

Multiethnic Korea?

Multiculturalism, Migration, and Peoplehood Diversity
in Contemporary South Korea



Edited by John Lie

TRANSNATIONAL KOREA 1

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John Lie, editor

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**Institute of
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University of California, Berkeley

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Preface

After *Multiethnic Japan* appeared, several people asked whether I planned to write a book on the same topic for Korea. I halfheartedly mumbled something vaguely affirmative on more than one occasion, and I am pleased that the conditions of South Korea and of my life made this faint promise a reality, however short of a full-scale study—and with a question mark to boot—the final product has turned out to be.

The myth of monoethnic and monocultural Korea is tenacious. This is paradoxically, or precisely, because historical evidence doesn't support it, though the surprisingly persistent and powerful nationalist historiography in South and North Korea casts the messy past as an epic narrative of a singular, unified, and pure people. The story has convinced enough South and North Koreans so that for the second half of the twentieth century it became a simple matter of commonsense: natural, obvious, and irrefutable. The family romance of the blood-unified nation faces at every turn the recalcitrant reality of human movements and mixings, ethnic heterogeneity, and cultural diversity. The prevailing response, at least until very recently, was denial or denigration. I can only hope that the deleterious consequences of monoethnic and monocultural fantasy will subside, if only in small part because of this and other efforts.

This volume is the outcome of two workshops held at the Center for Korean Studies, University of California, Berkeley, in September 2009 and October 2010. I am grateful to the Academy of Korean Studies (this work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies [KSPS] Grant funded by the Korean Government [MOE] [AKS-2007-MA-2002 and AKS-2012-BAA-2102]), the Korea Foundation, and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, for their financial and logistical support.

Several scholars, who for various reasons did not contribute chapters to this volume, participated actively in one or both workshops. I wish to thank Henry Em, Joe Hankins, Elaine Kim, Kyu Hyun Kim, Myoungkyu Park, and Gi-Wook Shin. I wish also to acknowledge Andrew Eungi Kim

and Ingyu Oh for alerting me to the importance of this topic. Kate Chouta and Christopher Pitts offered their unmatched editorial skills in shaping the prose. Yunhee Roh helped with the references. For all matters organizational and logistic, Aaron Miller proved invaluable, and he, Martin Backstrom, Wen-hsin Yeh, and Dylan Davis were indispensable to the making of this book.

John Lie

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Sue-Je L. Gage is an assistant professor in anthropology at Ithaca College. Her specialization is the lives, histories, and experiences of “mixed” Koreans known as Korean “Amerasians” in South Korea and in the United States. Her research focuses on race, belonging, globalization, international relations, policy, militarization, and interagency collaborations. She has conducted long-term fieldwork over the last twelve years working with Amerasians in South Korea and other Asian American communities in the United States. Her work is interdisciplinary, transnational, and multisited, exploring holistically how Amerasians as local, national, and global citizens identify themselves and strategically use their identities to maneuver within Korean society, the United States, and the globalizing world. She teaches courses on race, identity, citizenship, gender, media representation, policy, Asian America, Northeast Asia, and the anthropology of the U.S. military.

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Minjeong Kim is an assistant professor of sociology at San Diego State University. She studies global gender issues, international marriage migration, migrant families, Asian American studies, and the mass media, and her ongoing research focuses on the state-family dynamics in the process of immigrant incorporation. Kim was a Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellow in Women's Studies for her research on Filipina marriage migrants in South Korea, one of the first extensive qualitative research projects on the population. She has published several book chapters and articles on the topic in such journals as *Social Politics*, *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, *Sociology Compass*, and *Journal of Korean Studies* (forthcoming), and she is currently working on a book manuscript, tentatively titled "Elusive Belonging: Marriage Migrants and 'Multiculturalism' in Rural South Korea." Kim's other research project examines Korean professional immigrants in the United States and the dynamics between gender relations and immigration policies. With Christine E. Bose, Kim coedited *Global Gender Research: Transnational Perspectives* (2009, Routledge), and she has also published work on race, gender, and sexuality in the media.

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ONE

Introduction

Multiethnic Korea

JOHN LIE

Until the 1990s, to speak of South Korea and multiethnicity or multiculturalism in one breath would have struck virtually everyone as bizarre, contradictory, or delusional. For one indisputable characteristic of South Korea—and of North Korea as well—was said to be its ethnic and cultural homogeneity. The dominant folk notion of Korean peoplehood was a singular people, of shared blood. The metaphor of blood descent underscored the equation of Korean peoplehood with an extended family or a nation based on kinship ties. Hence, a common conception was that all Koreans are the same, or at least very similar: they look and act alike, speak the same language, believe in the same things, and eat the same food. The prevalence of collective pronouns in South and North Korean speech underscores the reflexive presumption of commonality. Surprised and at times violent reactions awaited evidence to the contrary, whether in finding a diasporic Korean with a poor command of the natal tongue or in encountering a “Korean” person with “mixed” (or “impure”) ethnoracial parentage (*honhyōl*, or “mixed blood”). Critical intellectuals were no different in assuming little or no ethnic or cultural diversity in South Korea or even Korea as a whole.¹ The rare presence of foreigners merely affirmed the essential homogeneity of (South) Korean people and culture.

Nonetheless, few observers can now state with much conviction or cogency that contemporary South Korea is a monocultural and monoethnic society. By 2011, there were over 1.4 million foreign residents in South Korea—the equivalent of over 3 percent of the total population.² It would

¹ As a recent English-language overview asserts, Korea is “one of the most homogeneous societies in the world” with “no significant ethnic minorities” (Seth 2010, 1).

² *Kukche in’gu idong t’onggye yōnbo* 2012 (Seoul: Kukka t’onggye p’ot’ōl, 2012). This figure

be easy to dismiss the case for multiethnic South Korea by noting that perhaps two-thirds of the resident foreigners are Chinese citizens of Korean descent. Even when someone might stress the relative paucity of nonethnic Koreans who have settled in South Korea, he or she would be hard pressed to argue that recent North Korean refugees or return migrants from China (*Chosŏnjok*) and elsewhere are well integrated into South Korean society. In any case, the irrefutable increase in international marriage and the resulting children—at least one-tenth of marriages in South Korea have involved a foreign spouse since the mid-2000s³—makes a mockery of any unreconstructed claim for South Korea as a monocultural or monoethnic country. Furthermore, it is becoming difficult to remain deaf to the voices of those who have been defined or define themselves as part of multiethnic and multicultural Korea, an expanded notion of Korean peoplehood that had hitherto excluded them.

Before I proceed, let me stress the essentially contested concepts of multiculturalism and multiethnicity. Most claims of modern peoplehood—in this case, being (South) Korean—entail a notion of common descent and contemporary commonality, such as shared phenotype, language, and culture (Lie 2004). Moreover, many suggest that the bottom line is a matter of a shared bloodline or gene pool. Yet, as reams of recent scholarship suggest, one cannot neglect the historical and social construction and constitution of ethnic, racial, and national categories and realities. Almost everyone is wont to believe that North and South Koreans belong to the same group called “Koreans.” As the evidence of North Koreans in contemporary South Korea suggests, however, the claim of cultural homogeneity—the same set of assumptions and outlooks, or the same repertoire of reflexes and behaviors—is almost surely wrong. Beside the facts of linguistic drift and cultural differentiation—not surprising given that the two countries have coexisted without much interaction since the end of the Korean War—there is the brute reality of physiological difference. By the early 2000s, the average height of South Korean men was 13 centimeters taller than that of their North Korean counterparts: a difference that would be tantamount to a “racial” distinction (Schwekendiek 2009). Do we then conclude that North and South Koreans are different peoples? That is, do they constitute distinct races, ethnicities, and cultures? The hypothetical unified Korea would be, in one line of thinking, certainly a multicultural nation-state, and perhaps even a multiethnic one.

Needless to say, ongoing discussions and debates on the concepts of

excludes naturalized South Korean citizens.

³ Statistics Korea at <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/english/news/1/8/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=70238&pageNo=10&rowNum=10&amSeq=&sTarget=&sTxt=> (retrieved 16 March 2012).

TWO

Late Migration, Discourse, and the Politics of Multiculturalism in South Korea

A Comparative Perspective

TIMOTHY C. LIM

This chapter addresses two related but analytically distinct issues. The first is the surprisingly early and seemingly strong multiculturalist turn in South Korea, a turn that has been led by the Korean state. The second centers on the concrete implications and broader meaning of this turn toward multiculturalism, both for South Korean society and for the immigrants themselves.

On the first issue, my argument is straightforward and, I readily admit, even a bit banal. To wit, I contend that the seemingly strong embrace of multiculturalism in South Korea is, in part, the product of related structural and demographic changes. Structurally, South Korea has become an export-dependent, labor-importing country. Decades of high-speed and outward-oriented economic growth and industrialization, to be more specific, have created a persistent gap between the demand for low-paying, low-skilled (factory, agricultural, construction, and service) work and the supply of domestic workers willing to do this work. Demographically, South Korea's extremely low fertility rate—one of the lowest in the world at 1.15 in 2009¹—is perhaps the most salient factor. This has contributed significantly to the labor shortage and will lead, barring a sudden and sustained increase (a very unlikely scenario), to a long-term need for continued

¹ Based on an estimate from Statistics Korea (available at <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/english/index.action>), the 2009 rate represented a significant decline from the previous year's rate of 1.19, and translated into 445,000 live births. The OECD birthrate average is 1.64. Significantly, the average age of pregnant women in South Korea is also increasing. In 2009, the average increased to almost 31 years old, up from 25.7 years in 1999. All figures cited in "Birthrate Declines Again in 2009," *Korea Herald*, 24 August 2010.

THREE

Korea

Multiethnic or Multicultural?

NORA HUI-JUNG KIM

In recent years, a rapidly expanding discussion of South Korea's (hereafter Korea) transition to a multiethnic and multicultural society has taken place. Major newspapers, whether politically inclined to the left or the right, have published editorials and opinion columns announcing the advent of a multicultural society, and editors have urged the Korean government and the Korean people to change both social structure and mindset to accommodate the country's increasing ethnocultural diversity. Because of the widespread myth of ethnic homogeneity in Korea, this sudden interest in multiculturalism is both unexpected and puzzling for many people. In this chapter, I shed light on the mode in which ethnocultural diversity in Korea is managed by critically analyzing how the news media articulates the idea of a multicultural and multiethnic Korea.

Three different perspectives of a multicultural and multiethnic society can be applied to Korea. The first limits multiculturalism and multiethnicity to Western (and a few Asian) countries. This perspective implies that Korea is not such a country. The second perspective, which has been the most prevalent one since 2006, is that Korea is becoming a multicultural and multiethnic country as a result of globalization and international migration. Like the first perspective, this one includes a binary image of multicultural and multiethnic Western countries contrasted with homogenous Korea. Korea's transformation to a multiethnic and multicultural society occurs in the course of Korea becoming more globalized and Westernized. Finally, a few columnists have argued that Korea has always been a multiethnic country. From this third perspective, the transition to a multicultural and multiethnic society is not unprecedented, but rather a matter of degree.

Overall, there is a widespread consensus that Korea is undergoing a significant transformation and is more multicultural and multiethnic than

FOUR

Tolerance, *Tamunhwa*, and the Creating of the New Citizens

Currently, multiculturalism in Korea is focusing too much on governing foreigners, who constitute only 2 percent of the population, but it should rather focus on transforming Koreans, who constitute 98 percent.

—A migrant-center staff member

Does that mean that I am some kind of commodity?

—A Korean-Chinese (*Chosŏnjok*) woman

EUYRYUNG JUN

By the time I made an appointment to meet with attorney Shin, a human rights lawyer, late one morning in the fall of 2008, the countless events and programs related to multiculturalism that were sprouting up had left me feeling overwhelmed. More than half a year had passed since I started my long-term fieldwork in the greater Seoul area the previous winter. This time, I was forcing myself to finally accept the fact that I could hardly follow all the events and do ethnographic research. I was overwhelmed not only by the tremendous number of symposiums, seminars, conferences, lectures, festivals, and classes that were organized around the theme of multiculturalism, but also by the range of experts involved in this “booming multicultural industry.” Participants included researchers in disciplines such as pedagogy, cultural anthropology, sociology, women’s studies, linguistics, social work, and public administration; various professionals in the field of culture and arts; elementary and middle school teachers; and various nongovernmental and civil society organizations from the Unesco Korea office, to, of course, local migrant centers.

From my perspective as a researcher who had been studying the issue of migration in South Korea through the activities of migrant centers and migrant trade unions, the abrupt emergence of a “*tamunhwa* (multicultural) apparatus” that transcends traditional migrant advocacy groups

FIVE

Makeshift Multiculturalism

The Transformation of Elementary School Teacher Training

NANCY ABELMANN, GAYOUNG CHUNG, SEJUNG HAM,
JIYEON KANG, AND Q-HO LEE

In this ethnographic study of a South Korean teacher-training university's early adoption of a multicultural curriculum in 2009, we make observations about the manner in which South Korean institutions and individuals are enacting or inhabiting the country's multicultural regime, or what EuyRyung Jun in this volume calls the "*tamunhwa* (multicultural) apparatus," to indicate a state-orchestrated effort at transformation.¹ We observed what we have come to think of as "makeshift multiculturalism," namely, the speedy adoption of a project that is not yet clearly defined or delimited. We analyze the process of election in which institutions, units, and individuals are elected to serve as the vanguard of the promotion of multiculturalism, even as that project remains vague. We found that those elected largely embrace their leadership as a veritable moral calling for a "higher (national) good," even as they are often quite perplexed as to what exactly that calling entails (c.f. "alternative value" in G. S. Han 2007). In the field—in the college classroom, in the activities of a multicultural club, and in a summer grant elementary school mentoring program—we found faculty and students confused about the meaning and mandate of the multicultural project. We found people to be most ambivalent not about their election itself but rather about the bureaucratic organization of the multicultural apparatus—one that sometimes seemed to be antithetical to higher principles. If at some moments the makeshift project seemed to allow for something creative or productive to emerge, at other moments it

¹ We are grateful to Hae Yeon Choo for her very helpful comments. This project was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies (Korean Studies Promotion Service) Grant funded by the Korean Government (Ministry of Education) (AKS-2010-DZZ-2101).

The Needs of Others

Revisiting the Nation in North Korean and Filipino Migrant Churches in South Korea

HAE YEON CHOO

This chapter focuses on two migrant groups at the margins of multicultural projects in South Korea—North Korean migrants and Filipino migrant workers—and examines how religion has intervened in the project of nation-making as South Korea’s self-definition has begun to shift from ethnically homogeneous to multiethnic.¹ Despite being state-driven, South Korea’s multicultural initiatives are far from cohesive and clearly defined; instead, they are better understood as contingent and in-the-making, typifying what Nancy Abelmann and her colleagues call in this volume “makeshift multiculturalism.” Various state and civil society actors have participated in the making of South Korean “multicultural apparatuses” (Jun, chap. 4), compelled by a moral calling and sense of urgency (Abelmann et al., chap. 5) as well as religious and spiritual commitment (W. Kim 2007). These diverse partnerships with moral and religiously motivated civil society actors have stimulated an ongoing debate about the subjects and contents of state-sponsored multiculturalism in South Korea.

The Protestant churches I studied in South Korea were major actors in the area of migrant advocacy and assistance for North Korean and

¹ This research was supported by the Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Research Fellowship, the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant in Sociology, and the American Philosophical Society Lewis and Clark Fund. I thank John Lie and my fellow participants in the Multicultural South Korea Workshop at UC Berkeley; Joseph Hankins, Chaitanya Lakkimsetti, and Jessica Cobb who offered comments on an earlier draft; and all the research participants who opened their chapels, homes, and hearts to me, especially the late Pastor Peter Seung-Pil Chang, whose commitment to migrant advocacy continues to inspire many.

SEVEN

North Korean Migrants in South Korea

From Heroes to Burdens and First Unifiers

JIN-HEON JUNG

This chapter provides a historical overview of the South Korean state's shifting identity politics with regard to North Korean migrants,¹ as well as an ethnographic study of intraethnic contact zones. It is in these zones that North Korean migrants and South Koreans interact, encounter cultural differences and similarities, and negotiate a new sense of belonging in envisioning a reunified nation. My aim is to explore how North Korean subjectivities have been shaped through practices of individual and national imaginations and negotiations that are quintessential to modern nation-building in Korean history. I argue that Korean ethnicity should not be understood as a self-evident unit that shares a homogenous identity, but rather as a product of the complex social processes of boundary-making (Wimmer 2009).

In the growing discourses and practices of multiculturalism in South Korea, Korean ethnicity is perceived to be a whole in comparison to "other" foreign migrant groups (see Lim 2010; G.-S. Han 2007; K.-K. Han 2007; Oh 2007). Indeed, some intellectuals have pointed out potential problems of Korean ethnic nationalism, which is by no means singular in how it ignores not only internal cultural differences (e.g., Grinker 1998; Kwon 2000), but also multicultural values that encourage appreciating other ethnicities and customs (e.g., Park 2009). Following Bhikkhu Parekh (2000), Myeong-Kyu Park (2009) suggests the necessity of a "spirit of multiculturalism" in the reunification process.² The daily struggles of North

¹ Instead of "defector," the term generally used in the media, I refer to the North Koreans as "migrants," which offers a more comprehensive meaning.

² Parekh stresses that "if we are to develop a coherent political structure for a multicultural society, we need to appreciate the importance of both unity and diversity and establish a satisfactory relationship between them" (2000, 114).

EIGHT

Beyond Motherlands and Mother Love

Locating Korean Adoptees in Global Korea

ELEANA KIM

Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, more than 160,000 children from South Korea have been adopted into Western nations. Raised in white homes and communities in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, the vast majority of the children adopted between the 1950s and 1980s typically had very little exposure to other Korean immigrants, cultural practices, or products during their childhoods. Sixty years since the first Korean transnational adoptions, more than 120,000 children have been adopted into homes in North America, and the remainder by Western European and Australian families. The vast majority of these adoptions are also transracial, with the adoptive parents of European descent.

Originally intended to address an internationally recognized crisis of “mixed-blood war orphans” (*honhyŏl chŏnjaeng koa*) who were fathered by American and European soldiers and born to Korean women, transnational adoption from South Korea continued well past the mid-1960s, when numbers of mixed-race children began to be superseded by those of full Korean parentage. These children were sent from orphanages, which functioned as magnets for foreign sponsorship money and also as day-care services for poor and working-class families. During a period of rapid economic growth in which the state priorities of national defense and population reduction overshadowed the state welfare needs of poor families, transnational adoption functioned as a “quick-fix solution” (Sarri et al. 1998), fueled by notions of the American Dream and educational and economic opportunities offered by the West. Xenophobic ethnonationalism, poverty, and patriarchy were the political, economic, and social conditions that led to the mass exodus of mixed-race war orphans of the immediate postwar period, the economic orphans of the 1960s and 1970s, and, finally,

Diverging Paths, Converging Ends

Japan's and Korea's Low-Skilled Immigration Policies, 1990–2010

KEIKO YAMANAKA

Japan and South Korea (Korea hereafter), two recent countries of immigration in East Asia, adopted similar immigration policies in the early 1990s. They did so in response to an influx of foreign workers from around the region, who filled the growing demand for low-skilled labor among middle- and small-sized companies in both countries. Yet despite the rapidly increasing number of immigrant workers, governments in Japan and Korea denied the very fact of their presence while officially reaffirming the principle of allowing in only high-skilled foreign workers. As a result, each government instituted a variety of de facto immigrant categories that would, in effect, allow for the continuing employment of low-skilled laborers in jobs shunned by locals. The three major categories were (1) “illegal” visa-overstayers, (2) industrial trainees on contract, and (3) coethnics from abroad, such as, in the case of Japan, *Nikkeijin* (people of Japanese ancestry) from Brazil, and, in Korea, *Chosŏnjok* (people of Korean descent) from China.

By the mid-2000s, in the face of growing contradictions inherent within such immigration policies, Korea began to initiate reforms in order to narrow the gap between policy and practice. In August 2004, the country launched the Employment Permit System (EPS), guaranteeing immigrant workers legal protections roughly equivalent to their native Korean counterparts. In December 2006, Seoul abolished the Industrial Technical Trainee Program (ITTP), blamed for repeated human rights violations and a spike in the number of undocumented workers in the country. In the same year, a variety of organizations in Japan—including national ministries, political parties, and civil groups—began to address increasing ethnic diversity among the Japanese population, while also focusing on

TEN

Race-ing toward the Real South Korea

The Cases of Black-Korean Nationals and African Migrants

NADIA Y. KIM

Although students of South Korean multiculturalism have laudably given voice to the many non-Koreans who live in a country known, until recently, for its ardent self-image as *tanil minjok* (a monoethnic people), two voices I present here are often muted in the literature. One is of Black-Korean singer Insooni (Insuni)—arguably one of the nation’s most respected, beloved, and longest-lasting entertainers—and the other is of an African migrant, a de facto community leader of the growing group of Nigerians who call Seoul home. Says Insooni at a 2006 summer retreat for the country’s multiracial children, who daily suffer the indignities of oppression and discrimination: “You must work harder than any Korean. . . . You know why I am what I am? Because I work harder” (Kirk 2006). Says the Nigerian community leader in response to the question of why his coethnics (and other Africans) are moving out of Seoul: “Just because we are Nigerians we are asked to pay the security deposit twice as big as the one other nationals pay” (H. Lee 2010).

Why are such struggles absent in most studies of minority populations in the Republic of Korea (ROK), those that led to the moniker “multicultural society?” And why do Insooni and the Nigerian community leader not sound like those who live in a self-proclaimed multicultural country? What can we learn from the social locations and the “subaltern-speak” of the Black Koreans themselves to gain intellectual traction on how they are treated by the South Korean nation-state and how they interpret and act in response?¹ These are the signal questions that inspired the writing of this

¹ Although I understand why scholars of Korean Studies, including those in this volume, use the term “Amerasian” to include the Black-Korean offspring of at least one U.S. military parent, I eschew the term altogether. Although language is partial and imperfect in every

Almost Korean

Korean Amerasians in an Era of Multiculturalism

SUE-JE L. GAGE

We can no longer think of societies as isolated and self-maintaining systems. Nor can we imagine cultures as integrated totalities in which each part contributes to the maintenance of an organized, autonomous, and enduring whole. There are only cultural sets of practices and ideas, put into play by determinate human actors under determinate circumstances. In the course of action, these cultural sets are forever assembled, dismantled, and reassembled, conveying in variable accents the divergent paths of groups and classes. These paths do not find their explanation in the self-interested decisions of interacting individuals. They grow out of the deployment of social labor, mobilized to engage the world of nature. The manner of that mobilization sets the terms of history, and in these terms the peoples who have asserted a privileged relation with history and the peoples to whom history has been denied encounter a common destiny.

—Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*

Since the end of the twentieth century, five major events have altered the (re)construction of Koreanness and the terms of history: (1) the Japanese occupation, which brought Japanese understandings of social Darwinism and pan-Asianism; (2) the revival of the Tan'gun myth to create a mythico-history for Koreans to resist occupation, hence the decisive nature of "purity" within Koreanness through *minjok*-ism as part of an "imagined community"¹ process; (3) the U.S. military imposition since 15 August 1945, which introduced its own race-based ideologies and practices and the births of thousands of "mixed-blood" Koreans; (4) the

¹ On the term "imagined community," see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991).

TWELVE

Can the Union of Patriarchy and Multiculturalism Work?

Family Dynamics in Filipina-Korean Rural Households

MINJEONG KIM

Deok-ro runs a small hardware store in a downtown marketplace in Söjinkun (Söjin County) located in the southwestern region of South Korea (hereafter Korea).¹ It is a bustling area near a bus station that carries people to and from a city about half an hour away. At the end of each day, he returns to his quiet house surrounded by rice fields, a small portion of which he tends with his aging mother and his Filipina wife, Maia, for subsistence farming.

Deok-ro was matched with Maia through the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, also known as the Unification Church (UC). He was not a church member, but a *nongch'on ch'onggak* (farm bachelor) who could not find a bride because of his rural location and its lagging socioeconomic conditions. Because Deok-ro lacked a sense of commitment to the church, he refused to observe the three-month Separation Period—a UC rule that forbids a newlywed couple from consummating their marriage immediately after the Blessing (wedding). The general rule is: when a bride matched through the UC arrives in Korea, instead of joining her new family right away, she must stay in a local church. However, Deok-ro confronted the church and brought Maia home after only a month. He declared that he was the *taejang* (captain) of his own house, and his wife was his, not the church's, though he quickly conceded that he did not own Maia. When the couple got married, he told his new bride that she could leave him if she wanted, but she could not take their children. To show that he did not take his wife for granted, during our interview he emphatically reported two promises he had made to Maia at the time of their match: he

¹ All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

Korean Multiculturalism in Comparative Perspective

JACK JIN GARY LEE AND JOHN D. SKRENTNY

When someone from South Korea and someone from Europe both say, “I live in a multicultural society,” do they mean the same thing?¹ We argue that multiculturalism, usually understood in the West as the equal recognition and inclusion of persons of different groups in public life, has taken on different meanings in Korea (and, indeed, in the wider industrialized East Asia) and in Europe.² Our larger point is that the emergence of multiculturalism in South Korea (henceforth Korea) should be understood in a comparative perspective. More specifically, the extent of the multicultural transition of nation-states in Asia is limited in comparison to Europe as their multicultural policies have been shaped by the economic goals that are characteristic of “developmental states” (Wong 2004).

In terms of demographics and policies, multicultural developments in Korea bear a greater similarity to other developmental states in East Asia than to Southern European states that also became migrant-receiving states in the past few decades—about the same time as Korea. As recent countries of immigration, Korea, Japan, Italy, and Spain have begun to depend on migrants because of the needs occasioned by labor market shortages,

¹ The authors would like to thank fellow participants of the Multiethnic Korea workshop for their constructive comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. Jack Jin Gary Lee would also like to acknowledge the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore and the Tan Kah Kee Foundation for their support. While both authors contributed to the argument presented in this chapter, Lee took the lead in drafting and writing it.

² Nora H. J. Kim (chap. 3) maps the discourse of multiculturalism in the Korean mass media, highlighting three different perspectives on the issue of ethnic diversity in Korean society. Similarly, Jun (chap. 4) and Abelmann et al. (chap. 5) reveal how the Korean state’s institutionalization of *tamunhwa*, i.e., multiculturalism, through civil society organizations and the education system, respectively, has led to ambivalence and, sometimes, confusion about state-driven multiculturalism among social actors who are tasked to educate Koreans and migrants about ethnic and cultural differences.

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