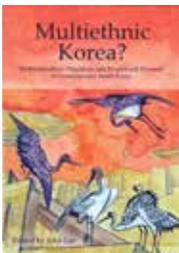


South Korea



John Lie, ed., *Multiethnic Korea? Multiculturalism, Migration, and Peoplehood Diversity in Contemporary South Korea*

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SOUTH KOREA HAS A prevalent sole ethnicity “myth.” As a result, its society nurtures strong ethnic nationalism (SHIN 2014), and it is arguably one of the most predominantly homogenous societies in the world with no significant ethnic minorities (SETH 2010). The recent influx of foreign populations, such as foreign low-skilled workers and marriage migrants, is a turning point for the country to rethink its mono-ethnic myth. One way of dealing with the transition to multieth-

nicity is to disseminate multiculturalism (*damunhwajuui*) via media, policy, and academic discourse. Thus, in South Korea, multiculturalism has been a buzzword for academic and media discourse since the mid-2000s.

Many scholars in and of South Korea have been overwhelmed by the enormous amount of work published in recent years. This is certainly the case in South Korea, where one can find this topic at conferences, symposiums, lectures, policy discussions and in newspapers and schools, as EunRyung Jun (chapter 4) experienced. Although this field is emerging in the Korean literature and context, a considerable number of academic works are available in English. As the editor of this volume, John Lie (Introduction), rightly states, it is a welcome addition to the field.

Multiethnic Korea? asks questions along the lines mentioned above. It presents many cases that involve those who are presumably Koreans but are in turn not typically thought of as part being an integral part of multicultural dynamics. The authors and editors employ the umbrella concept of “peoplehood” (that is, race, ethnicity, and culture) to argue for the inclusion of multi-culture within the civil treatment of so-called co-ethnic people (for example, North Korean refugees or return migrants from China), marriage migrants, and “mixed” (*honbyöl*) descendants of Korean heritage. This fills a void in the current body of academic literature and expands its existing scope. The contributors are mainly sociologists and anthropologists, as well as scholars in the fields of political science, education, and communication, who are predominantly Koreans or of Korean descent. The diverse mix of scholars allows readers to gradually grasp the big picture of a diversified Korea.

The thirteen chapters in this volume are organized around Korean society’s responses to changing cultural, ethnic, and population dynamics, as well as to migrants and multiracial/multiethnic Koreans. It is organized into particular groups, with links among the different arguments presented in the final, additional chapter. The following paragraphs present a thematic organization of the chapters.

In the introduction, John Lie argues that the origin of multicultural and multi-ethnic Korea can be traced back to colonial Korea and, on the contrary, the history of mono-cultural and mono-ethnic Korea was constructed in the development of postcolonial Korea. This set-up is connected to Timothy C. Lim’s chapter containing an overview of the Korean multicultural turn and Nora Hui-Jung Kim’s research on the media discourse concerning the sociocultural transition.

Korea’s “empty imperative,” in which Nancy Abelmann and her colleagues describe training elementary school teachers for multicultural education, is such a case, and resonates with Timothy C. Lim’s research on multiculturalism. In fact, how to channel practitioners, scholars, and citizens into this nation-building project is still a vague and changing idea. Perhaps this is why we can see many examples in which civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious groups, and activists intervene at different junctures in attempts to help the Korean government, policymakers and non-participant citizens to determine what steps to take.

Elena Kim’s chapter shows us that Korean adoptees are supported by NGOs, while the relatively absent Korean government neglects to embrace them as citizens. On the religious front, Hae Yeon Choo explores the role of religion in nation-building by using case studies of North Korean migrants and Filipino

migrant workers becoming neoliberal Korean citizens and Korean families respectively. Jin-Heon Jung's historical account of North Korean migrants also highlights how the sociopolitical context and inter-Korea relations shape views on North Korean migrants at different times. The chapters by Choo and Jung resonate with the idea that religions are contact zones where South Koreans and North Koreans meet for a new nation-building process.

Where the South Korean government does show comparatively active engagement and initiative is in the making of multicultural families, in particular, international marriage migrants. Minjeong Kim's ethnographic study of Filipina female migrants into rural Korea shows the government's idea of creating families and implicitly supporting patriarchal and nationalistic ideologies. As many of these policy pronouncements have focused on remedies for the crisis of social production, however, we still see that migrant workers, another large group among the migrant population in South Korea, enjoy greater freedom and less policy intervention than marriage migrants, as EunRyung Jun argues.

Nadia Kim and Sue-je L. Gage explore the topic of arguably the longest history of "mixed" Koreans, those resulting from the Korean War. Struggles that originate from a racial hierarchal order and social construction of what Koreans should look like are well researched in the cases of "Black Koreans" or "Korean Amerasians," as studied, respectively, by these authors. The chapters in this volume include Filipina female migrants, who are presumably the largest group of intermarriage couples, but one of the lacunae in this book is the emergence of their children as mixed-race descendants. How have they fared in the new and multicultural Korea?

Like other East Asian countries, for example, Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan, just to name a few, Korea's gradual transition from a traditionally sending country to a receiving country in terms of migration is important to note. In this regard, the ways in which Keiko Yamanaka comparatively explores the divergent immigration policies of South Korea and Japan, which have experienced similar steps, resonate with the line of thinking mentioned above.

These East Asian societies are all undergoing similar social and demographic patterns, including low fertility rates, an aging population, and a shortage of low-skilled labor forces, along with a similarly unwelcoming atmosphere in which new populations live. In this context, South Korea, experiencing colonial, circular, forced migration of its co-ethnic populations, offers an interesting and important case of how a society confronts and deals with social (un)acceptance and understandings of a long-held belief in the overarching narrative of homogeneity. This perhaps explains why South Korea still takes a conservative approach to fully embracing new types of migrants into its society, as Jack Jin Gary Lee and John D. Skrentny point out.

Notwithstanding its increasingly diverse populations, South Korean society is not yet ready to create categories for "minorities" and is still only acknowledging "foreigners" by biological, cultural, and ethnic citizenship. This perhaps urges us to try to understand that any practice of inclusion and exclusion in making Korea a multicultural and multiethnic country is a newly established aspect of "compressed modernity," to use CHANG's term (1999; 2010), which refers to

exceptionally condensed changes in societies engaged in the complex processes of nation-building.

Under the rubrics of societal transition, migration, and “other” Koreans, this book has set out how Korean society and governmental agents have responded to the new multicultural and multiethnic phenomena present in modern-day Korea. The big picture of demographic trends and systematic policy representation, which might offer a contextual background to non-specialists in the field, is still lacking.

As a comprehensive and important collection of research on Korean peoplehood, this edited volume pushes us to think about and recognize co-ethnic Korean migrants, migrants who form families in South Korea, and people with partly Korean ethnicities. It is intended to be useful for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses on Korea, international migration, ethnicity, and East Asia. The book will also provide insights not only for Koreanists and Asianists, but also for scholars in the fields of migration, globalization, sociology, comparative politics, and policy.

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