

ESSAY

**The Presence of Diverse Cultures in South Korea:
Redefining South Korea's Multicultural Society**

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In relation to western ideology, multiculturalism is defined as the harmony and co-existence of multiple cultures living in one area. This definition is forward-thinking and has been unsuccessful due to the lack of constant improvement from both the government and the civil society in western nations. In contrast, the concept of multiculturalism in South Korea tends to focus on society and the immigrants that fit into the categories of marriage migrants and multicultural families. The policies created with multiculturalism in mind have been known to leave out specific groups, still making it harder for them to be included in society in 2021. Much of the discourse around multiculturalism stems from multiple viewpoints that aid in the misconception that multiculturalism is new to the region. This essay looks at the chronological-historical emergence of multiculturalism as having been present on the Korean peninsula prior to democratization. Rather than critically analyze the ongoing multicultural debate, this research begins with the Goryeo dynasty's approach to open borders. It then moves forward to modern South Korean society in a timeline of events that consider immigrants and policies. In addition, this essay will discuss the emergence of a multi-ethnic society and highlight current policies of multiculturalism in South Korea.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Global Society, Multicultural Policy, Immigration, Migrants, Integration

Introduction

In the field of Korean studies, there is debate regarding the topics of national identity and multiculturalism, specifically regarding the topics of one-ethnic

identity. The recent trend of discussing Korean society as a global society in academics has influenced research questions on Koreanness, Korean national identity, and one-ethnic identity versus globalized society. These are just a few straightforward concepts that begin debates about Korea's future during a globalized world rather than looking at the present discourse in Korea and how multiculturalism is becoming synonymous with globalization. It is commonly argued that multiculturalism in South Korea is a relatively new topic of discussion, and that South Korea is still learning and accepting new cultures and the immigrant society. This view, however, is a misconception as Korea has long been a point of passage in East Asia from a historical point of view. In pre-history, while there was little contact with the nations of the west, Korea was in close contact with its neighbors Japan and China.

Throughout Korean history, from *Goryeo* (918-1392) and *Joseon* (1392-1910) to the Republic of Korea (1945-present), the presence of 'the other' was always part of the local history. However, there have been significant differences in the governments' acceptance and policies regarding 'the others' throughout history. Before the 2000s, there were few policies regarding multiculturalism within the government legislation. However, the 1940s stance on mixed-racial individuals served as a political agenda to marginalize the multicultural community. This marginalization continued for decades as mixed-racial children, those born of another race and Korean, over time began to include migrants and immigrants. After Korea's democratization in 1987, policies were created with multiculturalism as the coined terminology in mind. In 2006, the multicultural community was working to integrate into society; however, due to the policies and education layout, they were given more options of assimilation and segregation.

The sources referenced in this essay discuss the emergence of multiculturalism in South Korea. They especially look at South Korea's identity crisis in the globalization process, as it involves the perception of multicultural families and immigrants. Scholars Shin Gi-Wook and Emma Campbell discuss the change Korean society is going through as Korea enters the global stage. They both accept that Korea is changing with the presence of foreigners in South Korea. However, they have contrasting views about the direction society is taking. Ahn Ji-Hyun is a leading researcher in neoliberal multiculturalism in Asian media and has analyzed how it is perceived by society by way of the media. Ahn's book *Mixed Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in South Korean Media* looks at the transformation of society in South Korea through media analysis of how Korean society has

perceived members of the multi-ethnic community.¹ Finally, other scholars such as Iain Watson, Bae, and Robert Prey examine the transformation and struggles of a global society through a historical and comparative analysis of other nations in the world and struggles within multiculturalism.

Chronologically, this essay will briefly explain the *Dangun* myth as the point of fallacy in a one-ethnic identity argument. It will then discuss the open border policies of *Goryeo* and *Joseon*. The *Joseon* government exemplified the practice of welcoming individuals who followed and accepted the *Joseon* way of life through assimilation. Thus, looking at multi-ethnic society through history, despite the small number of non-Korean ethnic groups that have been present in Korea, shows that the narrative of Korean nationalism being homogenous is a new framework introduced with relatively recent government policies. The essay follows the timeline to the modern history of South Korea, starting from the 1940s as Korea was coming out of the Japanese occupation and forming its own government. After the Korean War and the democratization of Korea, new members are introduced to the community—as well as a new set of government policies regarding multiculturalism. The terminology and conceptualization of a global society are introduced to Korean society in the twenty-first century. These policies were created with the goal of integrating immigrants and migrants into a shared Korean society.

Literature review

South Korea has been a historically homogenous nation. Moreover, the national identity of South Korea has reflected an ethnic identity instead of one based on republic nationalism, such as in the United States of America. Despite the similarities of the US and South Korea having free-market economies or being democratized nations, the national identity that the citizens of their respective countries use to describe themselves may be different. Nationalism in the US is based on the unity of the nation under “universalistic ideals (democracy, rule of law, free marketplace) and institutions (separation of power).”² The one-ethnic concept of Korean identity is centered on the familiar lineage of passing heritage and citizenship by blood. The narrative of Korea being a “one ethnic” nation is changing due to

1 Ji-Hyun Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in South Korean Media*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

2 Minxin Pei, “The Paradoxes of American Nationalism,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 136 (2003): 31–37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3183620>.

multiple factors, mainly the steady increase of migrants and immigrants to the region since the armistice of the Korean War. In 2015, Statistics Korea reported that “the number of international migrants was of 1,306 thousand persons.”³ Immigrants and migrants come to Korea for reasons that allow them to stay in Korea for an extended period rather than the limitations of a tourist visa. They may come to Korea as students, low-skilled labor workers, English teachers, employees, or spouses. Whatever their reason for being in Korea, they desire to be part of a community and part of Korean society. While migration to South Korea has been increasing over the years, there is debate about whether Korean society is globalizing or having an inverse reaction. Scholars like Shin Gi-Wook argue that the globalization of Korea would cause a reverse reaction during which the community would latch on and maintain traditional values and culture.⁴ On the other hand, scholars like Emma Campbell argue that Korea’s youth show more acceptance and acknowledgment of the worldwide society and are working towards globalizing Korea.⁵ South Korea remains in a constant debate over the identity of Korean nationals, therefore contesting the ‘Koreanness’ of immigrants.

The Korean language uses the term *Uri*, meaning a collective ‘we;’ in fact, this term is used in context to describe the country as *Uri Nara* (our country) rather than *Taehanmin’guk*, (the Republic of Korea). The emphasis on ‘we’ is well-represented in the Korean terminology *Han minjok* as an ethos and pathos to what it means to be Korean; however, this essay will focus on the ethos of what it means to be Korean or be considered Korean. The scholar Robert Prey states that the singular citizen and the nation are inseparable in Korea due to the perceived ethnic homogeneity of South Korean society.⁶ This collective ‘we’ in Korean culture reflects the relationship between ethnic Koreans, having Korean ancestry, while individuals

3 Statistics Korea, *International Migration Statistics in 2015*, (July 14, 2016), <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/5/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=355673&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&searchInfo=&sTarget=title&sTxt=>.

4 Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

5 Emma Campbell, “The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans,” *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no 3 (2015): 483–502.

6 R. Prey, “Different takes: Migrant world television and multiculturalism in South Korea,” *Global Media Journal – Canadian Edition*, 4 (2011): 112.

who are not ethnically Korean are identified as ‘the Other’ in society.

Iain Watson provided three qualities in reference to the term multiculturalism in South Korean society based on the following elements: (1) assimilation, (2) multicultural pluralism, and (3) respect for cultural plurality.⁷ However, the key aspect of assimilation sees traditional South Korean culture as ‘greater’ than other cultures. Watson stressed that this idea could be compared to the US assimilationist approach to multiculturalism. In the United States, it is commonly argued that one should speak English on U.S. territory. Stemming from the old saying “when in Rome, do as the Romans do,” assimilation is the preferred method of social integration in a multicultural society. However, this approach is problematic as it leads other cultures to be inferior and lose cultural specificity while assimilating to mainstream culture.

Korea is experiencing various ethnic and cultural groups due to the increasing number of foreigners who stay for shorter tourists or work visits and immigrants who have visas that allow them to stay long-term. As a result, Korean society is starting to incorporate those not ethnically Korean by blood lineage. Watson explains that South Korean society encourages foreign wives to be more like traditional Korean wives, for instance, wearing traditional Korean clothes, keeping the house in order, cooking, or caring for children.⁸ These expectations can be observed during wedding ceremonies and Chuseok.

Furthermore, South Korean multiculturalism is additionally suffering from cultural pluralism.⁹ Cultural pluralists’ approach respects cultural diversity. However, rather than form a co-existence amongst cultures, this approach expects diverse cultures to be integrated into mainstream culture—thus setting up a dominant culture to lead the others. Lastly, Watson stated that a facet regards multiculturalism as “equal respect for cultural plurality,”¹⁰ yet even countries like Australia and Canada struggle with forming respect among the diverse cultures. While multiculturalism is the harmonious and equal status of all cultures in a nation-state, the term has been interpreted very differently in South Korean society. As a result, there is confusion regarding people’s

7 Iain Watson, “Paradoxical Multiculturalism in South Korea,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 4, no. 2 (2012): 233–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-0787.2012.01338.x>.

8 Iain Watson, “Multiculturalism in South Korea: A Critical Assessment,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 40, no 2 (2010): 337–346.

9 Watson, “Paradoxical Multiculturalism in South Korea,” 236.

10 *Ibid.*, 237.

perception of multiculturalism and how to integrate a multi-ethnic population.

Historical analysis

Korean nationalism is described as ethnic nationalism within the context of a common language, history, and set of customs. They also claimed descendants of a common ancestor: *Dangun*, who helped create the first nation of Korean history, *Gojoseon*. *Dangun* is known as the first ruler of Korea and the direct line to Korean history, but not necessarily as the origin of the bloodlines. Despite the knowledge of *Dangun*, the dynasties did not teach or focus on the identity of what it meant to be one ethnic group. During the Three Kingdoms period, three separate kingdoms occupied the peninsula. It was during the unified *Silla* and subsequent *Goryeo* dynasties that the peninsula was under one government rule. The lineage of *Dangun* was not the narrative used by the government, as these kingdoms had close relations with China and faced invasions from Mongolians and other tribes. Generally, there was an ‘open-door policy’ that welcomed foreigners to Korea without ethnic discrimination. Acknowledging that the narrative of one ethnicity did not exist during *Goryeo* and *Joseon* is key for exploring when the national identity narrative was created and how the identity of citizens has changed over time. In order to study this progression, this essay will start with the *Goryeo* dynasty and its immigration policies.

The *Goryeo* dynasty had the principle of “stopping neither those who wanted to come nor those who wanted to leave.”¹¹ Koreans of the *Goryeo* period could agree that birth itself did not condemn a person to uncivilized status but rather that civilization was achievable by individuals who chose to participate and be active in their efforts to assimilate. This policy embraced *Hyanghwain*: those coming to Korea for various reasons, such as defectors fleeing from economic distress or prisoners of war.¹² *Hyanghwain* was used as a broad term for all foreigners defined as those who just immigrated without

11 Mun-Jong Han, *Joseon jeongi hyanghwa, sujik woe'in yeongu* [A Study of the Japanese Who Were Naturalized and Received Official Titles] (Seoul: Gukhakjaryeowon, 2001).

12 Kyung-Koo Han and Geon-Soo Han, “Damunhwa sahoe gaenyeomgwa hanguksahoe damunhwa damron'e daehan seonchal: dan'ilminjokgukka'eui jaseungjabak/ hwangoltaltae? [Reflections on the concept of multicultural society and the discourse on multiculturalism in Korean society: is the nation-state going to be caught in its own trap or recasting itself?]” (paper presented at the Plenary Session of the Annual Meeting of the Korean Sociological Association held at Ewha Womans University, Seoul, South Korea, 2007).

speaking a word of Korean and those born and raised in *Joseon* from foreign families, indiscriminate of their Korean cultural fluency. The government agenda was to embrace individuals' hard work and effort with rewards and leniency. The *Joseon* dynasty was able to assist immigrants by separating them into small groups and allotting them pieces of land in different regions.¹³ Some policies exempted Jurchen people, immigrants from Northeast China (modern-day Manchuria), and Japanese immigrants from taxation of farming products for three years and from corvee labor for ten years.

Additionally, there was a rule of leniency towards immigrants in the criminal justice system. Immigrants and their future lineage who committed crimes in *Joseon* had the right to trial. If punished by the penal code of *Joseon*, they would be held to a lesser standard than Joseon citizens.¹⁴ Despite the acceptance of immigrants, there were still cases of discrimination as *Joseon* considered itself a civilization on par with China. This conceptualization of status resulted in the discrimination of the Jurchens and the Japanese compared to other immigrants from China.¹⁵ Chinese immigrants and their descendants were perceived as more civilized and were given more favorable treatment.¹⁶ Korean literature available in English has offered a historical and favorable context of the immigration 'open door policy,' in contrast to the closed doors of the mid-1940s during which Koreans were re-establishing what was considered traditionally Korean and made them unique. This reevaluation of identity was the result of the Japanese occupation (1905-1945), when the Korean people were forced to relinquish their tradition and culture under the latest promulgation policy of the Japanese military government during its last few years of occupation.

The aftermath of the Korean War separated Korea into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea) and the Republic of Korea. The Republic of Korea, referred to as South Korea or Korea, rebuilt the state under Rhee and later Park Chung-hee. During Rhee Süng-man's First Republic (1948–1960), the government worked to suppress the presence of the mixed-race population and to prevent any potential future social problems. The peninsula faced strong influence vis-à-vis the US and North Korea, and with the end of Japanese occupation, the peninsula was in a frenzy of

13 Han, *A Study of the Japanese*, 49.

14 *Ibid.*, 196.

15 Han, "Reflections on the concept of multicultural society," 22.

16 *Ibid.*, 23-24.

rebuilding its identity and determining the state's future as a democracy or socialist government. In the 1940s-1950s, the Korean government passed the Korean Nationality act of 1948. This law grants naturalization to people who are Korean through the blood of the patrilineal line. At the time, it did not seem to have strong implications as there were only 1,020 mixed-racial children in Korea.¹⁷ However, only 326 were naturalized by birth, meaning they were recognized as Korean citizens. Naturalization was denied to those whose mother was a Korean citizen. The unregistered mixed-racial children could not attend school and were not able to be active in civil society, as they were not given the same opportunities as naturalized Korean mixed-racial children.

In Korea, Park Chung-hee's military government dictatorship (1963-1979) is known for its rapid economic success; however, many South Korean citizens lost their lives under the dictatorship, and people started to fight for democracy and freedom.¹⁸ Unlike North Korea, South Korea welcomed the international community and actively interacted with other countries, which helped South Korea develop into a more globalized society.¹⁹ The most notable post-Korean War influx of mixed-racial children occurred due to foreign (primarily American) military presence. A high number of wartime orphans and mixed-racial children were born to single mothers, who at this point faced stigmatization from comingling with American military personnel. Women involved with the US military and their children were viewed as an embarrassment for the family and, in some cases, as enemies of the state. Korean women were subjugated to derogatory terms and were not encouraged to mention that their children were significantly marginalized, as this could be seen as anti-nationalist.

Park Chung-hee's government promoted the increased perception of mixed-race individuals as "enemies" of the state. The newly formed nationalism that embraced Korean traditions and culture was used to unite the people under one bloodline. However, the threat lay in the mixed-racial children who possessed partial Korean lineage. During Park's and Rhee's governments, mixed-racial males were not allowed to participate in military duty as pure Koreans' citizenship duty, even though the law was amended on how

17 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 38.

18 J. Kim, *A history of Korea: From 'land of the morning calm' to states in conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

19 Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Belonging: The Puzzle of Multiculturalism in South Korea," *Citizenship Studies* 16, no 1 (2012): 103–17.

citizenship was given based on parents' lineage.²⁰ Koreans recovered national pride and confidence due to the rapid economic growth from the 1960s-1980s. Korean civil society experienced a resurgence of international interest in things Korean, causing a revisit of the *Dangun* myth to unite the people.²¹

Korea was known to be a labor-exporting nation until the late 1980s, during which the situation turned, and it became a labor-importing nation. After Korea's economic boom, migrant workers came from Southeast Asia to fill low-skilled jobs, introducing new ethnic groups to Korean society. During the 1980s, Korean popular entertainment began to show representation with mixed-racial celebrities in the media, such as Park Il-Chun (African-American Korean), Insooni (African-American Korean), and Yun Su-Il (Caucasian-Korean) in the 1970s and 1980s. These individuals were known as Itaewon club singers who performed live shows but later gained popularity due to physical characteristics differentiating them from popular Korean singers.²² Culture media scholar Ahn Ji-Hyun argues that the expectation of the mixed-racial singers, "Amerisians," was to appear more Korean using whitening makeup. In contrast, their Korean counterparts needed to look more exotic, thus popularizing the use of yellow foundation.

Transitioning into the late 1980s, the Korean government made it a national policy to incorporate globalization into the framework of the Roh administration, thus, opening the discussion of accepting new groups into Korea and working together for integration. However, this would not be possible until the late 1990s, after the IMF crisis in Korea and the explosive increase of "international marriages."²³ Men in rural areas had difficulties finding marriage partners as young women migrated to the cities, which catalyzed the practice of bringing brides from other Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand.²⁴ During the rise of marriage migrants from Southeast Asia, we see the term "Ko-asian" being coined to describe children of mixed Korean and other Asian ethnicities.²⁵ This term would not only separate these individuals from Koreans but

20 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 42.

21 Kyung-Ko Han, "The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea." *Korea Journal* 47, no 4 (2007): 8–32.

22 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 42.

23 Prey, "Migrant world television and multiculturalism in South Korea," 109-125.

24 Ibid.

25 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 42.

also cause a distinction between categories of mixed-racial individuals.

The rise of marriage migrants and the issues surrounding the new spouse and children’s rights was at the forefront of the government agenda, which used them for state propaganda. There was a policy shift towards multiculturalism, and therefore the South Korean government struggled to determine which policies to prioritize regarding ‘multicultural family’ issues within society.²⁶ The policies created by the government highlighted the two largest migrant groups: migrant workers and foreign brides. However, it was not until the twenty-first century that we saw the Korean government and NGOs working to provide better legislature for protection and fundamental rights for mixed-raced Koreans and foreign national residents, such as migrant brides or naturalized immigrants in Korea.

President Roh advocated to stop teaching ethnic homogeneity and embrace the views of multiculturalism. With this guideline, government agencies started various projects to aid foreign brides in adapting to South Korean society.²⁷ For example, the Ministry of Justice implemented the Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea (2007) and the Multicultural Family Support Act (2008). Both legislations sought to improve the lives of the families and individuals and promote social integration (see table 1 below for more in-depth information).

	<i>Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea (2007)</i>	<i>Multicultural Family Support Act (2008)</i>
Proposed policy based on the act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2008–2012) • The Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2013–2017) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The First Basic Plan for Multicultural Family Policy (2010–2012) • The Second Basic Plan for Multicultural Family Policy (2013–2017)
Policy goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help foreigners in Korea adjust to Korean society and reach their full potential • To create a society where Koreans and foreigners in Korea understand and respect one another with the aims of contributing to the development of Korea and social integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the quality of life of members of multicultural families • To contribute to social integration by ensuring that members of multicultural families enjoy a stable family life
Main policy actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support economic stimulus and attract human resources from overseas (openness) • Promote social integration that respects shared Korean values (social integration) • Prevent discrimination and respect cultural diversity (human rights) • Ensure a safe society for Koreans and non-Koreans alike (public safety) • Promote co-prosperity with the international community (cooperation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a “Multicultural Family Support Policy” system of organizations • Strengthen management of international marriage mediation and the system to verify foreigners before entry • Strengthen support for the settlement and independence of marriage migrants • Create an environment to foster the healthy growth of children in multicultural families • Enhance society’s understanding of multiculturalism

Table 1: Korean Legislature for Immigrants and Multicultural Families.²⁸

26 Prey, “Migrant world television and multiculturalism in South Korea,” 109-125.

27 Han, “The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State,” 8–32.

28 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 50.

Korea is one of the countries with the world's lowest birth rates at 0.9 children per woman²⁹ and simultaneously has one of the most rapidly aging populations.³⁰ Consequently, South Korea has been affected by a shortage in the labor force and has strongly relied on migrant workers from other Asian countries. In 2018, the South Korean population was 51,629,512, and the number of international immigrants was 1,480,000 (the highest number of migrants recorded after 200).³¹ Consistent with findings from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS), the number of registered foreigners had gradually increased from 3.5 percent in 2014. The influx of foreign individuals living in Korea began to create small groups who were socially active; however, these individuals were marginalized by policies that were originally designed to accept their cultures and ethnicities into society. The government began to use the term *damunhwa chu-ŭi*, or multiculturalism, to explain the continued phenomena and policies. As discussed earlier, multiculturalism is defined as harmony and co-existence of multiple cultures living in one area, but this may be a forward-thinking concept that does not work without constant improvement and attention from both the government and civil society. However, looking at contemporary Korean society, notable changes are being made, although their ethnic identity and racist past are still present within this globalized society. Learning from the past is important; as nations and citizens, the primary step in growth is acknowledging the past, while the second step is addressing issues within the scope of current social goals.

One crucial tool for integration was the multi-ethnic primary school set to be opened to educate children of multi-ethnic identity. Led by the Division of Education and Welfare Policy of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the school would primarily cater to older children born outside of the country and mixed-race children who are born in Korea and are having difficulties in school. These children are living in Korea with limited knowledge of the language and culture. The goal of this school is to allow for social cohesion. The aim was to teach the children

29 Korean Statistical Information Service, "Total fertility rate(persons) 2019," Vital Statistics of Korea Table, https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1B8000F&conn_path=I2&language=en

30 Prey, "Migrant world television and multiculturalism in South Korea," 113.

31 Statistics Korea, *International Migration Statistics in 2018*, (July 18, 2019), <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/5/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=377860&pageNo=&rowNum=10&amSeq=&sTarget=&sTxt=>

and their families the Korean language and culture to ease the process of adapting to Korea and joining the society and the labor force in the future. This school is a topic of debate as its solution to multicultural students' educational challenges is, in essence, to segregate them from their Korean classmates and teach assimilation. Statements by Korean professors and the Ministry of Gender Equality were included in a report by the Korea Herald:

I think basically those children's education should be done with other Korean children. Right now it may work, but I worry about it if we open separate schools it means, for the future, Korea may be divided." (Professor Han Geon-soo of Kangwon National University)

"I am opposed to the school, because it will further segregate the multiracial children."

(Park Kyung-tae, professor of sociology at Sungkonghoe University)

"The establishment of a separate school, class, and after school activities for children with multicultural backgrounds is not viewed as an appropriate measure for the children of multicultural families.

(Ministry of Gender Equality)³²

Since the promotion of the 2007 and 2008 legislature, there has been little effort to work on the integration of immigrants in a form that avoids marginalizing sub-groups of different multicultural groups. The government promotes multiculturalism and uses media to show the model group of the Southeast Asian assimilated wives who have worked hard, learned Korean, and raised their children to be fully participating Koreans. It is essential to realize the marginalization and expectations different immigrant groups face in society, especially migrant brides and multicultural families. Ahn's research gives examples of how they are perceived and viewed through media representation shown to society as entertainment.³³ Ahn analyzes visual representations of mixed-race children on television: *Rainbow Kindergarten* (tvN, 2011) and *Cackling Class in Vietnam* (tvN, 2013). It investigates these two reality shows portraying everyday mixed-race children as platforms where Korean audiences

32 Paul Kerry, "Making Sense of Korea's Multicultural Policy," *The Korea Herald*, March 1, 2011, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110301000137>.

33 Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, 169-189

learn to read racial differences between the two programs' cast members.

Ahn pointed out that the two programs focused on different groups of mixed-race children. *Rainbow Kindergarten* cast mixed-race children whose fathers were from western nations. These children were praised for their bilingual skills and their appearance. The majority of these children, between five to nine years old, became famous as *ulzzang* (good looking) among the viewership. *Cackling Class in Vietnam* cast children of Vietnamese women to participate in cultural exchange with their mother's home country, as representatives of Koreans experiencing other cultures. Unlike the children of *Rainbow Kindergarten*, the children partaking in *Cackling Class* were initially less popular. The program included traveling to other countries, such as Cambodia and Mongolia. Ahn noted that rather than viewing the Southeast Asian-Korean children as beautiful, they were viewed as subjects of compassion.³⁴ With biracial children at the center of the dialogue, there is a current increase of the reality-observation genre concerning the globalization of reality TV and the media industry's neoliberal turn in the twenty-first century. Ahn critically analyzed what specific types of racial disparities become evident in television culture while arguing that both shows televise the neoliberal transformation of the family on a multinational level. Ahn discusses the racialization of children among their Korean peers, as the terminology of *danmunwha* and skin color played key roles in the children's experiences with discrimination and bullying. Despite these popular shows taking place in the recent decade, there is still some discourse on what is accepted as being multicultural in Korean society.³⁵

In 2021, there is more so a presence and acceptance of foreigners and multicultural individuals in all forms of entertainment. Korean entertainment is a commodity and is highly prized with the rise of the *Hallyu* wave, representing the spread of Korean culture through media entertainment such as music and films in recent years. The acceptance and promotion of the multicultural group are not for the group's benefit but for the national image of Korea; current reality shows and television often do not tell the same stories as Ahn's book. Ahn points out that it is the face of Korea that is changing in society, hinting that Korea is moving away from homogenous

34 Ibid., 167.

35 Ibid., 167-179.

and becoming a global society.³⁶ However, even though multicultural groups have been present throughout Korean history, this was not valued until globalization and capitalism came to the forefront of Korea's political agenda.

Conclusion

Shin points out that Koreans established the concept of ethnic homogeneity during the colonial period to counter the Japanese propagandist notion of *naisen ittai* (Korea and Japan are one and the same).³⁷ The term "multiculturalism" has become a key concept within South Korean society as the Korean population has gone through demographic changes and has accepted the immigration population to some degree.³⁸ With the co-existence of both identities in Korea, the multicultural groups may face future obstacles as Korea continues transitioning into a global society and strives to be part of the global community. During this process, it is important to look at the social integration of immigrants and migrants in South Korean society. Most importantly, it is vital to note that multicultural integration is a slow and tedious process in any culture. It is also not a sudden incident but rather a transition that occurs over time with the assistance of politics and economics. While South Korea may seem noticeably changed in the late twentieth century, this essay shows that the occurrence of a multicultural community can be traced back to pre-modern Korea.

The focus on South Korea shows the historical presence of non-Koreans in society for generations. Nevertheless, awareness of such groups has not increased despite an increasingly technological and globalized world. With the aid of media and transnationalism, the diaspora of non-Koreans moving to Korea and Koreans leaving to other countries have contributed to the global society, but now we must bring the narrative to a local level; Korean society needs more confrontation on this discourse. Positive change is to come with work not only from the government but also from society and the active effort from the immigrants. With these three groups working together and holding each other accountable, South Korea has a

36 Ji-Hyun Ahn, "Transforming Korea into a multicultural society: Reception of multiculturalism discourse and its discursive disposition in Korea," *Asian Ethnicity* 13 (2012): 98.

37 Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 472.

38 A. E. Kim, "Demography, migration and multiculturalism in South Korea," *The Asia Pacific Journal* 7, no. 6 (2009): 1-19; Ahn, "Transforming Korea into a multicultural society," 98.

strong foundation and will continue to progress towards a global society.