Will Labour Migration lead to a Multicultural Society in Korea?

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Introduction

Korea no longer has to decide whether it wants to become a multicultural society. It made that decision years ago – perhaps unconsciously – when it decided to be a full participant in the emerging global economy. It confirmed that decision when it decided to actively recruit foreign migrants to meet the economic and demographic needs of a fast-growing society.

Korea is faced by a different decision today: what type of multicultural society does it want to be? Does it want to be an *exclusionary society* in which immigrants and minorities are treated as second-class citizens, discriminated against and socially excluded? Or does it want to be an *inclusive society* in which everybody who contributes to the economy and society enjoys equal treatment and equal opportunities?

The first type of society is one that is multicultural in its population composition, but refuses to recognise this in its policies on citizenship, social welfare and national identity. This is a society which is likely to experience serious divisions – and even conflict – on the basis of national origins and cultural values. The second type is a society that recognises cultural diversity, while working for social equality and shared identity based on civil belonging.

These are 'ideal-types' – that is conceptual constructions that illustrate the possible extremes that result from different approaches to a certain political dilemma. No society fits exactly to the ideal-types. The closest fit to the exclusionary society would have been *apartheid* South Africa up to 1994. Today, the Gulf Oil states are close to this approach: they depend heavily on foreign workers for their economic growth, but deny these workers many basic rights. The closest fit to the inclusive society today would be Canada, with its strong policies of multiculturalism. However, elements of this approach are to be found in Australia, Britain and several other European societies.

In this paper, I start by providing a few definitions of important terms. Then I discuss why Korea is likely to become a multicultural society. The paper goes on to discuss the experiences of a some European immigration countries in finding the best way to incorporate people of different cultural backgrounds into their society. That can mean changes in political institutions and cultural identity for the majority as well as the minority. I will also examine the problems that have arisen recently in dealing with cultural difference.

I will argue that more open and diverse societies do not have to mean loss of social cohesion, cultural identity and core values. Korea is still at an early stage in the migration process. It can make informed choices about strategies to effectively shape patterns of migration and ethnic diversity, to the mutual benefit of the host society, the migrants and their countries of origin. Appropriate responses from government and civil society could lead to beneficial outcomes for all concerned.

Definitions of basic terms

A multicultural society refers to a country with a population made up of groups that are diverse on the basis of cultural characteristics such as language, religion, customs and values. Culture does not refer only to ethnicity, but can also include characteristics linked to social class, gender, regional location, sexual orientation and so on. Nearly all the world's nation-states have culturally-distinct groups (whether they have had recent immigration or not). A key characteristic of democratic societies is their ability to include people with different cultural values as citizens.

Ethnicity can be defined as sense of group belonging, based on ideas of common origins, history, language, experience and values. Most modern nation-states developed through incorporation of several territorial groups into a common political unit. This applies particularly to European nation-states like the United Kingdom (UK), France or Spain. Immigration also played an important part in the history of these countries. However, immigration but was the principle factor in building certain nations, like the USA, Australia or Canada.

An ethnic minority is a group that is distinguished from the majority population on the basis of ethnicity. In many cases this leads to discrimination or social exclusion.

A multi-ethnic society is found in a country with two or more ethnic groups. This applies to the great majority of countries in the world. Stating that a country has a multi-ethnic society says nothing about the relationships between the groups, which may be either conflictual or harmonious – or somewhere in-between. In such societies we speak of ethnic diversity.

Multiculturalism refers to a policy model for managing ethnic diversity. It implies that it is the responsibility of the state to work together with the groups that make up society to ensure good inter-group relations. Multiculturalism has two main elements:
1. Recognition of the right of ethnic groups to maintain their own languages, religions and customs (as long as these do not conflict with the rule of law).
2. Action by the state to guarantee equality of opportunities, by preventing discrimination or racism against members of minority groups, and ensuring that every member of society has equal opportunities to participate in education, in the economy and in political processes.

Multiculturalism developed initially in Canada (where it became the official policy in 1971). It was then taken up in Australia and in several European countries – especially the United Kingdom (UK), Sweden and the Netherlands. The balance between the first element (cultural recognition) and the second (state action for equal opportunities) varies considerably from country to country. In the USA, multiculturalism is mainly concerned with recognising the role of minorities (like Native Americans and African-Americans) in US culture and history. Providing opportunities to immigrants and minorities is seen mainly as a matter for the private sector.

Assimilation is the idea that immigrants can in time give up all their cultural distinctiveness and be completely absorbed into the dominant culture of a receiving society.

Integration, by contrast, is often taken to mean that that immigrants become part of a society through a process of mutual change, in which all groups learn to recognise and adopt some of each others' cultural characteristics. However, integration is actually used in many different ways, and is a rather vague concept.

Social cohesion is the idea that members of society should work together to achieve common

social objectives and a peaceful society. Some people ague that social cohesion is best achieved in relatively homogeneous societies, while others argue that recognition of diversity leads to social cohesion, especially in multi-ethnic societies.

Transnationalism is a concept that has developed in recent years to reflect the fact that modern transport and communications technologies make it easier for people to migrate temporarily or repeatedly between two or more countries. The idea is that some people develop a transnational consciousness, and maintain economic, cultural and social relationships in several places. Transnational communities are seen as a challenge to nation-states because people can have multiple loyalties. This characteristic of contemporary migration is reflected in the increasing number of countries that permit dual citizenship.

How labour migration leads to ethnic diversity

Why did I say at the beginning that Korea has already made decisions that are likely to create a multicultural society? This is not the official view. Indeed when the Employment Permit System (EPS) was introduced in 2004, it was designed to bring in temporary migrant workers who would only be allowed to stay three years. A further three years was possible, but the workers had to leave for a whole year in between. Moreover, workers were not allowed to bring in spouses or children. Thus the Korean labour recruitment system was designed to permit temporary residence for work – not permanent settlement.

However, international experience leads me to argue that Korea's policies will – albeit unintentionally – lead to settlement and ethnic diversity. On the most general level there is evidence that the decision to participate in the global economy through liberalisation of trade rules, the opening of domestic markets and the search for export markets is already a step towards a multicultural society. In international comparison it is clear that the most dynamic economies are to be found in open societies – that is societies that allow flows of all sorts across their borders. Closed societies tend to be economically and technologically backward.

Flow of capital for investment and of commodities for trade are generally accompanied by flows of people and of ideas. While most governments welcome capital and commodity flows, they are much more ambivalent about the other types. This is because control of people entering the national space is seen as a prerogative of national sovereignty: nation-states have differential rules on who may enter (e.g. the highly skilled, but not the lower skilled, or nationals of some countries but not other). As for ideas, transfer of technological or business knowledge is welcomed, cultural flows bringing different cultural or religious values are viewed with suspicion. However, globalisation seems to have its own logic, and it is impossible to have the 'desirable' flows (capital and commodities) without the 'unwanted' ones (people and ideas).

New cultural influences are an intrinsic part of globalisation. Technology transfer is almost always linked to import of new ideas. Moreover, migration is not a one-way process. Koreans have gone to other countries since the 1950s (and indeed earlier) as permanent migrants, manual workers, students and skilled workers, and as businesspeople. This too brings global influences and aspects of cultural diversity to Korea.

On a more specific level, it seems clear that the establishment of a migrant labour system is a step towards a multicultural society. Korea actually used *export of labour* in the 1970s and 1980s as one way of developing the resources needed for its own economic take-off. But the success of the export-led growth strategy quickly used up available domestic labour reserves. In addition economic growth – as in other industrial countries – was accompanied by declining fertility. It was inevitable that *import of labour* would be needed to sustain economic growth. Korea introduced the 'industrial trainee system' in 1994 as a disguised

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framework for the import of low-skilled labour. 'Trainees' did not enjoy the legal rights of workers and were paid below the minimum wage. In a situation of labour scarcity, trainees left their posts and found irregular work, with better pay and conditions. By December 2002 there were officially estimated to be 289 239 undocumented migrants (80 per cent of the total foreign workforce) (IOM 2005, 108). In response, the Korean Government introduced the EPS and phased out the trainee system.

Factors that change temporary workers into permanent settlers

As already mentioned, the EPS is designed to prevent long-term settlement by requiring workers to rotate and by prohibiting family entry. Can it succeed? It is instructive to look at the experience of European countries that used 'guestworker' systems from the 1950s to the 1970s for exactly the same reasons, i.e. to provide workers without the risk of settlement.

Germany's highly-developed recruitment system had strong similarities with the EPS. Its basic idea was to ensure *'rotation'* by recruiting workers for a limited period, restricting their rights and minimising family reunion. Migrants were expected to accept relatively poor wages and conditions, make little demand on social infrastructure and not get involved in labour struggles. In conditions of strong labour demand, it was hard to sustain such principles. Employers wanted to keep on good workers, and family reunion soon started through the practice of recruiting wives or husbands of existing migrants as workers. They joined the workforce, but once families were re-united the birth of children and long-term settlement were inevitable. The system broke down completely after the 1973 Oil Crisis, when German stopped labour recruitment. The theory of the guestworker system was that by stopping recruitment most migrants would leave fairly soon. In fact, many did, but others stayed. Family reunion speeded up, and settlement and ethnic minority formation took place. The experience in other European countries was similar.

Why did many migrant workers turn into permanent settlers? There were several reasons:

1. Migrants' objectives were linked to the life cycle: young single workers originally intended to stay for a few years, but as they grew older and established families, their plans changed.
2. Although migrants were recruited temporarily, they met long-term structural labour needs of the economy.
3. Employers wanted to retain good migrant workers, and encouraged them to stay on. Migrants became concentrated in certain types of work, creating dependence on foreign workers in important economic sectors
4. The recession of the 1970s was much worse in migrants' countries of origin (especially Turkey and North Africa) than in Europe, so there were economic incentives to stay.
5. Migrant workers had been integrated into welfare systems: entitlements to unemployment benefits, education and social services made it worth staying despite worsening employment prospects.
6. In liberal-democratic societies, governments could not simply expel legally resident foreigners: the courts protected their rights to secure residence status and to live with their families.
7. A coalition of pro-immigrant forces, embracing trade unions, churches and civil rights organizations, demanded equal rights for migrant workers. These groups influenced policies through their links with social-democratic and liberal parties.

To sum up: most temporary migrant workers originally came to Europe with the intention of going away again after a few years. The majority did leave, but a certain proportion stayed (perhaps a third or a quarter) and this number was enough to bring about substantial change in receiving societies.

Now another element of the guestworker system became significant: it had been based on the inferiority and the separation of the foreigner. W. European societies did not integrate immigrants as equals, but as economically disadvantaged and racially discriminated minorities. As a result, immigrants tended to settle in specific neighborhoods, marked by inferior housing and infrastructure. Ethnic enterprises and religious, cultural and social associations developed in these areas. Thus the inherent contradictions of the guestworker system led to today's ethnically diverse but socially divided European societies (Castles 2006).

Will these factors apply in Korea in the same way as they did in Europe? It is too early to say, and in any case, I lack the detailed knowledge necessary to judge. However, recent changes in Korean regulations, such as the reduction of the one-year waiting period for a second contract to one month indicate similar pressures(Abella 2007). Employers in certain sectors certainly see a long-term need for migrant workers, and this tend to turn them into long-term immigrants, Recruitment of ethnic Koreans from China and Russia is also likely to lead to settlement. Finally, the growing tendency for Korean men to seek their brides in other countries indicates that the effects of migration cannot be confined to the labour market: bride migration is likely to bring cultural change, since it is above all mothers who passes on language and culture to children.

Recent European experiences: the 'integration crisis

How should Korean society and policy-makers react to the growth of immigration and the likely trend towards a multicultural society? Again, it is useful to look at recent European experiences to understand the choices that Korea may face in the future. When immigration started in the post-1945 boom, incorporation of the newcomers into society was not seen as a major issue. The numbers staying on were not expected to be large, and there was a strong belief that it would not bring about important changes in national culture and identity. Britain, France and the Netherlands expected to be able to assimilate fairly small groups of immigrants from their colonies and from other European countries. Germany and other 'guestworker' importers (e.g. Austria and Switzerland) did not anticipate family reunion or settlement, and therefore pursued polices of temporary adaptation to the labour market (Castles and Miller 2003).

At first, the prevailing model in countries like Britain, France and the Netherlands was *assimilation*, which meant that immigrants were to be incorporated into society through a one-sided process of adaptation. They were to give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural or social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population. The 'guestworker' countries, on the other hand, wanted *temporary adaptation* of migrant workers for the labour market but denied the rights to family reunion and permanent stay: migrants were not meant to become citizens or to participate in most areas of society, especially citizenship and political participation).
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But when the post-1945 economic boom ended in the 1970s, family reunion took place – even in 'guestworker' countries. Then the end of the Cold War and globalisation brought new migrations from ever more diverse origins. This led to community formation and the maintenance of minority cultures, languages and minorities. Even in the 'guestworker' countries, settlement was taking place despite official denials, leading to social exclusion, and an enduring link between class and ethnic background.

Both the assimilation and the temporary adaptation models had clearly failed. France sought to maintain the assimilationist approach, although it was renamed as 'inclusion' or 'integration'. Elsewhere the principle of *integration* meant recognizing that adaptation was a gradual process that required some degree of mutual accommodation. Acceptance of cultural

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maintenance and community formation might be a necessary stage, but the final goal was still absorption into the dominant culture – integration policies were often simply a slower and gentler form of assimilation. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, several European countries began following the Canadian and Australian approach of *multiculturalism* that recognized the long-term persistence of group difference. In Britain, the new policy was actually called multiculturalism, while the Swedish Government spoke of 'freedom of choice' and the Netherlands of 'minorities policy. The new approach meant that immigrants should be able to participate as equals in all spheres of society, without being expected to give up their own culture, religion and language, although usually with an expectation of conformity to certain key values.

Immigration certainly proved to be a major factor bringing about change in European countries. Since the 1990s, migration has grown in volume and become far more diverse in origin, with migrants coming not only from Europe and the Mediterranean region, but from Africa, Asia and Latin America as well. It is impossible in this short paper to describe the detailed experiences of each of the European countries. However, it is important to point out that all the different approaches to incorporating immigrants seem to have run into difficulties in recent years. There is much talk in Europe of an '*integration crisis*'.

By the early 1990s, assimilation seemed to be on the way out everywhere, except France. Democratic civil societies were thought to have an inherent trend towards multiculturalism (Bauböck 1994). That is no longer the case. Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK have all re-labelled their approaches with much greater emphasis on 'integration', 'social cohesion' and 'core national values'. The Netherlands has had perhaps the most dramatic turn-around and seems to be on the way to a new assimilationism (Vasta 2007). The backlash against multiculturalism has a number of causes. One is the growing awareness of the enduring social disadvantage and marginalisation of many immigrant groups – especially those of non-European origin. Many immigrants have been in receiving countries for thirty years or more – indeed a second and even third generation of descendants of if immigrants have grown up in Europe. Yet immigrants and their children still show high levels of unemployment, and of concentration in lower-skilled jobs. In addition, immigrants tend to be concentrated in poor neighbourhoods, with low-quality housing and poor educational and social facilities. Instead of attributing this to discrimination, the dominant approach is to blame minorities for clustering together and refusing to integrate.

Another factor is the growing fear of terrorism and Islamic terrorism. Events like the bombings in Madrid and London are seen as evidence of the incompatibility of Muslim values with modern European societies. In this interpretation, recognition of cultural diversity has had the perverse effect of encouraging ethnic separatism and the development of 'parallel lives'. A new model of individual integration – based on compulsory 'integration contracts' and citizenship tests – has been introduced in several countries. The problem for such views, however, is that the one country that has maintained its model of individual assimilation is also experiencing a crisis of integration. The minority youth riots of autumn 2005 showed that France has also failed to overcome the inequality and racism that excludes immigrants and their descendents from society.

It seems therefore that all the different approaches to incorporation of immigrants have some problems: guestworker-type policies of temporary adaptation become useless once settlement takes place; multiculturalism seems to lead to persistent separatism, and assimilation only perpetuates marginalisation and conflict. In my view, this integration crisis actually reflects the unwillingness of host societies to deal with two issues.
1. The deep-seated cultures of ethnocentrism and racism that are a legacy of European colonialism and imperialism. In times of stress, such as economic restructuring or international conflict, ethnocentrism can lead to social exclusion, discrimination and violence against minorities

2. The trend to greater inequality resulting from globalisation and economic restructuring. Increased international competition puts pressure on employment, working conditions and welfare systems. At the same time neo-liberal economic policies encourage greater pay differences and reduce the capacity of states to redistribute income to reduce poverty and social disadvantage.

Taken together these factors have led to a racialisation of difference – that is, the relatively poor labour market and social outcomes of certain groups are blamed on their cultural characteristics rather than on other social factors. The existence of separate and marginal communities is taken as evidence of failure to integrate, and this in turn is perceived as a threat to the host society. The result, as (Schierup et al. 2006) argue for Europe, is a 'dual crisis' of national identity and the welfare state. The attempt to resolve the crisis through blaming minorities does not provide a solution. Rather it threatens the fundamental values upon which democratic societies are based.

Consequences for Korea

Koreans often state that they have a homogeneous culture and national identity. Yet it is necessary to ask two key questions:
- Can an homogeneous identity be maintained in a situation of globalisation?
- Is it desirable to try to maintain an homogeneous identity?

On the first question, I have already argued that Korea has taken the first steps towards greater cultural and ethnic diversity. However, it is still at a very early stage in this process. Only around one per cent of Korea's population come from other countries – compared with 23 per cent in Australia, 12 per cent in the USA, and 5-10 per cent in many European countries. If you add children of immigrants born in the country, the population of overseas background is nearly twice as high – for instance nearly half the population in Australia and a quarter to a third in other immigration countries. Korea may never reach such levels, and in any case it would take many years before this happens. All the same, it seems clear that diversity will grow in Korea. Apart from immigrants, diverse cultural influences come from Koreans travelling abroad, global media, and the international nature of modern business and technology. Korea will become a multicultural society, but it will be a fairly slow process that gives time for analysis and planning.

On the second question, it seems both impossible and undesirable to maintain an homogeneous identity. Attempts at closure to external influences lead to stagnant and backward societies – like China and Albania before the 1990s, or indeed North Korea today. Economically successful societies are almost always relatively open societies. Moreover, the introduction of democratic institutions and a strong legal system means that human rights exist not only for citizens but for immigrants as well. Under the EPS, migrant workers are guaranteed many labour market and social rights on the same basis as Korean nationals. Once migrant workers obtain substantial rights of this kind, they are on the road to long-term stay.. By choosing a modern economy and an open society, Korea has implicitly set itself on the path to cultural change and greater heterogeneity.

Studying the experience of European countries (and also of the USA, Canada and Australia which are not covered in this paper) can help to understand possible future scenarios for other countries. Of course, Korea is different from Europe in many ways, so it would be mistaken to think that developments will follow the same pattern. Nor will the models used in Europe necessarily fit in Korea. All the same, the European experience does provide some useful lessons:
1. Temporary migrant labour recruitment is almost always likely to lead to permanent settlement of at least a proportion of the migrants.

2. The character of future ethnic groups will, to a large measure, be determined by what the state does in the early stages of migration. The immigration policies used by both post-colonial nations and guestworker recruiters in Europe started trends to marginalisation and social exclusion of immigrants. ies.
3. In order to cope with the difficult experience of settlement in a new society, immigrants and their descendents need their own associations and social networks, as well as their own languages and cultures.
4. The best way to prevent marginalization and social conflicts is to grant permanent immigrants full rights in all social spheres. This means making citizenship easily available, even if this leads to dual citizenship.

Can Korea avoid making the mistakes that led, in the long run, to serious social divisions and to the current 'integration crisis' in Europe? This depends on recognising the reality of change, and introducing new policy models in good time.

Elements of a multicultural policy for Korea

Obviously, it is up to Korean citizens and their political representatives to decide on future directions. It would be quite wrong for an outsider to suggest solutions to Korean problems. However, I will close my paper with some policy ideas that arise from international comparisons, and which may be helpful in discussions.

Temporary and circular migration
Recently, governments and intergovernmental agencies have recommended policies of temporary or circular migration. Many migrants wish to work for a few years in another country, and then to return home with their savings and enhanced knowledge. The European experience shows that some migrants are likely change their plans and stay on. Democratic countries find it very difficult to enforce temporary stay, since migrants have rights and are protected by the legal system. The emphasis in circular migration policies should therefore be on *incentives* to return home (such as training, education, re-integration assistance, investment advice), not on *compulsion*.

Rights for migrants
Giving migrants inferior rights, and especially employing irregular migrants, leads to split labour markets which are economically inefficient. It also leads to labour market segmentation and residential segregation which are socially harmful. Democratic societies should ensure that migrant workers have full labour market and social rights. They should also create pathways to permanent residence and eventual citizenship.

Integration policies
Market mechanisms on their own do not lead to equal opportunities for immigrants and their descendants. Public policy should combat discrimination, ensure that migrants have access to public services, such as health and education, and seek to prevent segregation in housing.

Migrant participation and citizenship
The only way to prevent exclusion and social divisions is to ensure that migrants can participate in mainstream institutions. Local voting rights for migrants after a certain period of residence is an important step. In the long run, migrants should be encouraged to become citizens and to participate in political institutions. Since many migrants maintain transnational links with their homelands, and find it psychologically difficult to give up such links, dual citizenship is the best solution for many migrants and their children.

Changing public attitudes
In Europe, many people have found the shift to multicultural societies challenging, because it

brings about changes in culture, identity and the way of life. In time, many Europeans have found that diverse societies bring more choices and more rewarding lifestyles. In addition, Europe's history of colonialism and nationalism has often led to prejudice and hostility against newcomers. The state and civil society institutions have important roles to play in changing attitudes and preventing racism against migrants.

Maintaining national identity

National identity does not have to be based on trying to define 'core national values' and emphasising the differences between ethnic groups. In fact, all people in complex modern society share many cultural experiences and values, while possessing distinct individual and group characteristics. Ethnic origins are only one factor in cultural identity. Liberal societies offer many choices, and protect the right to make choices – as long as these do not infringe the laws and the rights of others. Multicultural identities in immigration countries can include many elements of existing national identities, as well as many new elements based on mutual learning.

Multiculturalism and social cohesion

Multicultural societies like those of the USA, Canada and Australia have been the most successful in including large numbers of migrants into society and turning them into citizens. These experiences show that there need be no contradiction between multiculturalism and social cohesion. The most ethnically-diverse societies appear to be amongst the most successful in terms of economic growth, political stability and social harmony.

Towards an inclusive society

Recent experience in Europe shows that integration models of different kinds have run into difficulty because of the failure to prevent exclusion and to ensure equal opportunities for migrants. Social exclusion and economic disadvantage leads to isolation and alienation of minorities. This in turn can lead to radicalisation and conflict on both sides. An inclusive society is the best solution for both migrants and the existing population.

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