

**INCREASING ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN KOREA: MULTICULTURALISM AS A
REALITY, IDEOLOGY AND POLICY**

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ABSTRACT

South Korea is rapidly becoming a multicultural society, as more than a million foreigners live in the country. The increasing ethnic diversity has heralded the widespread use of the concepts of multicultural society and multiculturalism. However, these terms have often been misused and misunderstood, as reporters and even scholars have used them indiscriminately and interchangeably, failing to distinguish between multicultural society as a fact, i.e., ethnic diversity in Korean society, and multiculturalism as a policy and ideology. In particular, the latter has been used without an adequate understanding of the multiplicity of its meanings and implications. This paper aims to redress this problem by tracing the origin of the use of term *damunhwa* or “multicultural” and its related terms such as multiculturalism, multicultural family, multicultural children, and multicultural education. Through this exercise, the paper attempts to examine process through which these terms came into use and analyze how their meanings may have changed over the years, albeit their very short history. The paper also identifies the agents involved in the construction of those meanings and assesses their role in making these potentially alienating terms more palatable and tolerable. Lastly, the paper analyzes Korean multiculturalism from multidimensional approaches, discussing the applicability of the concept as a fact, ideology, policy, and process in the Korean context.

Key words: Korea, multicultural society, multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, multicultural policy

INTRODUCTION

South Korea (henceforth Korea) is rapidly becoming an ethnically diverse society. As of the end of 2007, the number of registered foreigners totaled 1,066,273, accounting for about 2.2 per cent of the total population. The number of foreigners in Korea jumped 2.75 times since 1997 when the figure was 386,972. If the current trend continues, it is expected that the number of foreigners in Korea will reach the 1.5 million mark in 2012, 2.53 million in 2020, and 4.09 million by 2050 or 9.2 per cent of the total population, which would be similar to the proportion of foreign-born residents in the total population of England (9.7 per cent) in 2005.

The increasing ethnic diversity has naturally spawned the rise of the concepts of multicultural society and multiculturalism as important keywords describing contemporary Korea. Although these terms are being frequently referred to in the media and the academia, they are often misused and misunderstood, as they are used indiscriminately and interchangeably. The most serious problem in this regard is the failure to distinguish between multicultural society as a fact, i.e., ethnic diversity in Korean society, and multiculturalism as a policy and ideology. In particular, the latter has been used without adequate understanding of the multiplicity of its meanings and implications.

The question is: When did the discourse of multicultural Korea and multiculturalism first begin? Why did the discourse of multicultural Korea and multiculturalism become so popular? Is multiculturalism consistent with Korean values? This paper aims to tackle these questions by tracing the origin of the use of term *damunhwa* or “multicultural” and its related terms such as multiculturalism, multicultural family, multicultural children, and multicultural education. The paper also attempts to examine the process through which these terms came into use and to analyze how their meanings may have changed over the years. In particular, the paper examines the direct and indirect role of the government, media and academia in promoting multiculturalism as a desirable policy for Korean society. Lastly, the paper argues that Korean multiculturalism needs to be analyzed from multidimensional approaches, examining the applicability of the concept as a fact, ideology, policy, and process in the Korean context, thereby bringing into sharper relief a full range of cultural, social and political implications of the concept.

THE DISCOURSE OF MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY IN THE NEWS MEDIA

In an ordinary usage, the term *damunhwa*, literally meaning “multiculture,” is used to refer to the phenomenon of increasing ethnic diversity in Korea. When literally translated into English, it is a noun, but it is actually used as an adjective, as in “multicultural.” For example, in describing Korean society as a multicultural society, the expression used in Korean is that Korea has become *damunhwa hashoe*, literally meaning “multiculture society.”

In trying to trace the first incidents of the use of the term *damunhwa*, the paper searched the newspaper archives being provided by Korea’s leading Internet search engine, Naver (www.naver.com), which has archived articles from three daily newspapers, namely *Kyunghyangshinmun*, *Dongailbo*, and *Maeilgyeongje*, from 1960 to 1991. The articles which are indexed under this term have been based on the title and content. Other related terms such as *damunhwasahoe* (multicultural society), *damunhwajui* (multiculturalism), *damunhwagajok* (multicultural family), and *damunhwagyoyuk* (multicultural education) are automatically indexed by these newspapers because *damunhwa* is a prefix to these concepts.

From 1960 to 1991, *Kyunghyangshinmun* and *Dongailbo* each makes just four references to those terms, while *Maeilgyeongje* has none.¹ The first ever reference to the term *damunhwa* in the newspaper media was made in Korea on October 24, 1964 in an article in *Kyunghyangshinmun* (1964). The article describes how the UN was at a turning point with the rise of the Middle East as a powerful force to reckon with and how the international political landscape was changing as the traditional allies of the United States are riding on the multicultural wave (*damunhwa mulgyeol*) to have a more independent say in diplomatic relations. The second reference to the term is made in the same newspaper nearly 20 years later in August 1983. The article recounts the popularity of Jerusalem as a place of “pilgrimage” for Korean Christians and describes the ancient city as religiously plural (*dajonggyo*) and multicultural (*Kyunghyangshinmun*, 1983). It would be another three years before the term *damunhwa* or *damunhwajui* is mentioned in any of its articles published in the newspaper. In the first of the two articles published in 1986 which refers to the concept reports on a conference involving professors of music education and their claim that music education in Korea is centered too much on Western classical music and that there is a need for multiculturalism-centered (*damunhwajungsimjui*) music education, incorporating musical traditions of not only the West but also of Korea and Asia (*Kyunghyangshinmun*, 1986a). The second article featuring *damunhwa* in 1986 was a piece written by a columnist for the newspaper. The column, which was written in time for the 1986 Asian Games, takes note of the increasing prominence of Asia in the global arena and the region is described as being characterized by *dainjong* (multi-races), *damunhwa* (multi-cultures), *daeoneo* (multi-languages), *dajonggyo* (multi-religions) and *daideology* (multi-ideologies) (*Kyunghyangshinmun*, 1986b).

For *Dongailbo*, the first article featuring the term *damunhwa* appeared in January 1983. The article was a contribution by a Hudson Institute researcher who writes about the role of South Korea in the creation of the Asia-Pacific community, warning against following the United States model of multiculturalism, which he derides as an amalgamation of assorted cultures and as a blind openness to any culture (*Dongailbo*, 1983a). A second article in the same year is a translation of a commentary which appeared in U.S. News and World Report, describing the immigrant culture of the United States as no longer being a “melting pot” but rather a “salad bowl,” which is described as a representative of multicultural society in which different cultures are allowed to maintain their uniqueness and coexist (*Dongailbo*, 1983b). It would be another seven years before an article featuring the term *damunhwa* would appear again. The article recounts a cultural performance held at a Korean church on the eve of a Los Angeles festival celebrating Asia-Pacific cultures and mentions that understanding the city is impossible without knowing about its cultural diversity (*Dongailbo*, 1990). The article also refers to a seminar on multiculturalism and the importance of multi-races in area cultures and arts. The fourth and last article on *damunhwa* from 1960 to 1991 in *Dongailbo* appears in 1991. It is an account of a visitation to the naval Silk Road, including visits to Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, the latter of which is characterized by the writer as being

¹ In searching newspaper archives and scholarly works, the meaning of *damunhwa* (多文化) as “multicultural” should be distinguished from the meaning of *damunhwa* (茶文化) as tea ceremony culture. The latter word derives from *dado* or the art of ceremonial tea-making. Many articles in the 1970s and 1980s which featured the term *damunhwa* were about this tea ceremony.

concerned with creating unity from multi-cultures and multi ethnic groups (*daminjok*) (*Dongailbo*, 1991).

As the above survey shows, the frequency of reference to the term *damunhwa* in the three daily newspapers in Korea in the 1960-1991 period was negligible, with the term making appearances only eight times in total. It is safe to say that other daily newspapers in Korea, including *Chosunilbo* and *Joongangilbo*, also made very limited references to the term during the same period. In fact, the same trend continues until the end of the 1990s.

For the daily newspapers in Korea, the frequency of reference to the term *damunhwa* has become noticeably higher only since the year 2000, especially after 2006. For example, *Dongailbo*, which has comprehensively archived its articles since 2000, has reported on *damunhwa* much more frequently, especially since 2006: 11 times in 2000, 15 times in 2001, 8 times in 2002, 6 times in 2003, 10 times in 2004, 16 times in 2005, 60 times in 2006, 100 times in 2007, 298 times in 2008, and 947 times in 2009.

This trend is also evident in two other daily Korean newspapers, namely *Chosunilbo* and *Joongangilbo*. The following is the frequency of reference to the term *damunhwa* in the portal of *Chosunilbo* (www.chosun.com) in the 1990s and 2000s: the first and only time in 1993, once in 1994, twice in 1995, 8 times in 1996, 9 times in 1997, 6 times in 1998, 4 times in 1999, 10 times in 2000, 19 times in 2001, 15 times in 2002, 14 times in 2003, 10 times in 2004, 18 times in 2005, 67 times in 2006, 193 times in 2007, 440 times in 2008, and 797 times in 2009. *Joongangilbo* shows the same trend, as *damunhwa* and its related terms appeared only sporadically in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the first reference was made in September 1985, followed by another reference in November 1987 and another one in October 1992.² From 1994, like *Chosunilbo*, there had been continuous references to the term, albeit only a handful or a dozen times annually, until 2005. It is from 2006 that the frequency of reference to the term increases sharply, jumping to the total of 20 in 2006 and 48 in 2007. Like other newspapers, the total of references soars to hundreds in 2008 and 2009.

As can be seen above, *damunhwa* was a negligible issue in Korean newspaper media until the end of the 1980s and was not much of an issue in the 1990s and up to the middle of the 2000s. It is only from the mid-2000s, particularly since 2006, that the newspaper articles mention *damunhwa* in the Korean context in earnest and in great frequency, making references to migrant workers and migrant brides as well as multicultural families in Korea. Despite the low number of references made to the term, there were some significant differences in the way it was treated by the Korean newspaper media in the 1980s and 1990s. Up to the 1980s, references to the concept were largely made to describe cultures of other countries, particularly the United States. The concept of multicultural society or multiculturalism up to this period was conceived purely as an external phenomenon, insinuating its irrelevance to Korean society. In the 1990s, the Korean media began to portray the term as having relatively greater relevance to Korean society, which was partly due to a growing emphasis on *segehwa* or globalization by the Korean government. The Kim Young-sam administration (1993-1998) adopted it as one of its key guiding policies to bring about reforms in education and economy to enable the nation to successfully compete internationally, and the Korean media followed suit, paying more attention to globalization and its accompanying values, one of which was multiculturalism. For example, the first reference to the term *damunhwa* or *damunhwajui* in *Chosunilbo* was made in March 1993, in

² The number of references to *damunhwa* in *Joongangilbo* is as follows: 1 in 1985, 1 in 1987, 1 in 1992, 4 in 1994, 5 in 1995, 6 in 1996, 10 in 1997, 3 in 1998, 9 in 1999, 6 in 2000, 9 in 2001, 21 in 2002, 9 in 2003, 13 in 2004, 11 in 2005, 20 in 2006, and 48 in 2007.

time for the start of Venice Biennale in June 1993. The theme of the 1993 Biennale, which is an art exhibition of contemporary art from all around the world, was multiculturalism, highlighting how art is a channel through which people of different cultures are brought together and allows a dialogue for peaceful coexistence among different cultures (*Chosunilbo*, 1993). The second reference to the concept was made in the newspaper in January 1994 in view of one of the watershed events of economic globalization, namely the Uruguay Round (1986-1994). The article, written by the Korean Ambassador to UNESCO, argued that the upcoming ratification of the Uruguay Round meant not only a greater integration of the Korean economy into globalized economy but also the need for Korea to become more cognizant of, and open to, diverse cultures outside of Korea, particularly multicultural societies (*Chosunilbo*, 1994).

Continuing with the globalization-multiculturalism nexus, *Chosunilbo* reported on the 1996 International Advertising Association Festival in Korea (*Chosunilbo*, 1996). Regarding the festival, several articles highlighted the increasing prominence of multicultural dimension in advertisement in the era of globalization. Also, one of the earliest mentioning of multiculturalism as a philosophy and social policy was made by Chaibong Ham, the then professor of political science at Yonsei University, when he wrote a column for the newspaper in January 1997, describing his impression of a book entitled *Multiculturalism* written by Charles Taylor and introducing the reader to the basic essence of the debate revolving around the issue (*Chosunilbo*, 1997a). Furthermore, in his review of two books translated into Korean, namely Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, Jeongin Kang argues that scholars like Said and Jacques Derrida see multiculturalism and multilateralism as ways, a third alternative way, to overcome Eurocentric worldviews and practices (*Chosunilbo*, 1997b).

Many articles in the 1990s thus covered international events which were tinged with meanings of globalization, such as international trade agreements, international art exhibitions and conventions of international advertisers, all of which empathized the increasing importance of the cognition of multicultural elements in everyday life, be it economy or art. Reviews of books written by authors from multicultural societies or books dealing with characters living in multicultural setting also brought up references to *damunhwa* and *damunhwajui*. Also, the United States was mentioned often as a society of multi-cultures, especially in light of Korean immigrants living in that country. Charles Taylor's book entitled *Multiculturalism* and his lecture in Korea also received some media attention, presaging a key social change that will grip Korea in the near future.

Capturing the essence of the use of term 'multicultural' in the 1990s was the term *damunhwasideae* (a multicultural era), that we are living in an era of globalization, in which many, disparate cultures come in contact, potentially causing conflicts, and in which there is greater competition in the economic sphere. The term also implied that Korea was increasingly being integrated into the globalizing world and that the country was increasingly being exposed to, and influenced by, the diverse cultures of the outside world. In view of such change, Korean media began to emphasize how Korea needed to globalize, in order to keep abreast of rapid changes happening around the world, so that the country does not fall behind. Still, up to the early 2000s, the idea of multicultural society was mentioned as an external phenomenon, a social reality limited to the outside world, especially such immigrant societies as the United States, Canada and Australia. There was still no earnest illumination of Korea as potentially becoming a multicultural society. And multiculturalism was referred to very superficially as an antonym of unilateralism, prejudice, alienation of minorities, intolerance, ignorance, injustice and close-mindedness. The concept was also perceived as a synonym of multilateralism, worldliness, openness, tolerance, and justice. Multiculturalism

was never used in reference to a government policy, but more as minority groups having more say in the politics of immigrant societies.³

THE DISCOURSE OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THE ACADEMIA

One of the best ways to ascertain research trends in the academia is to check the data base of the National Assembly Library, which keeps the most comprehensive information on books and journal articles published in Korean as well as master's theses and doctoral dissertations.⁴ A perusal of its website provides a wealth of information on the meteoric rise of the research topic of *damunhwa* in Korea.

Like in newspaper articles, it is from 2006 that *damunhwa* becomes one of the most popular topics of research. Up to 1990, there was not a single book published on the topic (to be more specific, there was not a single book that bore the word *damunhwa* in its title), nor was there any master's thesis or doctoral dissertation devoted to the topic. However, there were four journal articles published in the 1980s which examined either multicultural education or the issue of multicultural reality in other societies (Japan and Canada).⁵ In the 1990s, there was still no published book about multicultural Korea, although there was a dozen imported Japanese books on the nature of multicultural Japan. Less than ten master theses bore the title *damunhwa* during the same period, but they were mostly on multicultural education, with very little attention given to the Korean context. During the same period, nearly 50 journal articles bore the word *damunhwa* in their titles, with a large majority devoted to multicultural education in general.

Between 2000 and 2005, about a dozen books, imported books in Japanese, translated books, and unpublished reports on *damunhwa* were made available, but the focus was generally on multicultural education, although one book was devoted to general discussions of life in a multicultural era, as in *Damunhwasidaewi hangukin* (Koreans in an Era of Multicultural Era) by Sunggon Kim (2002). However, there is one unpublished report that is likely to be the first book-length manuscript on the multicultural reality of Korea, namely "Gukjegyeolhon ijuyeoseongui eoneo mit munhwa jeokeung siltae yeongu: Chollabukdo imsilgun (mit sunchanggun·namwonsi) ilwon sare bogoseo" (A Research on the Language and Cultural Adjustment of International Marriage Migrant Women: A Case Study of Imsil, Sunchang, and Namwon, North Cholla Province), which was written by Hanseok Wang, Geon-Su Han and Myeonghui Yang in 2005 for the National Institute of the Korean Language.

As for master theses and doctoral dissertations, around 50 were written on the topic during the same period, but most of them focused on multicultural education, while several theses did examine the nature of multiculturalism in Canada and Australia. As for journal

³ One interesting development in the Korean news media is the use of an expression that is rather uniquely Korean: the use of the expression "multicultural children" to refer to children born to interracial or interethnic couples. In the west, terms like biracial, biethnic or multiracial children are used. Similarly, the expression "multicultural family" is used in Korea instead of interracial or interethnic family as in the West.

⁴ Another useful source is the Korean Education and Research Information Service (KERIS), but upon comparison with the National Assembly Library, KERIS was found to be slightly less comprehensive.

⁵ To avoid arbitrariness, only the books, articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations that bore *damunhwa* in their titles were counted.

articles, nearly a hundred of them bore the word *damunhwa* in their title. What is noteworthy about these articles is that many of them dealt with case studies of other multicultural societies, including Sweden, Singapore, Thailand, Jordan, Turkey, Vietnam, Japan, Canada, and Australia. Another notable fact is that multiculturalism was the focus of many articles, although all but one of them dealt with the nature of the concept in other countries. In fact, the article on Korea, namely “Korea: Hangukeseoui damunhwajui mosaek” (Korea: An Examination of Multiculturalism for the Country), is one of the earliest works on Korean multiculturalism. Published in *Minjokyeongu* (Research in Ethnic Studies) in 2003, Jaejung Lee (2003) examines the concept of multiculturalism in view of government policies toward foreigner settlements in Korea. *Minjokyeongu* did publish several articles about foreigners in Korea prior to Lee’s article, but they were surveys of their migration to Korean society, rather than framing their presence in a multicultural framework.

Like in the newspaper media, it is from 2006 that *damunhwa* has become a very popular topic in the academia, with more than 200 original books, translated books and unpublished reports becoming available. Books and reports written in Korean typically deal with the nature of multicultural society in Korea, while translated books typically deal with case studies of other multicultural societies, theories of multiculturalism or multicultural education. Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations as well as journal articles show similar trends, as hundreds of them have been written since 2006, covering as diverse topics as education, family, immigration, citizenship, laws, counseling, religion and welfare.⁶

THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT AS A KEY AGENT OF MULTICULTURALISM

So what happened in the mid-2000s, especially since 2006? What brought about the heightened attention given to *damunhwa* and *damunhwajui* by the media and the academia? Has Korean society, known for having strong pride in ethnic homogeneity, all of a sudden become cosmopolitan in outlook and become tolerant of the people of diverse cultures? The catalyst for all of these changes has been the Korean government. The government policy regarding foreigners until the mid-2000s has been one of exclusion and control. Indeed, the Korean government prior to the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003-2008) saw foreigners purely in terms of utilitarian purposes, allowing them to come to Korea only to fill jobs shunned by Koreans and leave after a year or two. Accordingly, various labor importation schemes were implemented to bring in unskilled migrant workers, and these workers, many of whom were labeled as “trainees,” were excluded from the protection and rights their Korean counterparts enjoyed. Permanent settlement was out of the question, as residency in Korea was strictly temporary (even family reunions were not allowed). Human rights’ violations in the treatment of unskilled migrant workers were rampant and they were subjected to poor working conditions, long work hours, physical and verbal abuse, and delay of pay.

All of this changed during the Roh Moo-hyun Administration, as its policy on migrant workers and foreigners changed from exclusion to inclusion, fairness and institutional legitimacy. In effect, policy regarding foreigners made a transition from “immigrant control” to “immigrant integration” during the Roh administration. The Roh administration went to great lengths to improve the living and working conditions of unskilled migrant workers while trying to create incentives for high-skilled workers to come to Korea. Also, “multiculturalism” became an important part of policy dealing with

⁶ Keeping abreast of this rising trend in research focus on *damunhwa* is the increasing number of research institutes which are devoted to multicultural issues in Korea.

foreigners in Korea, particularly focusing on measures to help multicultural families and their children. The reason for emphasizing multiculturalism seems to have been the desire to counter the consequences of Korea's rapidly aging population, which is largely caused by record-low fertility rate, by creating a social milieu in which foreigners, especially migrant brides, and interethnic children feel welcomed. Another reason for embracing multiculturalism seems to have been the wish to make Korean society more tolerant of foreigners, so that it can invite more foreigners to come to Korea and replenish potentially dwindling human resources. The changing government policy was reflected in the way it took more responsibility for planning and implementing foreign labor policies, greatly undermining the role of private agencies. Accordingly, the government launched the Employment Permit System (EPS) in August 2003 to provide for migrant workers the same rights as Korean workers in regard to working hours, bonus, and welfare benefits.

More importantly, a policy that marks a turning point in the government policy in dealing with foreigners and a policy that prompted the media and the academia to pay great attention to the issues of multicultural Korea is the "Grand Plan." The Grand Plan was announced after President Roh met with heads of 14 branches of government ministries and agencies in April 2006. The Plan designated the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MGEF) to coordinate policies for migrant brides and multicultural families, while other ministries including the Ministries of Labor, Justice, and Social Welfare and Health as well as central and local government agencies had to participate. The stated vision of the Grand Plan is "a social integration of foreign wives and an attainment of a multicultural society" and its major policies include:

1. regulation of international marriage agencies by improving the transparency of their practices; and protection of migrant brides before entry to Korea by requiring brokers to provide them with unadulterated information on potential husbands;
2. support for victims of domestic violence by providing more shelters and emergency hotlines;
3. enacting a new law to protect foreign wives from becoming undocumented immigrants in case of divorce;
4. provision of support, including various Korean language and cultural programs, for newly arriving migrant brides;
5. provision of support for multicultural children in schools through the implementation of programs to prevent racism and a revision of contents in textbooks which are insensitive to racial issues;
6. provision of social welfare, including medical care, to foreign wives who are married to poor Korean men;
7. raising social awareness of multicultural issues among the public and implementing measures to become a successful multicultural society; terms implying racial discrimination such as "mixed blood" and "biracial" will be replaced with more politically correct terms; and consideration of a law banning prejudice against multicultural and immigrant children; and
8. building a strong network among government agencies and opening more government centers to not only keep abreast of the changing situations of multicultural families but also to offer the above services more effectively.

There are both external and internal factors which galvanized the government to take such swift action in launching the Grand Plan (Lee, 2006). Externally, there had been a series of media reports from the Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia about "human-trafficking" by international marriage agencies and the plight of migrant brides in Korea.

These reports highlighted sensational cases in which Korean husbands abused their foreign wives and in which the latter's human rights were violated. Another external factor which contributed to the making of the Grand Plan was the racial riot in France which took place in November 2005. As Korea had been a migrant-receiving country for almost 20 years, there were a significant number of migrants living in the country by the mid-2000s and the government wanted to take preventative measures against a potential racial conflict.

Internally, women's associations and migrant advocacy NGOs as well as migrant brides' self-help organizations pressured the government to take actions against heartless international marriage agencies that arranged marriages based purely on commercial motives, often resorting to measure that amounted to human trafficking. One such practice that was resented by women's groups was a "bride guarantee," a promise made by a marriage agency to replace the bride if she runs away after a wedding. A second internal factor had to do with the visit of Hines Ward to Seoul in April 2006. His visit was received with a media hoopla which raised awareness about the plight of mixed-race children in Korea. Ward, who left Seoul as a toddler, was born in Seoul to a Korean mother and an African-American father who was a U.S. serviceman. He became an instant star in Korea after winning the MVP at the Super Bowl. The story of Ward and his mother, who overcame many difficulties to raise him in the United States, fascinated Koreans and made the pair instant celebrities. Local media had closely covered the run-up to Ward's visit and cable news channel YTN broadcast their arrival live. During their 10-day stay, Ward and his mother met with President Roh and received honorary citizenship for the city of Seoul. Ward's visit sparked a broad reexamination of social prejudices against children of mixed parentage in Korea. Newspaper editorials called for more tolerant attitudes toward mixed-race Koreans, while the news media reported on egregious cases of discrimination against them.

These internal factors seem to have galvanized the Roh administration to implement the Grand Plan, a natural outcome since the former president Roh Moo-hyun and many of his cabinet members had been activists in pro-human rights movements (Lee, 2006:19). It is also likely that the Roh administration became concerned with the record-low fertility rate in Korea and it wanted to implement policies to provide assistance to foreign wives and their families to encourage larger families.

The Grand Plan was followed by laws which provided an institutional framework for supporting foreigners and enhancing the rights of foreigners in Korea. For example, the "Basic Law Regarding the Better Treatment of Foreign Residents in Korea" was enforced in July 2007 to promote an integration of foreign residents as members of Korean society. Also, the "Multicultural Families Act" was enacted in September 2008 to help them improve their quality of life as well as to provide information and education support to such families. The law also requires the Ministry of Welfare to conduct a survey every three years to stem discrimination and prejudice and to nurture a social milieu which recognizes the diversity of people living in Korea.

The Lee Myung-bak Administration has followed suit, especially to encourage the immigration of high-skilled workers, including IT-personnel, to Korea. In 2008, the "First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy" was announced, which is designed to enhance national competitiveness through an open-door policy for foreigners with professional skills to settle in Korea and to develop Korea into a more mature, multicultural society. Other proposed changes include: allowing high-skilled workers to request for an extension of their stay without limits; permitting foreign students who graduate from Korean universities to accept jobs immediately after graduation; and opening government jobs to foreigners.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF MULTICULTURALISM: AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR KOREA

It is clear that the government has played a major role in making multiculturalism a popular news item and a trendy topic of research in the academia. And the government, the media and the academia seem to have come to the conclusion that Korea has become a multicultural society⁷ and that multiculturalism is a way to go for Korea. However, this paper argues that while many ideas regarding multiculturalism have been mentioned and articulated in policies, articles and books, they generally lack comprehensive understanding of its multiple meanings, implications and practical problems.

Multiculturalism refers to a set of ideas and policies advocating the acceptance, mutual recognition and promotion of the cultures of various ethnic groups as equals within a society (see Goldberg, 2009; Laden and Owen, 2007). The eminent philosopher Charles Taylor (1994) identified multiculturalism as the “politics of recognition” as well as the “politics of equal dignity” and the “politics of equal respect.” Taylor (1994:37) argues that we now live in an era dominated by “a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens” and “the equalization of rights and entitlements.” Taylor (1994:36) writes:

The importance of recognition is now universally acknowledged in one form or another. . . . On the social plane, we have a continuing politics of equal recognition. . . . the understanding that identities are formed in open dialogue, unshaped by a predefined social script, has made the politics of equal recognition more central and stressful. It has, in fact, considerably raised the stakes. Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it. . . . The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.

Based on the Canadian experience of multiculturalism, Harold Troper (1999:997) further conceptualizes multiculturalism as being comprised of three components: “the demographic reality of a . . . population made up of peoples and groups representing a plurality of ethnocultural traditions and racial origins; a social ideal or value that accepts cultural pluralism as a positive and distinctive feature of . . . society; and government policy initiatives designed to recognize, support. . . and manage cultural and racial pluralism” (see Isajiw, 1997; Lewycky, 1999; Fleras and Elliott, 2002). Similarly, Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott (1992) argue that multiculturalism is a multidimensional phenomenon that should be analyzed in several, different ways. Specifically, they argue that multiculturalism must be viewed as a fact, ideology, policy, and process. Multiculturalism as a fact refers to empirical description of ethnic diversity, i.e., the existence of multiple cultural groups who are different in terms of beliefs and behavior. Multiculturalism as an ideology refers to

⁷ Is Korea a multicultural society, as in the same sense as Canada, Australia, and the United States, where foreign-born permanent residents account for 20-30 percent of the total population? The question is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that less than one-fifth of the total of 1.2 million foreigners in Korea are permanent residents. A large majority of foreigners in Korea are migrant workers who are staying in Korea for a short-term period. There is also the issue of *Joseonjok* (ethnic Koreans from China). Does their presence, numbering close to 400,000, represent an increasing ethnic diversity in Korea?

prescriptive, normative statement of “what ‘ought to be’” (Fleras and Elliott, 1996:326) —a set of ideals that exalt the virtues of tolerance and mutual respect as well as the benefit of ethnoracial diversity. Multiculturalism as a state policy refers to the accommodation and management of diversity through the launch of state initiatives to promote cultural preservation and intercultural sharing as well as the attainment of social integration through removal of discriminatory barriers (Fleras and Elliott, 1992:68). Finally, multiculturalism as a process refers to how political sectors react to the changing dynamics of multicultural reality. Multiculturalism in this regard may be seen as being manipulated by both political parties and ethnic groups to promote their own agenda. The state, for example, can become supportive of multiculturalism for a political reason, in pursuit of “peace, order, and good government” (Fleras and Elliott, 1992:92). Political parties may view multiculturalism as crucial for re-election. Ethnic groups may also turn to multiculturalism in an effort to take advantage of entitlements and benefits they can enjoy. All of this shows the multidimensionality of multiculturalism, imparting “a distinctive perspective on the ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘where,’ ‘when,’ and ‘how’ of multiculturalism” in a given society (Fleras and Elliott, 1992:92).

Of particular importance in understanding multiculturalism is its policy implications. As Kymlicka (2005:73) argues, there are several variables or categories with which we can assess the extent of multiculturalism in a given society: constitutional affirmation of multiculturalism; recognition of dual citizenship; adoption of multiculturalism in school curricula; provision of funding for ethnic organizations to support cultural activities; and ethnic representation in the media. Also, government multicultural policies may include, but not limited to:

1. recognition of dual or multiple citizenships
2. government support for newspapers and radio and television programs in minority languages
3. support for multicultural education in which funding for minority language education is provided
4. adoption of multiculturalism in school curricula
5. support for minority festivals, celebrations, and holidays
6. support for music and arts of minority cultures
7. acceptance of traditional and religious dress and other accessories in schools, the military, and society in general
8. programs to encourage ethnic representation in politics and media
9. programs to encourage ethnic representation in education, science, engineering, and the work force in general (see Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2006; Wood, 2006).

All of these are important dimensions and characteristics of multiculturalism, but the current discourse of multiculturalism in Korea has paid a very little attention to them. There seems to be a lack of understanding about the nature, purpose, and properties of multiculturalism in the discourse of multiculturalism in Korea. In fact, multiculturalism is often mentioned and discussed without a full understanding of its multiple meanings and implications. Also, the categories and policy issues of multiculturalism discussed above certainly do not yet apply to Korean society, for it has never shown any interest in promoting the culture or identity of newly emerging ethnic groups in ways other multicultural societies have done. Even if the Korean government were to adopt multiculturalism as an “official” public policy, the ideal of encouraging people to maintain their own ethnic cultures in Korea will be very difficult to maintain. Without their own school system, media supports, and sustainable cultural environment, ethnic groups in Korea will be bombarded with cultural

influences emanating from the Korea-centric media, schools, and working world. Also, not all cultures will ever be of “equal” value in Korea. In reality, ethnic groups are under great pressure to Koreanize and conform to the Korean majority. The so-called multicultural policy in Korea is predominantly aimed at producing Korean-conformity and there has been widespread discrimination against non-Koreans, in whatever forms and nature, especially toward other Asians.

Then, is multiculturalism consistent with Korean values? The answer is no. Koreans take great pride in sharing “one pure blood” as descendants of one common ancestor, and in a “unique, continuous culture” from the birth of the nation, both of which imply the superiority of Korean ethnicity and culture. This sense of Korea-centered supremacy or ethnocentrism fosters Koreans’ shunning of and discrimination against foreigners, especially unskilled migrant workers from other parts of Asia. Koreans cast all foreigners as strangers (*nam*) whose “strangeness” or “otherness” does not allow for smooth social interaction, which creates an exclusive and “closed” society to which foreigners find it difficult to adapt. Shunning as “different” even extends to racially- or ethnically-mixed Koreans, characterized as *honyeola*, literally “offspring of mixed blood.”

The emphasis on ethnic homogeneity based on the notion of Koreans being the descendents of one, common ancestor is now being challenged by a new emphasis on harmonious race relations and tolerance in the face of multicultural reality. This new emphasis has not yet led to the elimination of ethnocentrism and discrimination against foreigners, but it nonetheless marks a significant departure from the proverbial image of Korean identity and nationalism centered on the ideology of ethnic homogeneity. Still, many Koreans generally view multiculturalism as a threat, because its supposed assumption that all cultures are of equal value challenges the country’s efforts to maintain its cultural continuity in the face of the onslaught of western culture. The Korean government must be aware of this, as it still largely promotes the ideology of ethnic homogeneity in public education even to this day. Multiculturalism, as advanced by the Korean government, then seems to represent a type of image-framing by the government, which seeks to give the impression of interethnic harmony while minimizing ethnic conflicts. Like in most multicultural societies, the Korean government as a whole has encouraged the preservation of certain aspects of ethnic cultures, such as ethnic folk dances, cuisine, and arts. This may give the minorities the illusion of preserving their ethnic identity, while at the same time ensuring Korean-conformity. However, the nurturing of particular aspects of culture is not the same as the preservation of a whole, complete culture. When multiculturalism is represented by the preservation of select cultural practices which have more nostalgic meaning than importance in daily life, as is the case in Korea, what we have is *symbolic ethnicity* or *fragmented ethnicity* (see Roberts and Clifton, 1982). While the individual’s life is mostly de-ethnicized, as in education, occupation and daily social interactions, in some aspects, such as kinship, friendship, language, and cuisine, he or she may retain links to ethnic heritage. This pattern of “affective ethnicity”—a superficial way of rendering ethnic distinctiveness to individual identity in a society dominated by pressure to conform to mainstream society—is dominant in Korean society and is probably what Korean society wants. What this shows is that Korean perception of multiculturalism should be understood as a form of interculturalism, which stresses intercultural understanding and appreciation rather than intercultural equality. It could also be that the aim of multiculturalism in Korea is psychological. To members of ethnic groups, multiculturalism instills pride and confidence in their own identity and culture; to Koreans, multiculturalism makes them feel good about their openness and tolerance.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the genealogy of the concept of multiculturalism in Korea. As Korea rapidly became a multicultural society, there has been a widespread use of the concepts of multicultural society and multiculturalism. However, these terms have often been used interchangeably and indiscriminately, failing to recognize the multidimensionality of the meanings of multiculturalism. This paper attempted to redress this problem by tracing the origin of the use of term *damunhwa* or “multicultural” and its related terms such as multiculturalism, multicultural family, multicultural children, and multicultural education. What the paper finds is that the government has played a major role in promoting multiculturalism as a policy and ideology, although it has largely failed to fully understand the meanings and implications of the controversial policy. The paper also shows that multiculturalism as a policy is largely inconsistent with Korean values.

Given that the increasing ethnic diversity in Korea is inevitable and irreversible, the Korean government should closely examine the policies and programs related to ethnic and racial issues in such immigrant societies as the United States, Canada, Australia and European countries to learn from their experiences. In this way, it can learn the most effective ways of promoting social peace and tolerance while preventing or minimizing ethnic/racial conflicts. The government can also learn not to make the same mistakes those countries had made. The Korean government should also seriously consider more open policies toward immigration, not only for skilled professionals but also unskilled migrant workers, as Korean society is expected to suffer from a serious labor shortage from 2020 or so. It is one way to address the chronic labor shortage Korea is destined to face due to record-low fertility rates. With increased immigration, more secure supply of laborers can be assured.

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