significantly sped up the shift within Korean immigration policy from the first stage of importing labor to the second stage of establishing a social integration policy.

In addition, multi-ethnic families make vague the borderline between “Us” and “Them” or “Citizen” and “Foreigner,” which contributes to the public discourse about “multiculturalism” in Korea. For example, multi-ethnic families were called “Kosian (Korean + Asian)” families during the late 1990s. However, in order to find a more politically correct term for mixed race Koreans, “Kosian” and “mixed-blood children” were formally replaced by the terms “multicultural families” and “second generation of multicultural families” (多文化家族 2世) respectively, after being suggested by an NGO in 2003. Although the meaning of a multicultural society differs between the government and NGOs, and although there is no consensus yet what constitutes an ideal multicultural society for Korea, the new terminology became popular as the government began to pump funding into social services using the terminology of “multicultural

families.” In addition, multicultural families have contributed to other changes geared towards social integration, which include nationals as their target group. Plans to revise and correct contents implying racial discrimination in textbooks are good examples.

Though recent social integration policies and their resulting social services have been concentrated greatly on multicultural families, there has been an emergence of another class of foreigners excluded from these benefits. Services are concentrated primarily on families and migrants who are married to a Korean, which neglects the fact that there are migrants, and their families, who are not married to Korean nationals. In addition, there is a tendency of paternalism. Although the majority of foreign wives are Josunjok, the government and media highlight the incidences of international marriages involving Southeast Asian women, while downplaying those involving Josunjok women in order to attract more public compassion. While this approach gains sympathy from the Korean public, it inadvertently creates a caste image of second-class citizens in Korea.

Finally, the current social integration policy for foreign wives leans toward that of a patriarchal family outlook, emphasizing a foreign wife’s role as wife, mother and daughter-in-law too much. However, it is interesting to see how the gendered geography within international marriage affects ‘patriarchal’ Korean society. Although the foreign brides have some difficulties in the early stages of their adjustment to Korea, it is a matter of time that most of them will recover the “power geometry.” The recent increase of the divorce rates of internationally married couples could be a sign of this development. In my opinion future policies, instead of focusing on family issues, must address gender equality, because without it, the deep social problems involving internationally married couples will continue.

In summary, multicultural families in South Korea will challenge the “homogeneous” and “patriarchal” concepts of Korean society. By a process of social and political trial and error, Korean society will have to figure out what a successful multicultural society entails.

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