

KOREAN MULTICULTURALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF FOREIGN BRIDES IN SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract: Multiculturalism is a universal trend in most countries that have an influx of migrants. However, it is a recent phenomenon in South Korea which prides itself of having a homogenous society. This article examines multicultural marriages and discusses the emergence of female marriage migrants who are in part responsible in creating a multicultural Korea. This research uses a qualitative approach where existing literature, databases and other previously published materials have been used to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between foreign brides who have come into Korea through multicultural marriages which in the long run has contributed greatly to forming a multicultural Korean society. Despite several challenges, findings suggests that female marriage migrants are now acknowledged as one of the catalysts in the transformation of Korean society from a homogenous one to that of a multicultural entity. This is seen in the various laws adopted to integrate foreign brides and their offspring. However, though this is happening, the process of integration between foreign brides and the Korea public in general has a long way to go.

Keywords: South Korea, multicultural marriages, female marriage migrants, multicultural society

INTRODUCTION

South Korea (hereafter as Korea) has undergone rapid economic development and societal transformation after the devastation of Korean War in the 1950s and economic crisis in 1970s. It embarked on a remarkable journey of industrialization, modernization and globalization, propelling it into the ranks of the world's leading economies.

Due to rapid industrialization, Korea, which was once a migrant sending country or country of origins exporting its labor to developed countries, has gone through a period of 'migrant transition'. It is now a migrant receiving country or country of destination for immigrants across the world in search of employment, education and marriage. Since then, there has been a large influx of immigrants comprising laborers, missionaries, business people, teachers, and marriage migrants to start a new life leading to the emergence of a multicultural society.

Scholars classify a country with more than 5% of foreigners as a multicultural society. Based on this classification, Korea appears to be at the precipice of becoming a multicultural society (*Yonhap News Agency*, 2020; Yun & Park, 2011). International migration encompasses more than just people's movement from one location to another, it also includes the influences and values they bring together which can alter the character of both sending and receiving

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countries socially, culturally and economically (Han, 2007). An unforeseen consequence of inflow of international immigrants is diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and customs to influence the local culture (Kim & Oh, 2011; Han, 2007). The rising number of foreign migrants has led to comingling of cultures and lifestyles which have become visible in Korean society. This includes ethnic cuisine, clothing, accessories, and music as well as increased exposure to other cultures in everyday and family life (Han, 2007). Indeed, scholars and pundits agree that Korea has transformed from a mainly mono-cultural and homogenous nation to a relatively multicultural and heterogeneous society (Kang, 2015; Kim & Oh, 2011).

The three main categories of immigrant groups are: workers, brides and Korean diaspora (Kim & Jang, 2017). Many locals hoped that migrants would go back to their countries of origin after finishing their contract; however, many chose to remain. While Korea takes pride in its collectivistic and homogenous character, the government has realized that multiculturalism has become a reality and as such the nation needs to change and broaden its cultural boundaries. In other words, Korea has to maintain social stability but at the same time redefine its national identity rather than getting trapped in the notion of cultural homogeneity (Kim, 2018). In integrating migrant groups into the Korean society, the state has begun implementing specific policies related to multiculturalism as part of its administrative plan (Watson, 2010; Kim & Oh, 2011; Han, 2007). The Korean government and scholars acknowledged the difficulties and challenges faced by migrant groups living in Korea, where multicultural programs and initiatives have been enacted to provide support and protect the rights of migrant groups (Seol, 2010). Influx of international immigrants and migrant groups have not only transformed the nature and character of Korean society, but also have resulted in greater number of multicultural marriages. The marriages between a local and foreigner within the Korean context is often referred to as international marriages, multiethnic marriages, multicultural marriages or cross-border marriages. While these terms are interchangeable, this article uses the term multicultural marriages due to the significance of intermarriages in social and cultural aspects (Khoo, 2011).

Korea has experienced a rapid increase in multicultural marriages since the late 1990s where female marriage migrants have become the center of attention within the Korean society, particularly from academics and government (Kim, 2014). As such the focus on female marriage migrants has become somewhat common. This is because multicultural marriages between local Korean men and foreign women has accelerated familial and cultural changes across Korea where understanding and respecting the other has become more important than ever. In the Korean multicultural context, researchers and academicians have described the female marriage migrants using terms such as female marriage migrants, women immigrants, marriage migrants or married immigrant women.⁴ All of these terms mean *kyōrhon iminja* (Kim, 2014) which literally refers to immigrants who migrate to their spouse's home country through marriages. Hereafter, the article uses the term female marriage migrants to refer to this immigrant group and it is used interchangeably with foreign brides. Within the discourse of multiculturalism, many researches focus on female marriage migrants facing challenges related to cultural identity, discrimination, and social exclusion, especially in Korea. However, this article emphasizes on the emergence of foreign brides in Korea as a recent phenomenon.

The article is structured as follows. Beginning with an introduction on the subject matter, it proceeds to explain what is Korean multiculturalism, followed by the connection between Korean multiculturalism and multicultural marriages as well as foreign brides. The explanation includes how Korea is no longer homogenous, in part due to the diversity of foreign brides and

⁴ For instance, Kim, Oh and Lee (2017) use the term *marriage migrant woman* similar to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas agency which applies the term *marriage migrants* in its data on Filipino Marriage Migrants living in South Korea. In contrast, Hu and Lee (2022) simply use the term *women immigrants*.

the existence of mixed race children in Korea. Mixed race children here refer to children whose parents are of Korean and foreign nationalities, respectively.

KOREAN MULTICULTURALISM

In many Western countries, multiculturalism emerged due to international migration (Berkes, 2010). Canada was the first country that proposed multiculturalism as an official policy to resolve the clash between English and French communities (Leman 1999). However, the definition of multiculturalism varies depending on the setting and country. It is also influenced by political and social theories. Hence, multiculturalism does not have a widely accepted definition as it is multifaceted and the term needs clarification. In most cases, the Western concept of multiculturalism is one where minorities do not give up their own culture, religion, and language in favor of the majority culture or religion, although there is usually an expectation of conformity with certain key values of the latter (Seol, 2010).

Studies on multiculturalism in Korea are scarce (Ahn, 2012). This could be due to the fact the concept stands in contrast to the homogenous culture of Korea (Seol, 2010). The proverbial image of Korea is a society marked by racial and cultural purity. There is no equivalent word of 'multiculturalism' in Korea. The notion is foreign in Korea which for centuries has held values of one language, one ethnicity and one culture (Kim-Bossard, 2018). Hence, Seol (2010) suggests a 'Korean style multiculturalism', which is akin to cultural assimilation (Kim & Oh, 2011; Seol, 2010). Although the minorities can preserve their own ethnic heritage culture, they are required to adapt to the dominant majority national culture of the society they chose to stay in. In contrast, the majority group does not need to adopt any of the beliefs, practices and values of the minority cultures, especially if they live in an ethnically homogenous area. Hence, there exists many discriminatory practices against foreigners and their families.

Correspondingly, the majority of Koreans are now increasingly forced to notice the growth of multiculturalism in their own society. This has given the homogenous society potentiality and opportunity to cross-cut established groupings to grow into a multicultural society. Based on the development of multicultural marriages and female marriage migrants, the Korean public is now more aware that the cultural differences are important to be recognized and valued to make society stronger and vital to its long-term survival.

MULTICULTURAL MARRIAGES AND FEMALE MARRIAGE MIGRANTS

Since 1990s, there has been an influx of foreigners into Korea which has included low skilled and high skill labor, missionaries, business-people, teachers and marriage migrants. The three main migrant groups are migrant workers, marriage migrants and Korean diaspora. However, discourse on multiculturalism in Korea at that time was still at its infancy (Ahn, 2012; Shin, 2013).

Multicultural or mixed marriages have been a phenomenon since 1960s though the numbers were small and involved mostly local Korean women and foreigners, such as Japanese and American men. Many Koreans felt unhappy with this scenario as they felt their women were 'contaminated' by foreigners. But multicultural marriages were already a reality by then with several modifications. There was a shift in the 1990s when more Korean men rather than women began to marry foreigners.

Even this was also criticized because of the 'mail order bride' phenomenon where Korean men looked for marriage partners from lesser developing Asian countries (Lee, 2008). Majority of these men were farmers and fishermen who were unable to attract local women as they were not economically affluent and had to embark on commercialized marriages via brokers or agencies. On the other end of the spectrum, commercialized marriages were criticized as a form of exploitation of women as it commodified them (Constable, 2009).

Though rural Korean men are continuing to marry foreigners through brokers, in current times, men from urban areas have also sought marriage brokers to find suitable partners.

In the beginning, brokered marriages tended to be between women from the Korean diaspora from China and local Korean men. According to Lee (2014), the first brokered multicultural marriage took place on 16th December 1990 between a Korean farmer and an ethnic Korean from China. Since then, marriages between Chinese Korean women and local rural bachelors became formalized and arranged particularly with the efforts from local municipal governments and agricultural associations (Kim, 2007). These ethnic Koreans from China known as *Joseonjok*, mostly hailed from China's northeast provinces. Their ancestors left Korea and settled in China during the Japanese occupation. Although they do not hold Korean citizenship, *Joseonjok* have retained their Korean culture while living in China and most of them speak Korean well and have similar physical appearances (Lee et al, 2006). Therefore, they find it easier to be accepted into the Korean family and to be integrated into the larger society. Although *Joseonjok* are foreigners, their ethnic Korean identity is seen as less of a threat to the Korea's cultural identity compared with foreigners from another country due to their 'blood purity'. Thus, *Joseonjok* have become the largest group of female marriage migrants in Korea since the 1990s as the authorities and agencies tend to look for potential brides from the Korean diaspora as alternative choice for Korean men (Lee, 2022). This tendency is influenced by the Korean government's conservative stance to maintain the identity of Korea as ethnically homogenous.

As mentioned above, the first wave of 'male phenomenon' multicultural marriages happened in early 1990s, after the establishment of official relationship between Korea and China in 1992. Korean government had two different orientations toward migration inflow: 1) open-door policy for *Joseonjok* as female marriage migrants; 2) close-door policy for Korean Chinese as unskilled migrant labor. Since then, multicultural marriages have significantly increased as it is the simplest and easiest way for *Joseonjok* to enter Korea. The laidback policy of multicultural marriages created a loop whereby *Joseonjok* started to take advantage. Both younger and older *Joseonjok* were allowed entry into Korea. However, this 'Korean Wind' soon transformed into a typhoon in 1994 as it became a social problem (Lee 2022). The female migrants had the opportunity to get South Korean citizenship through marriage to a Korean, enabling them to live and work in Korea for as long as they desired. Hence, many *Joseonjok* used this opportunity to marry rural Koreans as a means to enter the country. Soon after, there were many cases of these female marriage migrants running away from their husbands to seek economic opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, the female marriage migrants at that time were also given invitations letters to bring their parents to Korea, but the parental visa was exploited by *Joseonjok* by selling them to other parties (Lee, 2022). These led to massive financial losses to the Korean husbands in addition to causing major immigration blunder for the government. In order to solve these problems, the Korean government therefore, had to control the number of multicultural marriages with *Joseonjok* although they were the primary choice of alternative brides. The first step embarked by the government was to sign a memorandum of understanding with the government of China in 1996 to tighten the process of multicultural marriages. This was effective as the number of entrants dwindled sharply. As time passed by, Korean men also began looking for brides from other countries, especially from Southeast Asia.

Table 1: Multicultural Marriages in Korea 1990 – 2000

Year	Total Marriages	Multicultural Marriages		Foreign Wives	Foreign Husbands
	Cases	Cases	%	Cases	Cases
1990	399,312	4,710	1.2	619	4,091
1991	416,872	5,012	1.2	663	4,349
1992	419,774	5,534	1.3	2,057	3,477
1993	402,593	6,545	1.6	3,109	3,436
1994	393,121	6,616	1.7	3,072	3,544
1995	398,484	13,494	3.4	10,365	3,129
1996	434,911	15,946	3.7	12,647	3,299
1997	388,591	12,448	3.2	9,266	3,182
1998	375,616	12,188	3.2	8,054	4,134
1999	362,673	10,570	2.9	5,775	4,795
2000	334,030	12,319	3.7	6,945	4,660

Source: Derived from Korea National Statistical Office, Population Dynamics (Marriage and Divorce), Population Dynamics Statistical Yearbook, National Indicator System by Ministry of Gender Equality, 1990- 2000

To give a better understanding of the foreign brides' phenomenon, the above table simplifies the development of this trend from 1990 to 2000. Table 1 shows Korean multicultural marriages included men and women from overseas who moved to Korea to marry a Korean national. The number of marriages had slightly increased from 1990 to 1991 to show a sharp upward trend in 1992 to become stable around 1994. However, in 1995, the number of foreign brides rocketed to 10,365 to reach its peak in 1996 with 15,946 marriages. During this period, the number of male marriage migrants were consistent. In 1996, the number of foreign wives were 12,647 accounting for 79.31% of total multicultural marriages. After that, the trend showed a decrease from 12,448 in 1997 to 12,188 in 1998 to reach a low of 10,570 in 1999. This drop could be due to the agreement signed between Korea and China, which drastically reduced the number of fake marriages, or marriages of convenience. Interestingly, the number of male marriage migrants in this period was consistent increase as the MoU mostly targeted marriages between *Joseonjok* and local men.

The increase in multicultural marriages reflects a shift in societal landscape in Korea to that of a multicultural nation. However, public discourse regarding Korean multiculturalism has been mostly focused on foreign women from East Asia and Southeast Asia, including China and Vietnam. Ethnic Korean women from China, referred to as *Joseonjok*, benefited from the policy that provides them easy access to visa and/or permanent residency. Vietnamese women on the other hand, were preferred as new source of brides for rural Korean men as they share similar values with Koreans having an extended family system and imbibing traditional family values.

The increasing number of marriage-based immigrants and migrant workers have led to issues such human rights violations and abuse which has attracted international attention. During the 2000s, the increasing number of international immigrants has sparked an interest in discourse on multiculturalism in the academic circle and among civil right groups as well as human rights activists forcing the Korean government to address this change in the demographic landscape of the country (Yun & Park, 2011). Although female marriage migrants,

are not the largest migrant group in Korea, they have always been at the center of attention of the government, media and scholars. In April 2006, the then president of Korea- Roh Moo Hyun- announced the transformation of Korea from a homogenous society into a multicultural one (Shin, 2013; Oh, 2007; Kim, 2012). He acknowledged that it has become impossible to stop the march toward a multicultural society. Not surprisingly Korea began to acknowledge dramatic social changes in contemporary Korean society and therefore chose to implement multiculturalism as a state policy (Watson, 2010; Kim & Oh et al, 2011; Han, 2007). In order to address the effects of the multiculturalism phenomenon on the society, the government began creating plans and policies that focused on supporting the integration of, among others, female marriage migrants into the larger Korean society.

Female marriage migrants are unlike other migrant groups. They are seen as permanent fixtures of society unlike other migrants who were impermanent and expected to leave when they finished their contract period (Frauser 2024). Due to their important societal and familial roles, female marriage migrants tend to have more intense, direct contact with the majority population (Ghazarian, 2018) where they are expected to stay permanently and become Koreans (Ghazarian, 2018). The Korean government say several positive attributes of female marriage migrants. Female marriage migrants along with their Korean spouses are seen as the solution to the nation's low birth and rapidly aging society crisis to nurture future generations (Kim, 2007; Kim-Bossard, 2018); lightening care-work burdens faced by Koreans (Shin 2020); resolve bride shortage (Kim-Bossard, 2018) and labor shortages (Kim, 2011). Hence, the bulk of Korean multiculturalism initiatives were specifically designed for multicultural families which included female marriage migrants and their children (Jang, 2022). Since 2006, central and local governments initiated and supported research projects on marriage migrants and social service programs and events geared to supporting them (Jang, 2022). The Korean government implemented many social programs to specifically help integrate them and their children into Korean society (Han, 2007). Language and cultural differences appear to be the most challenging issues for immigrants between 2008 and 2009 (Shin, 2013). Thereby, the government authorized the establishment of 100 Multicultural Family Support Centers (MFSC) which provide a variety of social and educational services (Jang, 2022) and allocate resources predominantly to promote Korean language and cultural programs (Shin, 2013).

Based on the history of recent demographic changes in Korea, it is undeniable that female marriage migrants play an important role in contemporary Korean society. However, they are frequently marginalized as 'cultural outsiders' as they are not racially, ethnically and culturally Korean. Hence, they are considered inferior compared with the locals. They are the subject of prejudices in the form of stereotypes, discrimination and even violence in marriages, family, workplace and society. The demographic transformation has come into sharp conflict with Korea's cultural framework. In other words, there is tension between the efforts to recruit foreign females as brides to fulfill traditional gender roles on the one hand and attempts to maintain Korea's identity as a homogenous nation. Hence, multicultural marriages provide insights into understanding the cultural beliefs and attitudes deeply rooted in Korean traditions in relation to increasing diversity in the country. However, it is impossible to downplay the role that foreign brides have played in fostering a cosmopolitan society in Korea. In fact, South Korea's rural and semi-rural districts now have a different sociocultural landscape as a result of marriage migrants.

THE ROLE OF FEMALE MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN CREATING A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

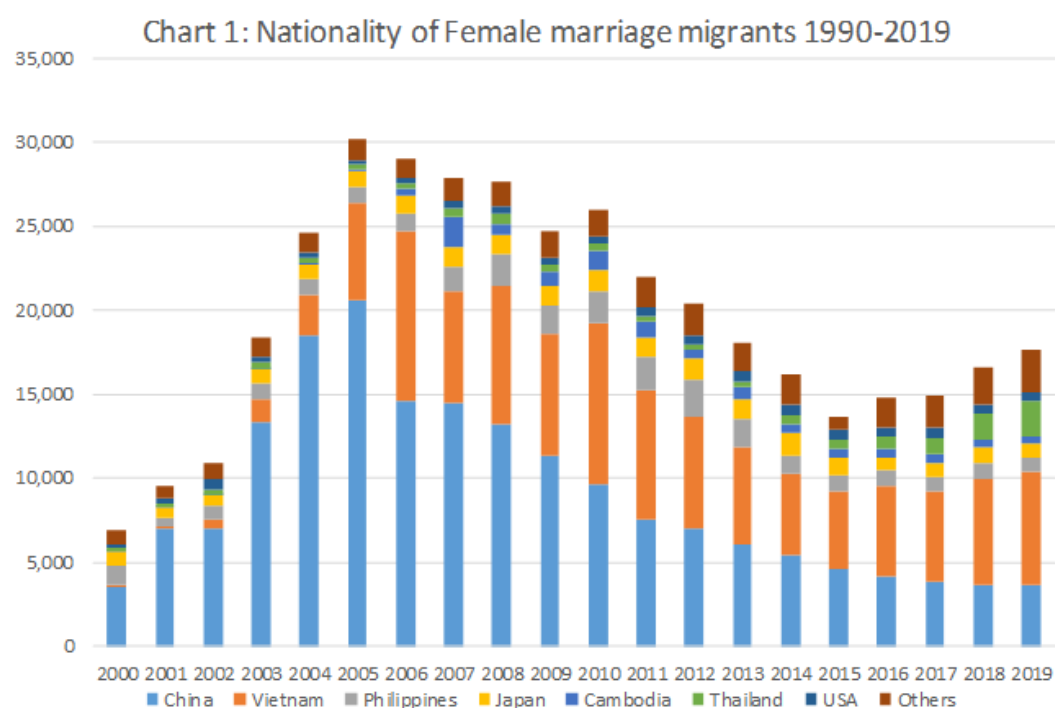
As mentioned before, unlike other migrant groups, female marriage migrants are seen as permanent additions to Korean society (Han, 2007). Their numbers admittedly may appear

insignificant, and most are concentrated in rural areas. But the other migrant groups (foreign workers, students and so on) are expected to leave the country after providing their services.

A distinguishing feature of marriage migrants is that they are ‘main social players with whom (the Koreans) have to coexist and not just as strangers in the society’ and therefore, they have more intense, direct contact with the majority. This has become the subject of discussion pertaining to amending the constitution to reflect this change in the demographic landscape of Korea (Yun & Park, 2011). Therefore, the contributions of female marriage migrants in transforming Korea into a multicultural and multiethnic society in Korea cannot be understated. These contributions can be seen in the legal, societal and familial arena.

DIVERSITY OF FEMALE MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN KOREA

Cross-border marriage migration has rapidly increased as a result of transnational migration movements, especially between Southeast Asia and East Asia. While the 1992 memorandum between Korea and China has managed to reduced fake multicultural marriages or marriages of convenience, it had nevertheless created a gap in Korea’s marriage market as there were simply insufficient supply of brides for rural bachelors. *Joseonjok* were the primary and largest ‘bride suppliers’ but due to Korean government’s control on the inflow of *Joseonjok* into Korean soil, rural bachelors were faced with a dilemma. Thus, the brokers and agencies had to source ‘bride supplies’ from other countries despite their preferences for the Korean diaspora. The new sources were from developing and lesser developed Asian countries, particularly Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand. They quickly emerged as the fastest growing market leading tin increasing the diversity pf marriage partners for Korean husbands as shown by the following chart.



Sources: Ministry of Gender, Equality and Family, 2019; National Indicator System by Ministry of Gender Equality

Chart 1 shows the nationalities of female marriage migrants in Korea between 2000 and 2019. The major source countries are Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand. The numbers reached its peak in 2005 (30,719 people) and fluctuated until 2019, with a total of

266,427. The chart also shows that before 2015, their numbers decreased steadily from 2006 (29,665) to 2009 (25,142). The data points to a modest increase yearly from 2016 to 2019 from 14,822 people (2016) to 14,869 (2017). In 2019, there were 17,687 marriage migrants. A majority of these marriage migrant women came from East Asia and Southeast Asian region and in terms of ethnicity, the Chinese outnumber the others 64.67% (172,295), according to data from 2000 to 2019. However, from 2015 onwards, the Vietnamese outnumbered the others.

Vietnamese female marriage migrants have increased more than tenfold, from 77 in 2000 to reach its peak at 10,128 people in 2006. Since then, the number has been fluctuating and reached its lowest in 2015 totaling 4,651 women. The largest marriage migrant group in Korea is Vietnamese. While the numbers of Chinese marriage migrants have been constantly falling from 3,880 (2017) to 3,671 (2018) and 3,649 (2019), the number of Vietnamese marriage migrants have increased since 2017 from 5,364 to 6,338 (2018) and 6,712 (2019). The numbers from Southeast Asia region have also increased representing 18.64 percent of the total female marriage migrants in 2019. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude the diversity of female marriage migrants has resulted in a multicultural society. The fact that they are there permanently means that their rights have to be protected.

MIXED RACE CHILDREN

With falling birth rates, a declining population, an aging society and increasing multicultural marriages, Korea will eventually become a full-fledged multicultural society in the near future. Due to the surge in international marriages, especially between Korean men and foreign women, the number of "mixed race" offspring in Korea has increased. More significantly, the rise in mixed-race children in Korea is a new phenomenon that is making Korea a multicultural society that is here to stay. With their mothers coming from foreign backgrounds, these children play a valuable role in making Korea a more diverse and inclusive society.

Table 2: Korea's Birth of Multicultural Household and Total Household, 2008 – 2022

Year	Total Household Birth (thousand person)	Multicultural Household Birth (thousand person)	Ratio of Multicultural to total household (%)
2008	465.9	13.4	2.9
2009	444.8	19	4.3
2010	470.2	20.3	4.3
2011	471.3	22	4.7
2012	484.6	22.9	4.7
2013	436.5	21.3	4.9
2014	435.4	21.2	4.9
2015	438.4	19.7	4.5
2016	406.2	19.4	4.8
2017	357.8	18.4	5.2
2018	326.8	18.1	5.5
2019	302.7	17.9	5.9
2020	272.3	16.4	6
2021	260.5	14.3	5.5
2022	249.1	12.5	5

Source: Derived from The National Atlas of Korea 2021, Korean Statistical Information Service, 2008 - 2022

Table 2 indicates Korean government began to collect statistics regarding multicultural families and their children only in 2008. Beginning from 2008, multicultural birth has shown a continuous increase from 13.4 per thousand person and reached its peak at 22.9 thousand per person in 2012. Nonetheless, the number of multicultural births shows a continuous decrease starting from 2013, from 21.3 per thousand per person and reached its lowest in 2022 at 12.5 thousand people. The proportion of multicultural households to total household has shown a continuous increase for more than a decade. Since 2008, the ratio of multicultural household to total household was 2.9% but this jumped to 4.9% in 2014. Although the ratio slightly dropped in 2015 (4.5%), it reached its peak in 2020. Since then, the ratio showed a slight decrease in 2021 with 5.5% and 5% in 2022. This is believed to be due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that the ratio of multicultural births to total household is at its highest at 6%. These new generation will eventually form the backbone of the Korean society in the future, making it more culturally diverse.

Korea’s transition to a multicultural society can also be seen in the classroom. Based on Table 3.1, the number of multicultural children has shown a steady increase since 2008 till 2012. Although the numbers started to decrease after reaching its peak in 2012, the ratio of multicultural children to total households has maintained a stable proportion due to a decrease in births. This also means that multicultural children will be more visible, especially within the classroom. Table 3 shows the ratio of multicultural children compared to total student population in Korea between 2015 and 2021.

Table 3: Ratio of Multicultural Children Compared with Korea’s Total Student Population 2015 – 2021

Year	Multicultural children as students (thousands)	Student Population
2015	82.54	1.40%
2016	99.19	1.70%
2017	109.39	1.90%
2018	122.21	2.20%
2019	137.23	2.50%
2020	147.38	2.80%
2021	160.06	3.00%

Source: Derived from Korea JoongAng Daily and Korea Statistics, 2013-2022

Based on Table 3, the number and proportion of mixed school going children in Korea have shown a continuous and stable increase. Nonetheless, these children continue to face difficulties while pursuing education. Since 2012, there have been news regarding multicultural children not being proficient in Korean and hence, face bullying, discrimination, and racism from their school mates which negatively impact their well-being and prevented them from attending school. This feeling of isolation and rejection shows they are having a hard time fitting into Korean society, to adversely affect their literary and academic achievements (Voanews, 2012). This issue has persisted until today (Park, 2024).

As female marriage migrants and multicultural children play critical role within Korean society amid spiraling birthrate, the central and local government formulate new policies and programs to support these children. One example is the *Multicultural Family Support Project* launched by Busan municipal government, which includes various programs for multicultural children that cover a period from childhood till youth. These include childcare, basic learning for pre-school and elementary students, financial support for elementary, middle, and high school students. Korea's multicultural policies and programs tend to emphasize assimilation rather than adaptation or supporting diversity. However, expats have called for a paradigm shift in educational policies.

THE EMERGENCE OF LAWS AND POLICIES RELATED TO MULTICULTURALISM

As the population is becoming increasingly diverse, the next section discusses the desperate need for new laws and regulations for an emerging multicultural society. More importantly, the government has come to realize this and is actively progressing with multiple programs as well as laws for incorporating the new community of female marriage migrants into the larger Korean society. Hence, the changes in the demographic layout should be acknowledged; the former Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs announced in its annual plan that 'Korea is now a multi-racial/multicultural society' in 2006. However, 'New Koreans' still have to deal with issues from the majority dominant society, including discrimination, economy instability and prejudice. Thereby, Korean government have played an active role in promoting multiculturalism to incorporate the immigrants. Before the announcement, there has always been policies by Korean government towards migrations. However, the policies focused on emigration as Korea was a sending country and there was no immigration at that time. An influx of migrants into Korea during the 1980s led to the formalizing of immigrant policy, for instance, Industrial Technical Training Program (ITPP), Work After Trainee Program (WATP) and Employment Permit System (EPS) which all focused on migrant workers. However, these programs were heavily criticized for exploitation, discrimination and abuse of workers.

During the 2000s, the focus of Korea's multicultural policy shifted to marriage migrants to ensure they are not discriminated, treated equally and are properly integrated and socially supported (Yun & Park, 2012). A series of experimental multicultural programs have been introduced and implemented (Han, 2007; Kim & Oh, 2011; Yun & Park, 2011). The state's multicultural policies and programs were aimed at tackling the following: violation of human rights communication problem, family relations, socio-economic and cultural adaptation (Yun & Park, 2012). Ministry of Gender Equality and Family together with other ministries including Justice, Labor, Health and Welfare, Education as well as local and central governmental departments are the primary implementers (Han, 2007). It can be concluded that the drive towards multiculturalism has shored up support for the government in academia, news media and civil society (Yun & Park, 2011; Han, 2007). National Research Foundation of Korea and Korea Foundation (KF) have also played a role in providing funds to Korean and international scholars to undertake research on Korean multiculturalism. Additionally, Korean colleges have newly launched institutes or departments for multicultural studies (Seol, 2010). Thus, it can be said that the government had successfully set the foundation to achieve a nationally integrated society (Seol, 2010; Han, 2007).

In April 2006, 'Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Migrant Women, Biracial people, and Immigrants' (hereafter referred as 'Grand Plan') has been announced by the Korean government. Although there has been multiple migration policy, Grand Plan is significant because it was the first integrated government plan for multicultural society (Ahn, 2012). The Grand Plan has emphasized on social integration, particularly for the female marriage migrants and their families. The plan covered several important issues, such as support for female marriage migrants: a) if they are victims of domestic violence; b) to integrate them into Korean

society; c) to raise mixed race children; through provision of social welfare for female marriage migrants. The state has in effect promoted cultural awareness for foreigners and multiculturalism; establish network between central and local government together with various administrations. The Grand Plan has served as the foundation several policies and initiatives for multicultural society. The Korean government has in later years implemented multiculturalism through a number of strategies and policies throughout the years. The table below shows the key policies implemented by the government to aid the transition of the nation towards a multicultural society.

Table 4: Multicultural Policies in Korea

Year	Policies
2007	The Basic Law for the Treatment of the Foreigners Who Lives in Korea
	The Multicultural Family Support Law
2008	The First Basic Plan for Foreigner Policies (2008-2012)
2009	Comprehensive Measures for the Improvement of Multicultural Family Support
2010	A Basic Policy Plan for Multicultural Family Support
2013	The Second Basic Plan for Immigration (2013-2017)
2018	The Third Master Plan for Immigration Policy (2018-2022)

Source: Authors' compilation

Many of these polices have focused on female marriage migrants rather than considering other categories of foreigners. The most significant action taken is the establishment of Multicultural Family Support Center (MFSC), a governmental institute to support female marriage migrants integrate into Korean society by providing series of services and programs. The services and programs provided includes in 6 major areas, including family, gender equality, human rights, social integration, counseling, promotion and resource integration. Thereby, the programs include Korean language education, family counseling, emergency support for families in crisis, translation and interpretation services for female marriage migrants who have communication problems. The number of MFSCs started from 1st center in 2006 then increased to 218 centers at 2019 (Park, 2019) and 230 centers in 2021 (Korea Net, 2021). Next, is the First Basic Plan for Foreigners (2008-2012) that sets the aspire female marriage migrants to join the labor force to achieve financial independent and suggested the creation of new employment opportunities specifically tailored for them, such as multicultural teachers, interpreters and translators. The Second Basic Plan for Foreigners (2013-2017) expanded the effort on supporting employment of female marriage migrants, including circulating a list of female marriage migrants seeking for employment opportunities to job centers and job programs to increase percentage.

Nonetheless, these programs and policies have received criticism on overlapping of initiatives. For instance, Korean language education services is the core nature of many

programs launched by different ministries. Other than the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family that operates Korean language program through MFSCs, Korean language classes also appears in social integration program by Ministry of Justice, home-visit classes in rural areas by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, employment support program by Ministry of Employment and Labor. A total of eight ministries in the central government has provided Korean language classes and competed with each other to attract more attendees. However, this has caused confusion as they have different textbooks and goals.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the ways in which the migration of female marriage migrants in Korea has clearly contributed partly to a multicultural society. Due to their diverse cultural background, female marriage migrants have altered the demographic landscape of South Korea. Specifically, female marriage migrants have helped in creating a multicultural society with their offspring of mixed-race children. It is reasonable to argue that the existence of mixed-race children has cemented the multicultural nature of Korea. As a result, while not perfect, the demographic change has led to the introduction of laws and policies related to multiculturalism. This article has provided a glimpse of the diversity and role of foreign brides, including the degree to which the Korean government has recognized their existence by enacting laws and regulations to address a society that is becoming more and more multiethnic, in light of the growth in cross-border marriages. Nonetheless, though the emergence of a multicultural South Korea is an irreversible and inevitable trend, yet it has not been fully embraced nor welcomed by the Korean public despite the huge influx of marriage migrant women. It cannot be denied that in the Korean case, the emergence of a multicultural society has been a state led experiment. Hence, the government must do more to raise awareness of the ways in which foreign brides and their offspring have contributed to Korea's globalization and cosmopolitanism.

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