

# TRANSIENT PROFESSIONALS: LOCAL NGO EMPOWERMENT

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*South Korea's native-English-speaking hakwon (South Korea's version of a private language school) instructor population is college-educated, well paid, and yet suffers from a lack of empowerment via a representative organization of its own creation. Of the attempts made by instructors to form such an NGO to advocate on their behalf the Association of Teachers of English in Korea (ATEK) stands out as perhaps the most ambitious, in spite of its rather short tenure and eventual collapse. Typical explanations given for that collapse can be divided among those internal, such as in fighting, and external, such as online harassment, but this paper seeks to show that such explanations remain insufficient. Using material obtained through interviews with former members, along with information gleaned from various online sources, this paper argues that a lack of official recognition of the organization by the South Korean government can be seen as the proverbial straw that broke the back of ATEK. Further, application of theoretical material presented in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back in: Introduction* by Thomas Risse-Kappen, regarding the way in which domestic governmental structure can either allow transnational actors access to that structure or not, will show that domestic actors such as ATEK are subject to the same sort of institutional discrimination. It is the author's hope that the examination of ATEK's collapse presented in this paper will constitute a useful framework to guide upstart instructor NGOs of the future, so that similar problems can be successfully avoided.*

## **Introduction**

Ethnic homogeneity is a highly contentious issue central to, and with ramifications for, policies concerning areas as diverse as demographics, education, marriage, migration, activism, and human rights. The Korean people have long held that theirs was a land of one people, but in contemporary

South Korean society this concept is being challenged. One way in which ethnic homogeneity in South Korea is being directly challenged can be observed in the size of the foreign resident population, which calls South Korea home. As of June 2008 about 2.36 percent of South Korea's population was made up of non-Koreans,<sup>1</sup> and according to the South Korean Ministry of Statistics, by May of 2013 the number of non-Koreans working in South Korea was approximately 760,000.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these, approximately 333,000 other foreign residents are described as not economically active, and listed as such for three reasons: "Child care and home duties,' 'Rested,' and 'Attending a regular school.'"<sup>3</sup> Thus it can be assumed that these are dependent family members of migrant workers residing and working in South Korea. In this way it is clear that many among these workers have settled in South Korea, with their families, to make a life for themselves. However, to say that South Korea's migrant worker population's relationship with its host country has been a rocky one, essentially from the start, would be something of an understatement. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into detail about the formation and activities of both Korean and foreigner led domestic NGOs advocating on behalf of this industrial migrant worker majority of the foreign resident community of South Korea. However, suffice it to say that with the opening of the South Korean labor market to migrant workers in 1991 NGO involvement in activism on behalf of this community followed quickly and has remained a constant feature ever since.

In contrast, South Korea's migrant native-English-speaking English language instructor population, members of which work at either public or private schools or universities (hereafter, instructors), numbered roughly some 22,000 as of 2010.<sup>4</sup> Yet the E2 (foreign language teacher) visa holding segment of that population, some 21,082 individuals as of 2009,<sup>5</sup> lacks domestic representation through an NGO of its own formation. To date only one such organization has emerged to advocate on behalf of this portion of the greater migrant population. The Association for Teachers of English

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1 Hyuk-Rae Kim, "NGOs and the Governance of Migration," in *State-centric to Contested Social Governance in Korea* (London: Routledge, 2013), 116.

2 "2013 Foreigner Labour Force Survey," *Statistics Korea*, last modified November 7, 2013, <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/english/news/1/1/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=310276&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt>. (accessed November 30, 2013).

3 Ibid.

4 "Animosity against English Teachers in Seoul," *Global Post*, last modified May 30, 2010, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/south-korea/100122/english-teachers-seoul-racism>. (accessed November 30, 2013). (accessed November 30, 2013).

5 "Number of E2 Visa Holders by Region and Gender," *English N Korea*, last modified June 2009, [www.englishnkorea.com/download/Statistics\\_n\\_Homepages.pdf](http://www.englishnkorea.com/download/Statistics_n_Homepages.pdf). (accessed November 30, 2013).

in Korea (hereafter, ATEK) was an incipient NGO with sustained operations from the first half of 2008 to about April of 2011. Exact dates are difficult to pinpoint as the organization never fully crystalized as a formal NGO for several reasons which will be discussed in detail below.

Conversely, as was mentioned above, South Korea's much larger industrial migrant population has long benefitted from the assistance of Korean NGOs, particularly religious NGOs. Under the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, industrial migrant workers formed the Equality Trade Union - Migrants' Branch, which later transformed into the independent Migrants' Trade Union. While the Korean government has refused to recognize the legality of the independently founded migrant workers' union, the highly educated and economically empowered migrant English teaching population of South Korea can certainly envy such an achievement. So, in terms of the foundation of a domestic body for the purposes of advocacy, how have industrial migrants achieved the success which has eluded instructors?

Instead of investigating the factors which led to the creation of ATEK, this paper will constitute a thorough examination of the causes of its disintegration. First, an examination of material assembled from qualitative interviews conducted with former ATEK officers and members will demonstrate that chief among internal causes of ATEK's disintegration were that organization's alienation of and subsequent failure to successfully mobilize key elements within its potential membership pool of instructors, namely those holding F visas, and further that the organization was plagued by in-fighting. Second, by contrasting portions of that same interview material with material published online this paper will demonstrate that ATEK suffered further from external problems including attacks levied against it from outside the instructor community and an inability to obtain official NGO status from the Korean government itself. Third, by applying theoretical material presented in Thomas Risse-Kappen's article *Bringing Transnational Relations Back in: Introduction*, regarding the role of domestic governmental structure in facilitating or blocking access to that structure by transnational actors, this paper will show that despite being a domestic actor ATEK failed at least in part because of South Korea's having, as Risse-Kappen puts it, a *state-dominated* domestic governmental structure. In this way, it is the argument of this paper that ATEK did not disintegrate under the weight of commonly understood internal and external pressures alone, but also in part due the specific structure of the South Korean state, which made gaining access to that state's political systems a virtual impossibility.

## Causes of the Disintegration of ATEK: Interviews with Informants

To get as clear a picture of the situation concerning the disintegration of ATEK as possible, in order to understand it as fully as possible, it was necessary to contact and interview several people directly involved in the foundation and running of the organization. While the initial research goal was to contact as many people as possible it quickly became clear that due to the particular circumstances of ATEK's disintegration a focus on obtaining an unbiased account of that disintegration would likely be a far more fruitful goal. Snowball sampling methodology was initially employed to this end, beginning with the first informant, Rob O., who recommended several further informants with whom to get in contact for potential interviews.

Ultimately, a total of five informants were contacted online and asked the question, "Why, in your opinion, did ATEK fail?" Limitations which had to be reconciled included the rather small size of this sample set, the fact that one could quite naturally question the reliability of the informants therein, and the particularly sensitive nature of the disintegration of the organization (one informant told me he was, "going to try to keep [his] emotions out of it..."). Therefore, it was incumbent upon the author to investigate the possibility that tangential perspectives of the story of ATEK's disintegration might provide further insight and paint a fuller picture of it. Thus, it became necessary to investigate the existence of various forms of pertinent online material as well. Gathered below is a summary of the material gleaned from those interviews and online material.

Rob O. was ATEK's National Communications Officer from April of 2010 to January of the following year, and a member of ATEK's Executive Council, which also included the organization's president and other national officers. In that capacity he participated in voting on issues and advised the council as to the public relations implications of ATEK's actions and projects. Finally, he was also in charge of managing the organization's public relations through various forms of media, doing interviews, writing press releases, and responding to inquiries and criticisms.<sup>6</sup>

According to this first informant, the most central reason for the downfall of ATEK was its having gotten a poor start. The organization's initial operation, entitled the "Equal Checks for All" campaign, was unintentionally divisive, essentially pitting the longer-term resident instructors, whose membership would ultimately turn out to be quite valuable to the organization,

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6 Rob O., online text message to the author, December 9, 2013.

against other resident instructors.<sup>7</sup> To explain, the South Korean law this campaign was focused on changing required E2 visa holding instructors to undergo medical exams, including HIV screenings. Exempted from such exams were F-visa holders, a group which includes visiting and resident ethnic Koreans not holding Korean citizenship and spouses of Korean citizens, of whom many were long-term residents of South Korea. These people either correctly or incorrectly felt that any changes the campaign might engender would not be beneficial to their specific life situations, for if the campaign were successful they too would be subject to such medical exams.

This was compounded by Rob O.'s opinion that whereas it was potentially easier for short-term E2 visa holding residents, who perhaps felt, "the exit option is attractive enough," to simply pack up and leave South Korea when the going got tough, those holding F-visas had invested themselves in marriages here.<sup>8</sup> Hence the membership of longer-term F-visa holding instructors simply ended up being of more value for the organization. The "Equal Checks for All" campaign unfortunately alienated this segment of the membership pool. Finally, according to Rob O. the organization was also plagued by internal problems, ultimately being "brought down by a toxic mix of personalities."<sup>9</sup>

Darren B. was ATEK's Vice President and Chair of the National Council from roughly 2009 to 2011. As vice president, his role was to assist the president and take that person's place during absences, while as National Council Chair he led the meetings held by that body which focused on a wide variety of topics from scheduling and voting to the organization's agenda.<sup>10</sup>

Mirroring comments made by Rob O. regarding in-fighting, Darren B. confirmed that divisiveness was not unique to ATEK's membership pool alone; there seems to have been a great deal of in-fighting within the organization itself among those who worked for it. According to this second informant ATEK suffered from a, "lack of quality people," which meant that the organization was very limited in its recruiting options. This meant that ATEK and its members were forced to, "recruit anyone and everyone, and put up with masses of [bullshit]." According to Darren B. this made it difficult to dismiss potentially difficult organization members who inevitably ended up disagreeing with other members,<sup>11</sup> which necessarily led to the in-fighting Rob O. mentioned.

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7 Rob O., interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Darren B., online text message to the author, December 9, 2013.

11 Darren B., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

Furthermore, according to Darren B., “Nobody [would] admit they lost because procedures for dispute resolution weren’t clear,” hence in his opinion the personnel problem was compounded by ATEK’s lack of mechanisms for the resolution of internal disputes. This problem led inexorably to a fractured organizational focus, which in the informant’s opinion ran the gamut of possibilities. There were those who felt the organization should strive to increase public visibility through the provision of services for members. Others, of the opposite opinion, felt that a neutral course could be struck by undertaking a minimal amount of activities. Ultimately, the organization ended up split between two factions, neither of which would agree to understand the organization’s charter in the same way. Regardless of which side was right or wrong it did not matter, because dispute resolution mechanisms did not exist, and furthermore, in Darren B.’s opinion, neither did, “central leadership.”<sup>12</sup>

Jared A. was ATEK’s membership coordinator in Incheon, having organized ATEK’s first meeting there in February of 2009. He was subsequently the organization’s chairperson in Incheon for a little more than a year from late 2010 to early 2012, during which time he was responsible for coordinating the activities of active members in Incheon and attending national meetings in which he participated in raising, discussing, and voting on various issues.<sup>13</sup>

According to this third informant, “ATEK was founded by ordinary people with good intentions,”<sup>14</sup> which arguably resonates strongly with what Darren B. mentioned about the organization lacking mechanisms for the management and settlement of disputes. It stands to reason that at an initial phase the ordinary and good-intentioned people of ATEK simply did not feel or realize that they needed such mechanisms as all they were trying to do was help people. Who would disagree with or try to undermine such a goal? Further, Jared A.’s comments mesh with the implication inherent to Rob O.’s: “ATEK’s struggles began when they alienated the very people upon whom they most depended for success – the F-Visa holders.”<sup>15</sup> In Jared A.’s own words, “Ultimately, the polar-opposite combination of inexperience, transience, and volunteer leadership were unable to gain traction towards even defining common goals, let alone achieving any.”<sup>16</sup> So while the organization was busily, though unintentionally, alienating those among the instructor

12 Ibid.

13 Jared A., online text message to the author, December 10, 2013.

14 Jared A., online text message to the author, November 30, 2013.

15 Rob O., interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

16 Jared A., online text message to author, November 30, 2013.

community who would potentially have been the most valuable assets to the organization it was simultaneously not focused enough to successfully remedy such a failure. This mirrors the opinion expressed by Darren B. regarding ATEK's not having had a clear focus, an opinion expressed by the next informant whose comments are summarized below.

Bryan H. was the ethics officer for ATEK's Seoul chapter for a few months during the end of 2009. Aside from being tasked with assisting in writing and codifying the organization's charter he described the job as comprising a role of checking and balancing the organization, but with a relative degree of autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

This fourth informant felt that, "ATEK had failures at multiple levels, planning, execution, and leadership." The organization was initially over-designed as something much larger and more complex than it needed to be because its founders unrealistically wanted ATEK to represent every instructor in South Korea, even those who only planned to spend a very short amount of time living and working in that country. This unreasonable goal was supposed to be facilitated, in the opinion of Bryan H., by an organizational structure that was far too complex, meaning that new rules and regulations were difficult to impose and that joining the organization was far more complicated than it should have been. Further, because of, "lofty goals and aspiration [sic.], the original founders created a [spider web] of checks and balances."<sup>18</sup> This unrealistic initial goal resonates strongly with what Rob O. stated about the organization's having gotten off to a bad start. Further, the overly-complex structure described by Bryan H. arguably echoes what Darren B. mentioned about ATEK's having lacked internal mechanisms for conflict resolution. Bryan H. continued, "Instead of starting small and simple, they came out of the gate saying they repped [sic.] everyone and were focused on changing a system that didn't really need changing," hence his opinion that the organization came undone partly because of a focus on unrealistic goals.<sup>19</sup>

Greg D. joined ATEK early in the organization's formation and rose quickly to the position of chairperson of the Gyeongnam Chapter in March of 2009, becoming ATEK's communications' director in May of that year. He subsequently became ATEK's first elected president in September of 2009, a position he held for one year.<sup>20</sup> His main function as president was the cre-

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17 Bryan H., online text message to author, December 10, 2013.

18 Bryan H., online text message to author, December 1, 2013.

19 Ibid.

20 Greg D., online text message to the author, December 9, 2013.

ation and implementation of organizational policy, but as the organization's leader, jobs left undone often fell to him. In this way, at any one time he could have been focused on recruiting and training new members, helping with the election of new national and local officers, participating in conferences and government events, and helping out with the day to day running of the organization.<sup>21</sup>

According to this fifth informant the causes of ATEK's failure involved reasons related to four groups of people. First, the organization was subject to online harassment by F-visa holding long-term resident instructors who, the informant felt, saw ATEK and its "Equal Checks for All" campaign as an upset to the established status quo; this opinion was also mentioned by Rob O.. Second, Greg D. was the only informant to have mentioned ATEK having been attacked externally by, "Korean nationalists," who, in his opinion, feel that foreigners in Korea, "are stealing their women, raping, miseducating, and destroying their culture. ATEK gave them a focal point to aim their sights on." Greg D. also mentioned attempting legal action against a group known as Anti-English Spectrum (hereafter, AES), but says that the case was summarily dismissed despite feeling his accusations against that organization were well documented.<sup>22</sup> While the leveling of racism and xenophobia against a foreign community is certainly nothing new, this information was unfortunately not corroborated by material provided by the other four informants, but instead will be discussed below with regard to the online research portion of this paper.

Third, Greg D. went into great detail concerning the existence of extensive in-fighting within the organization, as was mentioned by Rob O. and Darren B.. In short, the organization was split among two factions, one of which the informant discussed as, "usurpers," who, "joined the organization with the idea of changing it from a non-profit group to a [for-profit] business with no democratic council." Such incompatible views concerning the direction and focus of the organization, as was also mentioned by Darren B., could not be mediated, as the organization was both overly complex, as was discussed by Bryan H., and lacked mechanisms for internal conflict resolution, as Darren B. mentioned.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, and most importantly for the final section of this paper, Greg D. leveled blame directly at the Korean government itself. According to him ATEK was subject to a great deal of confusion when he attempted to register

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21 Greg D., online text message to the author, December 10, 2013.

22 Greg D., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

23 Ibid.



the group nationally as an NGO, despite initially being told that legally ATEK would be able to be so registered. Subsequently Greg D. was sent from one government office to the next in a fruitless search for even one government official or employee who could provide the information necessary to get ATEK registered as an NGO. In his own words Greg D. stated that, “Magically every office I went to and every officer I met had no idea how,” to register ATEK as an NGO in South Korea.<sup>24</sup> Whether ATEK was being intentionally given the run-around or was simply suffering from an overabundance of institutional red tape will likely never be known and therefore cannot be speculated upon. However, the fact remains that upon attempting to register ATEK as an NGO, Greg D. was stymied at every turn.

In Greg D.’s opinion, the fact that only “large” and well-established INGOs had ever successfully registered within South Korea, meant there was perhaps a disconnect vis-à-vis ATEK’s ability for registration, as no such “small,” domestic, or less well known group had ever done so before.<sup>25</sup> Obviously South Korea has NGOs of its own, but the point to be understood here is that South Korea’s instructor community lacks even a single advocacy group, made up of foreign membership, which is both autonomous from associated Korean groups and officially recognized by the South Korean government. Furthermore, it is important to note here that such obstacles, as were mentioned above with regard to the Migrants’ Trade Union, seem all too common or even constitute quasi-institutional practice in South Korea. For, along with refusing to recognize the MTU as an official union, “the South Korean government has consistently deported MTU leaders,”<sup>26</sup> such as happened to then MTU President Torna Limbu and Vice President Abdus Sabur on May 15, 2008,<sup>27</sup> and more recently to another former MTU president, Michel Catuira, who even after successfully appealing a government deportation order in 2011 was subsequently barred from re-entering South Korea the following year.<sup>28</sup> This sort of apparently institutional denial of the legitimacy of migrant generated advocacy groups, in the form of domestic NGOs, will be further explored below in the final section of this paper.

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 “Migrants’ Trade Union in South Korea Grows, Gains International Support,” *AFL-CIO Now*, last modified January 13, 2012, <http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Global-Action/Migrants-Trade-Union-in-South-Korea-Grows-Gains-International-Support>. (accessed December 7, 2013).

27 “Migrants’ Trade Union Leaders Deported,” *International Trade Union Confederation*, last modified May 20, 2008, <http://www.ituc-csi.org/korea-migrants-trade-union-leaders>. (accessed December 7, 2013)..

28 “Former Migrant Union Organizer Denied Entry,” *The Hankyoreh*, last modified May 2, 2012, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/530855.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/530855.html). (accessed December 7, 2013).

The following is a quick summary of the opinions expressed by the informants listed above.

1. Rob O.: A poor start, alienation of F-visa holders, in-fighting
2. Darren B.: In-fighting, no mechanisms for internal conflict resolution, lack of focus
3. Jared A.: Lack of experience, alienation of F-visa holders, lack of focus
4. Bryan H.: Unrealistic goals, overly complex internal structure
5. Greg D.: Alienation of F-visa holders, external attacks by “Korean Nationalists,” in-fighting, government obstruction

### **Causes of the Disintegration of ATEK: Online Materials**

Upon doing online research into the disintegration of ATEK, in the interest of presenting as full a picture as possible of opinions concerning such, it was discovered that the most complete published records in existence were those written by bloggers living in South Korea. One such article, “ATEK is Dead; Let’s Bury it: A Eulogy”, was written by this paper’s first informant, Rob O., known in the blogosphere as “Roboseyo.” Among the article’s seven reasons listed for ATEK’s disintegration, all three summarized above are included in detail.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the “Korean nationalists” mentioned by Greg D. are briefly discussed in the form of the group Anti-English Spectrum, though unfortunately the final point made by Greg D. concerning government obstruction of ATEK’s receiving official NGO status is not broached.

However, included in that article’s first sentence is a link to another article entitled “ATEK: the Great White Hoax”, published on a website called The Three Wise Monkeys, which is described on its “About” page as, “a weekly updated blogazine [sic.] with inside-out reportage, interviews, images, videos and everything else we can frame into it that is provocative, smart, entertaining and takes on life here from the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>30</sup> The article takes the form of a three part exploration of the history of ATEK’s formation, activities, troubles, and speculates on several possible reasons for the organization’s disintegration, including all of those discussed by the five informants interviewed for this paper, without exception.

However, it must be noted that informant opinions expressed about this article were by no means only all positive or negative. Rob O. described

29 “ATEK is Dead; Let’s Bury it: a Eulogy,” *Roboseyo Blogspot*, last modified March 26, 2012, <http://roboseyo.blogspot.kr/2012/03/atek-eulogy.html>. (accessed November 30, 2013).

30 “About,” *The Three Wise Monkeys*, last modified 2011, <http://thethreewisemonkeys.com/about-2/>. (accessed December 7, 2013).

the article as, “very one-sided and overwhelmingly negative,” because its authors apparently gave those of the opposite opinion expressed in the article no opportunity to refute it.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Bryan H. expressed his opinion of the article saying it was, “written in more of a gonzo journalistic flair, but they did their due diligence and [it’s] a great article on the organization.”<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Greg D. characterized the article as, “a hit piece,” written without the authors having conducted interviews or meetings with any members of ATEK, that the article contained false accusations and rumors, and finally his opinion that the real motivation for writing the article lie in the fact that the subject was controversial and would garner the website more traffic.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, published material concerning the history and activities of ATEK is extremely limited, leaving “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” as the lone published comprehensive examination of ATEK. Thus, in the opinion of this author, a critical examination of the points raised in the article would seem necessary in order to paint a fuller picture of the reasons surrounding the disintegration of ATEK. In this way, how closely the material of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” corresponds with the substance of interview material presented above must be determined.

Among the reasons for ATEK’s disintegration listed by the five informants interviewed for this paper both “alienation of F-visa holders” and “in-fighting” were given three times each. Part two of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” begins by addressing the causes of this first problem directly: “some expats with visas other than the E2 opposed the [“Equal Checks for All” campaign] for both sensible and self-serving reasons—they’d married a Korean citizen, had a master or doctorate degree, or some other condition that provided an exemption for the common work visa. Why should they be subjected to HIV/Drug tests in addition to full physicals and the hassle of obtaining an FBI check?”<sup>34</sup> Obviously this dovetails precisely with what was stated by Rob O., Jared A. and Greg D.. In-fighting is likewise discussed directly in the first installment of the article: “it’s hard to prevent infighting in an organization that’s desperate to make progress, faces constant critiques and requires council representatives to dedicate their time for free.”<sup>35</sup> This resonates

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31 Rob O., online text message to the author, December 9, 2013.

32 Bryan H., online text message to the author, December 1, 2013.

33 Greg D., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

34 “ATEK: the Great White Hoax (Pt. 2),” *The Three Wise Monkeys*, last modified March 28, 2011. <http://thethreewisemonkeys.com/2011/03/28/atek-the-great-white-hoax-pt-2/>. (accessed November 30, 2013).

35 “ATEK: the Great White Hoax,” *The Three Wise Monkeys*, last modified March 21, 2011, <http://thethreewisemonkeys.com/2011/03/21/atek-the-great-white-hoax/>. (accessed November 30, 2013).

strongly with what Darren B. characterized as the gravest challenge faced by the organization. Thus, while opinions of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” expressed in the interviews summarized above can hardly be characterized as only positive, it can at least be assumed that the article includes material of generally the same substance as was given in those interviews. That the article presents this material with a rather negative tone can be ignored in favor of attempting to draw from the article material which supports the informant interviews; as was shown above, such material is plentiful.

In addition to supporting the alienation of F-visa holders and in-fighting claims “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” includes material which parallels the second reason provided by Greg D., who stated his opinion that “Korean nationalists” were somewhat to blame for the disintegration of ATEK.<sup>36</sup> In part two of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” two incidents are discussed which led to animosity being directed at the foreign population in South Korea in the form of xenophobia and nationalism: first, the 2002 deaths of Shin Hyo Sun and Shim Mi Son, two fourteen-year-old Korean girls, who were accidentally hit and run over by a US military vehicle, the operators of which were acquitted of negligent homicide, and second, a 2005 scandal surrounding posts made on a website called English Spectrum in which an individual identifying himself as “the Player” posted lewd pictures of young Korean women along with “advice” for finding such women for the purposes of casual sex. In part two of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” this second incident is credited as the direct impetus behind the birth of the group known as Anti-English Spectrum,<sup>37</sup> the same group which Greg D. identified as the “Korean nationalists” who focused their destructive energy on ATEK.<sup>38</sup> Thus while Greg D. was the only informant who mentioned such a link between ATEK and these “Korean nationalists,”<sup>39</sup> such a claim is reinforced by the second portion of “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” in which AES is characterized as, “a vigilante Korean group,” which, “mainly exaggerates and exacerbates any information that builds the case against evil English educators residing in South Korea.”<sup>40</sup> Greg D. also discussed ATEK’s failed attempt to address the situation with AES through legal channels, saying essentially that the case was dropped by the police,<sup>41</sup> a detail further supported by the article which concluded its discussion of AES with this eye-opening statement: “It

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36 Greg D., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

37 “ATEK: the Great White Hoax (Pt. 2)”.

38 Greg D., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

39 Ibid.

40 “ATEK: the Great White Hoax (Pt. 2)”.

41 Greg D., online text message to author, November 26, 2013.

is reported that law enforcement appreciates some efforts of AES given that the group acts a bit like an arm of the law in cases where the law may not have the manpower."<sup>42</sup> Thus what is being further hinted at is tacit government approval of, or at least an allowance for, the activities of this group in supplementing the police to the clear detriment of the lives and livelihoods of the instructor community.

Greg D.'s fourth reason for the disintegration of ATEK, government obstruction, is further supported by material from part two of "ATEK: the Great White Hoax." On June 17, 2010 an ATEK officer named Mark Barthelemy attended a meeting of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency (SMPA)'s Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, which essentially constituted a dialogue between the non-Korean members of the committee and top representatives of law enforcement in Seoul. The committee's members came from several countries whose nationals call South Korea home including the Philippines, Nigeria, China, as well as a few of the seven English-speaking nations of which E2 visa holders are required to be citizens. The opposite side included Kim Ki-yong, the then director of the National Security Department.<sup>43</sup> This first step at building a relationship between the instructor community, albeit with ATEK as its mouthpiece, and a central branch of the South Korean government was followed by the SMPA inviting Mark Barthelemy to present at a lecture series entitled the "Multicultural Training Program." About this Barthelemy was quoted as saying, "It is a great honor to participate in these trainings and to represent ATEK on the committee ... SMPA's willingness to reach out to expat communities is a major step forward. Giving ATEK's members a voice will enhance the city's readiness, and will boost Seoul's image as a truly world-class city that welcomes people from everywhere."<sup>44</sup> Barthelemy's enthusiasm seems to have been shared by government officials as Choi Ho-ryul, Deputy Director of Foreign Affairs, commented on Barthelemy's lecture, given bilingually in English and Korean, saying, "Mark's entertaining and informative presentation provided our field officers with invaluable advice for engaging expat residents and tourists across cultural and language barriers."<sup>45</sup> It seems rather obvious that a relationship of such dually recognized mutual benefit would continue to be fostered by both sides, but that does not seem to have been the case.

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42 "ATEK: the Great White Hoax (Pt. 2)".

43 "English teachers' group connects Seoul police with expats," *Korea Herald*, last modified July 13, 2010, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20100713000612>. (accessed December 7, 2013).

44 "ATEK: the Great White Hoax (Pt. 2)".

45 Ibid.

Barely a year later it was published in “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” that the relationship between ATEK and the Seoul Police had apparently come to an abrupt end and that Barthelemy had at some point in the previous year ceased his membership with ATEK. Further, his vacancy on the Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee had apparently not been filled by another ATEK member. Likewise, the Seoul Police had failed to follow the first Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee meeting up with another as of March 2011. In researching “ATEK: the Great White Hoax” the authors of that article were told by a Lieutenant Kim of the Seoul Police’s public relations department that ATEK was not a member of the Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee. They quote him as saying, “The Foreign Affairs Advisory Commission [sic.] is composed of commissioners, which means an organization cannot be a member of the commission,” and further explained that questions related directly to Barthelemy were, “met with obliviousness.”<sup>46</sup>

While it presumably was not Barthelemy’s charge to build a relationship with the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency with the ultimate goal of having ATEK registered as a domestic NGO, creating such a relationship would have no doubt bestowed upon ATEK a certain measure of clout in that regard. Furthermore, can it be assumed that calling the Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee a “commission” was simply the lieutenant’s mistake? Was it a typo in the article? Or should it be assumed that the “committee” was changed in some way, ultimately making it a “commission?” Such confusion may seem unremarkable, but when seen as part of an overarching pattern of dysfunction and even possible obstruction, it cannot simply be dismissed. Finally, while this sort of information can only be speculated upon it seems at least plausible that where there is smoke, there is fire, and presumably there is more to this story than has been published in the public record. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this paper the author was unable to contact Mark Barthelemy directly for an interview. However, a possible explanation of the situation comes in the form of the theory explained in the next section of this paper.

### **Thomas Risse-Kappen and Domestic Governmental Structure: Theoretical Implications**

In the introduction to his 1995 book, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, Thomas Risse-Kappen argues that, “The extent to which transnational actors gain access to the political systems seems to be primarily a function

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46 Ibid.

of the state structure. National governments ultimately determine whether foreign societal actors are allowed to enter the country and to pursue their goals in conjunction with national actors," (italics in the original).<sup>47</sup> He goes on to identify three ways in which states can be categorized according to their domestic structure. With specific regard to the case of South Korea, Risse-Kappen places that country within the *state-dominated* domestic governmental structure, which he typifies according to the three traits. First, he characterizes South Korea as a "centralized state," exhibiting centralized political institutions concentrating executive authority at the apex of the political structure. Governmental systems of this sort are typically relatively independent of the state legislature and, "emphasize the state as caretaker of the needs of the citizens."<sup>48</sup> Second, Risse-Kappen identifies South Korea within the category of "weak societies," typified by an internal weakness of civil society, and states that such weakness stems from cleavages of class and/or ideology.<sup>49</sup> Civil society within states of this category would presumably find it rather difficult to mobilize citizens for political causes because of a distinct lack of consolidated economic, industrial, or religious social and/or advocacy organizations. Third, Risse-Kappen places South Korea within the category of states exhibiting "consensual policy networks," typified by rather well developed and powerful political intermediary groups. Such groups, political parties for example, act as channels for the aggregation of the demands of the populace about which compromises are made among the political parties themselves, quite separate from direct involvement by the populace; these groups then channel certain information into the higher areas of government.<sup>50</sup>

The most obvious implication of this argument is that a given transnational actor's potential for successfully accessing a *state-dominated* political structure can be contrasted with such success vis-à-vis what he deems a *society-dominated* state like the United States of America. The difference implicit to this dichotomy is the centralized governmental structure of the former, which leads to transnational actor difficulty accessing political systems and domestic institutions, and the fragmented governmental structure of the latter, leading to the opposite situation. Risse-Kappen also argues that while a state like South Korea may be initially quite difficult for a trans-

47 Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Bringing Transnational Relations back in: Introduction," in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-state Actors, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.

48 *Ibid.*, 22.

49 *Ibid.*.

50 *Ibid.*

national actor to access, the potential for that actor to induce change once this initial challenge has been mastered is quite high. Conversely he argues that the opposite would be true for a state like the US. wherein the government's inherently fragmented nature makes building coalitions among a host of groups manifesting disparate views and goals much more difficult. Thus while penetrating such a system may be initially accomplished with relative ease, guaranteeing policy impact is far more difficult.<sup>51</sup> While it is important to note this second of Risse-Kappen's two arguments, if for no other reason than to include within this paper a full summary of the cited writing, for the purposes of this paper's argument implications of Risse-Kappen's second argument will not be further explored.

Returning to Risse-Kappen's characterization of a *state-dominated* political structure like that of South Korea, the functions inherent to such a domestic political structure are echoed by Kim Nam Kook in *Catalysers in the Promotion of Migrants' Rights: Church-Based NGOs in South Korea*. In discussing South Korea's democratization movement of the 1980s, Kim states, "One can find a common pattern in the procedure of Korean democratization: citizens initiate changes through militant collective action, then the regime surrenders, and finally citizens are excluded in the stage of institutionalization that results from militant struggle."<sup>52</sup> This institutionalization no doubt takes place among the political intermediary groups Risse-Kappen discussed, for as Kim continues, "Explosive debates were often excluded or distorted by the incumbent political elites, not least in the aggregation process that occurred at the National Assembly."<sup>53</sup>

Finally, Kim specifically discusses the implications of this pattern with regard to the June 1987 protest movement against South Korea's military regime, characterizing it thusly: "Extensive participation by citizens at the beginning stage was not swiftly turned into a new political organization of their own and was simply replaced by negotiations between the existing political parties in the process of legislation and thus resulted in the extended tenure of the military regime until 1992."<sup>54</sup> It is centrally important to the argument of this paper to note that while Risse-Kappen makes very sound arguments vis-à-vis the ability of transnational actors to access the political systems of states of varying governmental structures, he does not address the ability or inability of domestic actors to do the same. However, as was

51 Ibid., 26

52 Nam-Kook Kim, "The Migrant Workers' Movement in Democratic Consolidation of Korea," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, (November 2012): p. 679.

53 Ibid., 679-680

54 Ibid., 680



discussed above, Kim's characterization of the South Korean democratization movement of the 1980s demonstrates the existence of strong domestic parallels with Risse-Kappen's arguments vis-à-vis transnational actors. For it would seem that Korean citizens themselves were blocked by South Korea's domestic governmental structure and as such were unable to directly take part in institutionalization of the legislative changes their protests had at least incited. Likewise, as was discussed above, the industrial migrants' movement has been unable to have their union, the MTU, officially recognized by the South Korean government, and their leaders are almost routinely rounded up for deportation.

Thus the inability to access a given government's political systems is particularly relevant with regard to the case of migration, which involves both the international and domestic spheres directly. Case in point, instructors in South Korea constitute an internationally migratory population residing domestically within the country. While some of these instructors are no doubt ethnically Korean and hence constitute international returnees, the vast majority of these instructors are expatriates who can legally only teach English in South Korea if they are nationals of one of seven English-speaking countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Therefore if South Korea is first considered a "centralized state" which sees itself as the caretaker of its own citizens, what is the role of that government with regard to foreign nationals residing within its borders? Can it be assumed that instructors are not going to be taken care of in the same way as South Korean nationals also residing domestically? Second, if South Korea, as a "weak society," is typified by class and ideological cleavages, would non-citizenship not automatically lead to a deepening of such divisions? Can it be assumed that instructors would likely be more, rather than less, unable to connect with South Korean civil society groups or form similar groups of their own? Third, if access to the top of the South Korean governmental power structure is even potentially controlled by "consensual policy networks," made up of strong political intermediaries like political parties, what ability might instructors have to sway the opinions and influence the actions of such groups, without the ability to vote? Can it be assumed that instructors have little or no ability to make their voices heard by and express their needs to those in the South Korean government taking part in the final institutionalization of policy?

Finally, if Korean citizens themselves within their own country cannot participate directly in the final institutionalization of legislative changes they have directly initiated through collective action, what hope do instructors,

as foreign nationals residing in South Korea, have of achieving that goal? In this way, it seems more than reasonable to assume that the political structure of South Korea's government is at least partially to blame for the inability of ATEK to register domestically as an NGO, in the same way that the MTU has likewise been unable to obtain official recognition from that same government. It remains to be speculated over whether or not ATEK, upon having been able to successfully register as an NGO, would have thus obtained enough legitimacy, clout, recognition, or what have you from the instructor community to overcome its internal problems, but it can be assumed that having successfully registered as such would not have caused the organization further injury or setback. Unfortunately, before that could happen ATEK disintegrated.

## **Conclusion**

While it is not the purpose of this paper to speculate about which single reason directly caused the disintegration of ATEK, the inability of that group to successfully register as an NGO with the South Korean government can arguably be understood as the proverbial final straw that broke the camel's back. Having started by alienating the most important portion of its membership base, plagued by internal division, suffering from a lack of unified focus, and subject to external attacks by Koreans and non-Koreans alike ATEK had still managed to continue moving forward. However, it seems that ATEK was finally undone by an inability to access the South Korean political system, which could have bestowed upon the organization a measure of legitimacy through official recognition of NGO status: the glue that might have held ATEK together. In this way, the only plausible remedy would involve the South Korean government's inauguration of an institutional system whereby civil society organizations, composed of non-Korean membership and operating domestically, could quickly and easily apply for and receive official government recognition as NGOs. Such a framework would constitute a strong move toward ensuring that advocacy for South Korea's instructors, industrial migrant workers, and foreign brides, including protection of their human rights, is a goal the South Korean government is interested in pursuing. Ultimately, the fact of the matter is that the non-Korean population of South Korea is growing, and as such the government has a responsibility to see to it that that population is allowed to advocate on its own behalf.

Today however the situation is much the same as it was before ATEK was founded for almost all of South Korea's native English-speaking English lan-

guage instructors. The community is migratory in nature, meaning instructors tend to fall into one of two resident categories: long and short term. Short-term residents make up the vast majority of the population, every day going about living their lives and doing their jobs for the most part protected by neither their home country nor the country which they now call home. With regard to redress, they are for the most part advocated for by neither powerful international nongovernmental organizations nor small grassroots associations of their own creation. While some among the community once sought to improve both the quality of their life and work situations here in South Korea through the previously discussed Association for Teachers of English in Korea, that organization succumbed to a lethal combination of mistakes, attacks, and impediments to the development which would perhaps have bestowed upon it the legitimacy it required to overcome its various failings. During his interview Greg D. described ATEK as he envisioned it: an organization by which English teachers would selflessly use their personal experiences to pay the benefits forward successively to each group of newly arrived instructors. "Imagine if an ATEK rep met you at the airport or online before you arrived,"<sup>55</sup> he said. Such lofty goals may sound idealistic or even downright impossible to accomplish, but those criticisms cannot negate the validity of one last point he made: "Korea needs strong civil society organizations."<sup>56</sup> Today South Korea's approximately 22,000 instructors ultimately need only one. Y

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55 Greg D., online text message to the author, November 26, 2013.

56 Ibid.