

VIRTUOUS CITIZENS AND SENTIMENTAL SOCIETY:  
ETHICS AND POLITICS IN NEOLIBERAL SOUTH KOREA

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Anthropology.

Chapel Hill  
2011

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## **ABSTRACT**

**EUYRYUNG JUN: Virtuous Citizens and Sentimental Society: Ethics and Politics  
In Neoliberal South Korea  
(Under the direction of Donald Nonini)**

This dissertation argues that while South Korea's developmentalist regime prior to the democracy struggles in the 1980s focused on the economic dimension of Korean social life, with the rise of civil society into the democratic era, it is the moral dimension of development that has been emphasized. I explore this project of moral development through the activities of migrant centers that have provided social, legal, and medical services to foreign migrants and acted as their main advocates since the 1990s.

Based on ethnographic and archival research, this dissertation focuses on the new social and ethical landscape created by the issue of foreign workers, marriage immigrants, and "multicultural families." First, I examine the problem of the human rights of the foreign worker, which essentially relied on the advocacy work by civil society groups such as migrant centers in the absence of the state's interest in protecting them. While the moral welfare of foreign workers became dependent on the benevolence and philanthropic activities of caring volunteer-citizens, the issue of foreign workers has become a matter of maintaining the moral integrity to the history of Korea's own emigration as well as of creating an empathetic society that is based on the value of "sharing" through more volunteer work and donations. Second, I locate the state programs for marriage immigrants and their multicultural families within its larger efforts

to cope with the country's recent demographic changes that are characterized by low fertility and rapid aging. I show that the state's multicultural programs have emerged as part of its governance of the given crisis and of the emergent populations that potentially disrupt existing social integrity, while the multicultural programs that are organized by migrant centers become a self-disciplinary project aimed at the general citizenry.

Since its emergence, the problem of foreign migrants has been a good subject to be utilized for the project of moral development led by civil society actors in South Korea. This dissertation explores how this project of engineering the social and ethical dimensions of the subjectivities aimed at the maturation of "civil society" is increasingly shaped by the neoliberal model of civic responsibility and empathy.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am very grateful to many individuals, groups, and institutions who enormously shaped the long path of the following dissertation.

First of all, I would like to thank the friends and colleagues whom I met through Friends of Asia and who guided me into the world of migrant advocacy and civic activism in 2003-4 and beyond. I would like to especially thank Serapina Cha Mikyung and Kim Dae Gwon at FOA and Jeong Jung Hoon at Gong Gam for sharing their thoughts and passion for social justice. I also extend my gratitude to the friends whom I met at Equality Trade Union-Migrant Branch and Migrants' Trade Union: Samar Thapa, Seo Seonyoung, Radhika Subba, Raj Gurung, Kaji Khapung, Lee Jeong Won, Moniruzzaman Masum, Mabhub Alam, and Mixrice for their trust and friendship.

For the period I conducted my fieldwork in 2008-9, I owe a debt of gratitude to many individuals: Lee Wan, Lee Ranju, and Lee Eunha at the Damunhwa Open Society, Ryu Seong Hwan at Ansan Migrants' Center, Lee Young at the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea, Choi Hyun Mo at the Korea Migrant Human Rights Center, and Heo Oh Young Sook at the Women Migrants' Human Rights Center. I also thank Chung Byung Ho, Lee Changho, and Oh Gyung Seok at the Center for Multicultural Studies at Hanyang University and the Rainbow Youth Center. During those years, Asian Center for Women's Studies at Ewha Women's University kindly hosted me as a visiting scholar. I would like to thank Heo Rageum and Lee Eunju at ACWS.

I also would like to note the institutional and material support from the Graduate School and University Center of International Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and from the National Science Foundation that made my fieldwork possible.

During the post-/fieldwork period, I was given a number of opportunities to present, formulate, and sharpen my thoughts. I am grateful for those conversations, discussions, and kind encouragement I had at the International Workshop on Korean Studies at the University of Hawaii, the Multicultural/Multiethnic Korea Workshop at the Center for Korean Studies in UC Berkeley, the Korean Society for Cultural Anthropology Meeting, the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Hanyang University, the Asian Center for Women's Studies at Ewha Women's University, "Social Movements Confronting Neoliberalisms" Workshop at UNC Chapel Hill, SSRC Korean Studies Dissertation Workshop, the American Anthropology Association Meeting as well as the Association of Asian Studies Conference.

I am also thankful for the passionate and inspiring conversations I had with friends in Chapel Hill/Carrboro and Seoul over politics and life. I especially express my gratitude to Seo Dongjin, Park Jin Cheol, and other members of "Hongdae Café Marxists", Catalina Cortes Severino, Juan Ricardo Aparicio, Elena Yehia, Angela Cacciarru, Lili Lai and Anil Bhattarai among others who shared their lives in Carrboro, and the friends at "Political Theory Reading Group" for sharing their knowledge and insights.

Above all, my deepest gratitude and indebtedness goes to my teachers in Chapel Hill: my advisor Donald Nonini for giving me his unconditional care and support for all these years, Peter Redfield for never running out of ideas and inspirations and for always

thinking ahead, Arturo Escobar for giving me the idea of being a “good human being” as well as a “good intellectual,” and Christopher Nelson for offering me the chance to think otherwise. I also thank Nancy Abelman for kindly accepting my last minute request to be part of my committee and for being one of the most powerful sources of energy to continue and finish my dissertation. Outside my committee, I would like to thank Terry Evans and his class, “Moral Consciousness: An Introduction to Anthropology.” With him and his “eccentric” approach to anthropology, I was always given a wonderful rest off the dissertation but yet the “strange” momentum to always return to *it*.

I can never sufficiently express my gratitude to my parents and family who kept me company throughout these years: my mother Lee Jeong Hee and father Jun Hee Chun, grandmother Heo Hee Sook, aunt Lee Jeong-soon, my brother and sister in law Jun Choong Ryong and Kim Eun Hyoo, and my long time friend Kim Moonjung. Of course, my “little brothers” Baru and Mau, and my writing company-in-Carrboro Wang Wang all have been a great joy and cannot be left out.

Lastly, I dedicate my dissertation to my late grandmother Kim Gyunja for having waited for me to return and finish. I am missing her silent smiles.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

EPS	Employment Permit System
ETU-MB	Equality Trade Union-Migrant Branch
ITS	Industrial Trainee System
JCMK	Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea
MCTS	Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sports
MHWFA	Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs
MTU	Migrants' Trade Union
NGO	Non-governmental Organization



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### The Context

*“Thinking about immigration basically means interrogating the state, interrogating its foundation and interrogating the internal mechanisms of its structuration and workings.”*  
(Abdelmalek Sayad 2004: 280)

Since the late 1980s, South Korea has been importing foreign migrant workers and “marriage immigrants” mostly from China, South and Southeast Asia, and the former Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The former was to fill the labor shortage in small-medium businesses in manufacturing, construction, garment, and fishery industries and the latter to meet the need of single males in both rural and urban areas who allegedly face difficulty in finding local marriage partners. According to a 2007 report prepared by the Committee of Policy on Foreigners, a state agency that administers migrant-related issues in the country, the number of foreigners living in Korea is expected to increase to about 4 million—10 % of the total population—by the year 2020. In 2006, the number of labor migrants was

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<sup>1</sup> The nationality of the migrant workers living in Korea varies significantly. The country of origin ranges from Bangladesh, China, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Mongolia, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Russia, Uzbekistan to Nigeria. Genderwise, while migrant workers from South Asia are predominantly male, this is not the case with those from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere that show no dramatic difference in the ratio of female to male. As for marriage immigrants, initially ethnic Koreans from China made up the majority. Nowadays, however, Vietnamese, Filipinas, Han Chinese, Cambodians and, to a lesser degree, Mongolians, Russians and Uzbekistanis are increasing, whereas the number of ethnic Korean Chinese has decreased.

296,919 while that of marriage immigrants was 93,786 (out of 910,149, the total number of foreigners living in Korea).<sup>2</sup> Importantly, due to the increasing number of international marriages of Koreans and non-Koreans—as much as 41% of all marriages in rural areas in 2006—and rapidly declining fertility rate among Korean couples—as low as 1.13 in the same year (Committee of Policy on Foreigners 2007)—it is expected that one third of the new born babies in the country in 2020 will be “Kosian”—a term that was coined to refer to the mixed people born between Koreans and other Asians (Joong Ang Ilbo 2006). While there certainly have been cases of foreign residency, e.g., ethnic Chinese and international marriages between Koreans and non-Koreans before the 1990s, the post-1990s era marks a distinct change where labor migrants, marriage immigrants, and their “multicultural” families came to constitute the emergent margins of Korean society—albeit with tremendous social and public attention. These migrant groups began to be called “socially weak” or “socially vulnerable” along with homosexuals, the homeless, the disabled, ethnic Chinese, and North Korean defectors (Choi et al. 2004).

Since the early 1990s, responding to this growing migrant population, a type of NGO that advocates for migrants started appearing in the greater Seoul area, an area that hosts numerous industrial neighborhoods. Popularly called *ijunodongjadanche*, literally meaning “centers for migrant laborers” or simply “migrant centers,” many of these local NGOs started as shelter, community, and/or counseling services for migrant workers and were affiliated with local protestant and catholic churches. While the philanthropic and religious nature of the early migrant centers still remains an important characteristic, it should be also noted that most of today’s prominent migrant centers gained their reputation by engaging in what can be called “activist politics.” Examples of this ranges

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<sup>2</sup> The same report prepared by the Committee of Policy on Foreigners (2007)

from publicizing cases of human rights violations in the workplaces, immigration and police offices, and the detention centers to organizing campaigns, rallies, and pressuring groups against various state regulations and policies on foreign labor relations. In the meantime, the number of migrant centers also increased significantly. While there were about five such groups in the early to mid-1990s in the greater Seoul area, now the number is somewhere around fifty across the country. These migrant centers differed greatly in size, organization, and in membership, while their typical routines revolved around giving legal and medical assistance, organizing free Korean language and culture classes on weekly basis, or providing temporary shelters for migrants.

Responding to the rapid increase in the migrant population, studies of migration and migrants have become a popular field in social science research in and on Korea (e.g., Go 1997; Gray 2003; Ham 1997; Han 2004; Han and Seol 2004; Lee 2004; Lim 2003; Moon 2000; Park 2002; Seol 2004; Seol and Skrentny 2004; Yu 1995). Many of these sociological and political science accounts focus on the racial, class, and cultural discrimination that foreigners and migrants undergo in Korea. However, while the NGOs' role has been essential in shaping the situation of immigration and migrant labor in Korea in the last twenty years, there are only few works that take local NGOs as the subject of their research (Kim SW 2009; Lim 2003; Moon 2000). By looking at migrant centers, I address this significant omission and turn the focus of analysis on the role of civil society and civil society organizations (such as migrant centers) in shaping the public discourses not only on migrants and migration but also on the question of social progress in the age of globalization. Thus, my dissertation looks at the ways in which the issues of foreign workers, marriage immigrants, and later, "multicultural families" raise a

particular set of questions that are deeply related to the state and civil society of Korea, rather than directly examining the lives and experiences of individual migrants living in the country.

My dissertation asks what the massive coming of foreign migrants since the late 1980s has meant for Korea. Around this time, Korea transformed itself from a migrant sending country into a migrant receiving one. Although emigration has always existed, this is when Korea began to have a large influx of migrants and develop a distinct identity as a receiving nation. Such a shift reflected not only the liberalization of the global economy outside, but also the country's economic growth, which was more or less translated into an "achievement" or even a "miracle" generating a collective sense of confidence and pride. However, instead of meaning an end to the developmentalist paradigm and mentality that had shaped the country thus far, I argue, the coming of migrants equally marked the coming of a different era and mode of development. Differentiated from the previous paradigm of economic development and growth, the newly emergent form of development focused on the moral maturation and advance of the country and coincided with the rise of civil society and the so-called *siminsahoedanche*, "civil society organizations." My dissertation seeks to intervene in the emergent civic attempt to reconfigure and reorganize the country and how such an effort is specifically manifested in the discourses on migrants. I examine the ways in which this new project of "moral development" is defined by heightened liberal discourses and practices and how it interacts with the ascendancy of neoliberalism in various domains of life.

I pay special attention to how “civil society” and individual citizens are increasingly mobilized to take care of the well-being of the society with the rise of various forms of the civil society organization and under the influx of discourses on “civil morality,” “civil consciousness,” “civil responsibility,” “civic participation,” and so on. Here, the progress of “civil society” depends on the harmonious and spontaneous cooperation among individual citizens who take an active part in the caring of one another. Reorganizing the social in such a way not only requires the remaking of the seemingly “non-social” units such as corporate entities into “socially responsible” ones, e.g., the “corporate social responsibility,” but also significantly relies on the participation of ordinary individuals in various altruistic activities, e.g., donating and volunteering. The mobilization of civic participation does not, however, mean or aim at the actualization of equality between its members, e.g., equality of income and/or “social status,” but, rather, relies on individual citizen’s empathy and feeling of solidarity to maintain the given inequality (Muehlebach 2007). It is not about achieving *equality* or equalization but is about cultivating better awareness for equality and “non-discriminatory attitudes/sensitivity” (e.g., Human Rights Movements Sarangbang’s Anti-Discrimination Project), and use of more “politically correct language” among individual citizens, cultivating the virtues of sharing (*nanum*) and cohabitation (*gongjon*). As it will be shown in the discussions of volunteering foreign workers and the “gimbap grannies,”<sup>3</sup> this new ethics of the social becomes crystallized when it successfully enrolls the most needy

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<sup>3</sup> The “gimbap granny” has been the most celebrated figure in this context. By gimbap granny, I refer to the senior women who were publicized widely by donating their lifetime savings for the education of needy youth. In these stories, what most powerfully seized the public minds was these grannies’ extreme frugality that ends not in some selfish accumulation but in the “sacrificial giving” done on behalf of other needy groups.



persons in the activity of giving and sharing and, thus, in the emergent sociality of the “caring community.”

My dissertation examines the ways in which the ongoing project of making a “sharing and caring society” is manifested in the field of civil or “grassroots” advocacy for foreign workers and, later, in the state and NGOs’ *damunhwa* (multicultural) project that emerged with the increase in the marriage immigrant population. The problem of foreign workers and marriage immigrants poignantly reveals both the reach and the limit of the caring society and the emergent politics of exclusion, as well as the paradoxical status concepts such as “equality” and “empowerment” are facing today in Korea and elsewhere. My dissertation treats “foreign worker” and “marriage immigrant” as two closely connected yet distinct sets of questions that invited and necessitated interventions in different areas of social life. Specifically, the issue of foreign workers and the civil mobilization around that issue since the mid 1990s has primarily been shaped in the form of humanitarian intervention for the suffering of the “outsiders within” and of rationalizing and “humanizing” the system of importing foreign labor (Chapter I) and as the matter of organizing citizens to participate in various medical, legal, and charity services for migrants (Chapter II), while the issue of marriage immigrants and multicultural families has been defined as a matter of assisting the “socially vulnerable” population and incorporating them “harmoniously” into the society (Chapter III) and as the matter of raising multicultural consciousness and sensitivity among other (“non-multicultural”) groups (Chapter IV).

Significantly, too, the mobilization of civil society in the care of foreign workers and marriage immigrants/multicultural families in Korea has been a distinctly “temporal

practice” that involves an active re-imagination and re-valorization of the present through the mobilization of Korea’s past—usually in the case of the foreign worker—and the future—in the case of marriage immigrants and the “multicultural children.” Specifically, I will examine the ways in which individual citizens were called upon to empathize with the plight of foreign workers through the memory of Koreans’ past migration and immigration and experiences of hardship and suffering, while the issue of marriage immigrants and their “multicultural children” has been mostly defined as a matter of thinking and caring about Korea’s future. Such redefinition of the present leads to the necessity not only of activating “civil society” in the care of the above populations but significantly also of re-educating individual citizens and re-making them into those who will better fit the re-gained/refreshed image of the self and its status in the symbolic and the imaginary “global moral and politico-economic order.” I will show how thinking about the issue of foreign workers, marriage immigrants, and “multiculturalism” becomes inseparable from thinking about the past, present, and the future of the country.

Overall, my dissertation explores the blurred lines between history and memory, self and Other, the minds and the engineering of the minds, governance and care (of the population), the state and society, empowerment and subjection, and the making of a “good society” and the making of a “competent society.” Below, I try to situate my dissertation in these blurred lines where the boundary of the moral, the economic, the social, and the sentimental does not appear to be so self-evident.

### **The Moral Economy of Migrant Advocacy**

In his study of the British poor in the eighteenth century, E. P. Thompson defines the term “moral economy” as a “traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community,” which “impinged very generally upon eighteenth-century government and thought” (1971: 79). Similarly, in looking at Southeast Asian peasants, James Scott defines moral economy as a “notion of economic justice and [a] working definition of exploitation,” which permits us “to move toward a fuller appreciation of the normative roots of peasant politics” (Fassin, 2005: 365). This term “moral economy” is reused and readopted by Didier Fassin to refer to the moral values and norms that shape and define the politics of immigration and asylum in his study of humanitarianism in France (2005).

Specifically, in their discussion of the situation of undocumented foreigners, e.g., refugees and asylum seekers in France, Fassin (2001), Fassin and d’Halluin (2005), and Tickin (2006) show the ways in which emergent medical humanitarianism led by various local NGOs shape what can be acceptable qualities for migrants. Amidst the rise of medical humanitarianism, an asylum seeker’s legal residence in France depends on how well and feasibly one can prove one’s bodily pain or traces of it as the primary evidence of one’s history of political persecution (See also Fassin 2001). Consequently, a migrant’s body not only becomes the site of his or her truth, but also in the bureaucratic process involving clinical experts’ examination and testimonies, a migrant’s subjectivity is reduced to a suffering body separated from his or her own political history.

In a similar vein, I would like to note how migrant advocacy in Korea since its outset has been both intentionally and unintentionally occupied with presenting an agreeable picture of migrants and foreigners. Whether for organizing routine programs

for migrants, asking for assistance from other groups or individuals for their resources, or publicizing the issue of migrants for the purpose of bringing forth certain changes at an institutional level, migrant centers are inherently in the process of presenting and representing a certain picture of migrants. As self-acclaimed advocates for migrants and/or mediators between the migrants and the general public and/or the state, they could not escape the question of “acceptability,” i.e., the acceptable quality of a migrant and/or a foreigner, which in turn powerfully shaped the parameters of their own practices of representation.

Specifically, when migrant advocacy sought to bring a familiar picture of the foreign worker to the general public, the work of familiarization relied on a careful calculation of the distance between them and Koreans. That is, in this moral economy of representation, the Other’s “sameness” to oneself was highlighted to the extent that the realization of it could bring one’s sympathy towards the other. The utility of highlighting the sameness, however, ceases to be valid when the sameness is understood to threaten the power of the host, i.e., the superiority of the Koreans vis-à-vis migrants. For example, it is noteworthy to see how the public discourse on foreign workers has been often that of the “Korean dream,” coined after the term “American dream.” Such a discourse, where a variety of actors including media and NGOs played a significant role, would almost always project foreign workers to be those chasing after the Korean dream as Korean migrants would have for their American or other dreams—thus, again, “they are like us.” However, precisely because the idea of Korean dream assumes the gap between “us” as the “reflection of the dream” and “them” as the “subject of the dream,” they become those who “are not yet fully like us.”

In this vein, it becomes worthwhile to rethink the practice of mobilizing the common history of labor migration that became popularized in the early phase of Korean migrant advocacy in terms of what Hannah Arendt named a “politics of pity” (1969). According to Arendt, a politics of pity is characterized by the separation between those who suffer and those who do not, or between the fortunate and the unfortunate. Distinguished from compassion as the passion of co-suffering that fails to travel in distance, Arendt notes, pity as a sentiment of feeling sorry at the suffering of multitudes of an unknown Other can easily move men without causing any mark in the flesh. It is this ability for pity to travel in distance and to be aroused at “generalized suffering” that makes it enter into a politics. Extending from Arendt, Luc Boltanski elaborates further on this question of distance, which is especially relevant here. He notes that pity is not automatic (1999). To arouse pity, the suffering in question should be “conveyed in such a way to affect the sensibility of those more fortunate.” That is, the suffering of the unfortunate should be made not only concrete but also generalizable (Boltanski, 11-12); it is his suffering, but anyone could be him.

When it was said that Koreans also experienced the same hardship 40 years ago, people could empathize more closely with the plight of migrant workers. Furthermore, unlike the ahistorical and apolitical picture of the refugee and/or the asylum seeker that is produced through bureaucratic and medical humanitarian regimes elsewhere (e.g., Malkki 1996; Fassin and d’Halluin 2005; Ticktin 2006), the figure of the migrant worker here even appears to be a subject of agency in that he shares a history of migrating overseas for a better future. Nonetheless, as this very commonality between Koreans and migrant workers is cast yet in another divide between the two—namely, the temporal distance that

locates the foreign worker in the past history of Koreans, the foreign worker soon becomes the figure of “yet unfortunate,” and thus “not yet fully human” in the developmentalist hierarchy that sustains the very divide<sup>4</sup> (Cf. Escobar 1994).

On the other hand, when there is a lack or absence of the spectacle of the Other’s misery, sympathy turns towards a reverse movement. That is, to deserve one’s sympathy, a migrant should not display any or too much agency (e.g., Ticktin 2006). A migrant who exhibits too much agency brings unexpected surprise at best or arouses resentments and fear. A film titled *Take Care of My Cat* (2001) visualizes such a situation in a scene where four twenty-something girl friends, the film’s main protagonists, get taken aback by the Burmese men’s invitation to join them while hanging out in a park. The girls look surprised at first but soon get struck with a slight dismay by these “foreign workers’ unexpected (sexual) activeness.” On the farther side of the spectrum are talks on “foreign crimes.” The fierce responses from Internet users on a case that occurred in Yangju in 2008, where an undocumented foreigner brutally raped and murdered a thirteen-year-old middle school girl, is only one such example. Their messages were filled with vociferous resentments and anger not only towards undocumented or “illegal” foreigners but also towards migrant advocacy groups, who, according to them, helped foster foreign illegality and crimes in the country. In these incidents, not only did the local advocacy for the human rights of migrants become seriously challenged, but also the situation itself tended to bring up further questions such as who deserves or can have human rights or is *everyone* to be included within the category of humanity (Cf. Asad 2000; Biehl 2005;

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<sup>4</sup> By denying the coevalness of the other, this notion of the foreign worker as Koreans’ temporal other reiterates developmentalism and the human hierarchy embedded in it, neutralizes global capitalism that generates a cross-border migration of people, and often simply amplify Korean narcissism.

Ticktin and Feldman 2010)

In the moral economy of migrant advocacy, migrants not only have been but also “had to have been” structurally disempowered by their virtue of being a foreigner, and their need to be acceptable, i.e., to be “hosted” (Cf. Derrida 2001). Although most of the migrants in Korea were “economic migrants,” e.g., labor migrants, their “economic subjectivity” would be downplayed in local migrant advocacy activities as long as it serves to suppress the image of a “bad foreigner” who is solely driven for economic advantages or taking “our jobs.” At the same time, the reverse would happen when it was deemed important to highlight their contribution to the Korean economy by filling up the labor shortage in the so-called 3D—“difficult, dangerous, and degrading”—industries shunned by the locals. Indeed, it has been reigning as one of the most popular narratives told by the individual migrants who actively participated in local migrant advocacy from the protest at Myongdong Cathedral in 1995 to the sit-ins in 2001 and 2003-4. A similar situation can be observed in representations of marriage immigrants, where the “good ones” who manage a “healthy and happy family” need to be distinguished from the “bad ones” who lie to her “old husband” to enjoy an affair with her “young lover” who often happens to be her own compatriot.

This problem of acceptability leads to another and perhaps more fundamental tension salient in Korean advocacy for foreign workers. As I will show in Chapter I, migrant advocacy in the country emerged as a response to the dehumanizing condition of the “industrial trainees”—a kind of guest worker who was brought to the small and medium industries in Korea under the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) since 1994. The ITS aimed to make the cheap foreign labor even cheaper by treating the workers as

“trainees” under the pretext of transferring Korea’s advanced technology and skills to developing countries. In 1995, fourteen Nepali trainees and their civic supporters organized a protest at Myongdong Cathedral in downtown Seoul and the migrant advocacy that was formed in the aftermath of the protest sought to “humanize” the working and living conditions of foreign workers and bring remedy to the inhumanity of the Korean state and society that was primarily responsible for the human rights violations against foreign workers. However, as I will show in Chapter I, migrant advocacy’s call for the universal human rights of all persons and its attempt to bring a “human” face to the foreign worker still relied on appealing to particular interests of the host state and society and on making visible the moral as well as the economic “value” and “utility” of migrants. When it was the common history of labor migration that was emphasized, the matter of better treatment of migrant workers was linked to the matter of caring about Korea’s international reputation and/or its moral maturation. When it was the state government’s massive crackdown on undocumented migrants that most threatened the wellbeing of migrants, it was the economic contribution and usefulness of migrants that was most emphasized.

In the above incidents, not only were the rights of the foreign worker carefully circumscribed to rechannel the primacy of the matter to the moral and economic advancement of the country, but also the line between human rights/dignity and human value, and between civil society’s moral call and the state’s economic rationality became significantly blurred. What became notable here is how one became heavily reliant on the other.



In his discussion on human rights, foreign domestic workers, and the Singaporean state, Pheng Cheah notes how unskilled migrant workers are almost always viewed “disadvantageously in comparison to highly skilled migrants and the local population”; They are “beings with less status on whom the state does not need to expend resources and care” (2006: 207). The state government’s neglect or rejection to provide better protection for the foreign workers stems from the fact that the latter is essentially excluded from the state’s concern for its biopolitical care. Human rights in this context are continuous with the “concept-metaphor of Bildung that informs the purported attempts of postcolonial states to cultivate the humanity of their citizens through economic development.” Here, and similar to the case of South Korea, local advocates for migrants as the “practitioners of humanity” (Ong 2006: 198) face the need to argue for the recognition of their contribution to the “economic and social well-being of Singapore” (Cheah, 251). The success of their advocacy fundamentally relies on how well they can translate their call for better treatment of foreign workers into both the immediate and imagined self-interests (See also Ong 2006; Wilson and Brown 2009; Yee 2009). The human dignity that emerged here significantly challenges the Kantian notion of human that opposes itself to the “market price” and renders visible the crisis of human in the “inhuman condition” of instrumentality (Cheah 2006).

The above discussion also forces us to grasp the state’s differential treatment of different (migrant) populations, which in Korea has been defined by both local activists and academics as “discriminations against” particular migrant groups. The state’s multicultural programs that emerged since the mid 2000s clearly excluded migrant workers (both documented and undocumented) from their target population. Rather, they

were programs that were exclusively designed to support the marriage immigrant and the multicultural family population and, therefore, respond to the social crisis created by “decreasing fertility and rapid aging.” This reveals how the state’s care and governance of different population groups cannot be understood separately from the hierarchy of human values among the different populations: among different migrant groups, between migrant and non-migrant groups, and among different non-migrant, native populations (See also E. Kim 2010). In his ethnography of social abandonment in Brazil, João Biehl (2005) examines the ways in which the unwanted, valueless, and thus abandoned and excluded are “let die” conjointly by the state, medical, social, and familial institutions. He argues “economic globalization, state and medical reform, and the acceleration of claims to human rights and citizenship” coincides with the production of such a “social death” (2005: 24). The kind of social death that Biehl describes emerges even without or before the political death of those lives thus “turning Arendt’s argument upside down” (Feldman and Ticktin 2010: 19). From the perspective of the Korean state, while they may be devoid of national rights and citizenship and be treated disadvantageously compared to other migrant groups, labor migrants yet have or can have a distinct place as long as there is a demand for them and their presence is translatable into/recognizable as a distinct market value. On the other hand, as the “self-interests” of the host state can be fluctuating and be constantly defined anew, so is the work of advocacy that significantly relies on the former never consummated (Yee 2009).

As I will examine in Chapter I, the Korean case illuminates how civil society organizations’ moral calls can complement the state’s economic interests. For example, as the new system of foreign labor to replace the much criticized Industrial Trainee

System (ITS), the Employment Permit System (EPS) that was prepared jointly by the state government and the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea (JCMK), the largest association of migrant centers, sought not only to “humanize” the system of using foreign labor by providing legal protections to labor migrants but also to rationalize it better and thus to optimize the use of cheap labor. The most vociferous call to transfer the administrative role that was formerly with the Korea Federation of Small Businesses to the state government came from the advocates for foreign workers. However, when the EPS turned out to threaten the general well-being of migrant workers, especially that of undocumented migrants, the JCMK and others faced the need to rework the system and reconcile the “human” in it, which yet meant working within the larger relations of instrumentality. From the perspective of development and growth, what became visible here is the uncertainty between the moral claims and the economic calculations, and between humanitarian concerns and instrumental rationality. Below, I explore this tension further in the problematics of state/(civil) society relation.

### **State/Society, Neoliberal Welfare and *Damunhwa***

*“In the context of the state, the collaboration/resistance dichotomy is unhelpful in thinking of strategies for political struggle. The reason is that such a gross bifurcation does not allow one to take advantage of the fact that the state is a formation that, as Stuart Hall put it, ‘condenses’ contradictions”* (Akhil Gupta 1995: 393).

*“Solidarity...is the principle of government that makes it possible to convert the conflicting demands and fears generated by the proclamation of the Republic into a common faith in progress”*  
(Jacques Donzelot 1988: 395)

In May 2008, during my long-term fieldwork in the greater Seoul area, I attended a symposium entitled “Making Multi-cultural Society: Policy Tasks for Korean Society from the American and German Perspectives” hosted by the JCMK and sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Korea Cooperation Office. Apart from two main speakers from Germany and the U.S., two government officials were also invited to speak in this event, one from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the other from the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, and two NGO staff, one from the Borderless Village<sup>5</sup> and the other from the House for Migrant Workers and Korean-Chinese Migrants. The scheduled presentations were followed by a Q&A and a floor discussion, and everything seemed to go smoothly until the presenter from the Borderless Village made sour and straightforward comments regarding what he thought was the biggest problem in the *damunhwa*—“multicultural”—situation of Korea. He said that the state government relies on a “divide and rule” by supporting marriage immigrants through its multicultural programs while excluding migrant workers and regulating undocumented migrants. At the end of his comment, he concluded as follows: “*Damunhwa* is not a thing of the state. It should not intervene further but remain only to support migrant communities and non-governmental organizations.”

This last comment brought questions for me about the ways in which the relation between the state and civil society is being imagined and which discrete functions or roles are being distributed to each party in this particular imaginary, and especially so, as I had heard that a huge amount of state funding was awarded to his organization the year before through the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism—perhaps the biggest amount

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<sup>5</sup> A group affiliated with *Ansan Migrants’ Center* who organized various multicultural programs in 2006-8.

in the NGO circle working on migrant related issues. Later on, related themes such as the “least state,” e.g., “the state should not intervene further” or “the state should just be satisfied by only doing this,” or the “dubious state,” e.g., “whatever the state does is suspicious” repeatedly came up in my interviews with activists, as well as talks and discussions in events like those mentioned above that I’d participated in the years 2008–9. More often than not, such accusations of the state and of what it does and/or the opposition between the “evil of the state” and the “good of civil society” were treated as inevitable and unquestionable things. An interview I conducted with an activist at the JCMK in March 2009 exemplifies this well. While arguing that issues regarding *damunhwa* “should be dealt with autonomously within the civil sector,” he told me it is because “the fundamental objective and direction of the government is wrong.”

In his ethnography of the discourses of corruption and the construction of the state in contemporary India, Akhil Gupta notes how a state/civil society binary proves unsuccessful in understanding the formation of the state in a non-European context like India (1995). Instead, he looks at the ways in which the discourses of corruption are deployed in the everyday life and the state is actively imagined and constructed through such discourses. For Gupta, not only does the state/civil society binary faces the problem of inadequacy as an analytic category to apply universally, but that very inadequacy also makes visible its specific historical and cultural formations. In following Gupta’s insights on the dislocated and translocal construction of the state, my dissertation takes seriously what he calls the “reification inherent in unitary descriptions of ‘the state’” (392). However, unlike Gupta who problematizes it at an analytical level, I examine how such a reification is mobilized precisely in the self-representation and self-fashioning of civil

society organizations such as migrant centers that have been strongly built on a state/civil society binary. As the above observation from my fieldwork exemplifies, the subject of the reification and/or unitary treatment of the state is important not so much because it renders visible the “imperialism of categories” (Ashis Nandy in Gupta, 376) but more because it has shaped and haunted the imaginary and the identity of Korean civil society groups. Commenting on the problem of state/society binary, Timothy Mitchell argues for the need to examine “the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced” (1991: 85). Below, I show not only how the discourses and practices that are produced by local NGOs make it impossible to draw any strict line between the state and civil society, but also how the very divide that is nonetheless defended is mobilized in enrolling further “civic participation,” “empowerment,” and “improvement.”

In looking at the developmentalist regime of Singapore, Pheng Cheah observes the close interplay between the state government and NGOs, which he refers to as “a complex combination of the two technologies of strong government and liberalism” (2006). While South Korea may differ from its Southeast Asian counterpart in having a distinct legacy of oppositional politics that evolved under the strong military governments of the past, it shares more in its postcolonial, developmentalist structuring of the state. Here, I argue the seeming difference, e.g., the development of strong civil society forces, played an important role in disguising the close relationship developed between civil society organizations and the state government since the 1990s. What has been under-recognized in this context is that the mode of government has transformed radically especially after the financial crisis of the late 1990s. While the state

governments that appeared since the aftermath of democratization have been operating more or less as strategic and flexible actors, that shift has been overlooked in the civil society led reification of the state, which usually refers the state to the authoritarianism of the previous governments and derives from anti-authoritarian and anti-statist passion ensuing from the pre-1990s. My contention is that the neoliberal developments that were accelerated since the late 1990s is precisely in continuity—albeit not without fragmentation and disjuncture—with the given project of civil society. In noting how the “movements behind Korean democratization...furthered liberal aspirations” in the aftermath of democratization, Jesook Song, for example, notes how they also lost “their ability to criticize the emergence of a (neo)liberal welfare state that minimized the explicit interference of state machinery” (2009: 10). Song says, “while it was common for Kim Dae Jung to be criticized for betraying the spirit of Korean democratization because he promulgated a neoliberal welfare state, it was rare that dissident groups problematized their own liberalism” (10).

Ronaldo Munck’s point may be relevant in Korea’s post-democratization (neo-) liberal developments: he notes that if civil society was the area where citizens were organized and mobilized for democracy under many authoritarian regimes in the South and the East in the 1970s, now it is being promoted by the neo-liberal project in its sacred war against the “big government” (2005: 66, See also Lemke (2001); Sinha (2005); Saad-Filho and Johnston (2005)). In Korea, while so many analyses and critiques have emerged that discuss the negative effects of neo-liberal reformations that got accelerated in the country since the financial crisis in the 1990s, many such analyses define neo-liberalism narrowly as a type of economic theory and/or a set of foreign and transnational

capital, corporations and financial elites at most. Especially in civil society circles in Korea and, more specifically, in the anti-neo-liberalism activism, while “civil society” has been almost unanimously considered the main source of resistance and counteraction against various “neo-liberal invasions,” considerations were seldom given to the ways in which “civil society” is being mobilized in Korea and elsewhere to restructure the state and the society in a more “economic” way. However, in commenting on NGOs in Korea, Seo Dong-jin argues how the activities organized by the well-known NGOs such as the Beautiful Fund under the slogan of “public-ness” since the 1990s have been an important part of neo-liberal governance that urges civil society to become activated and automated with its own self-responsibility (2009: 330).

Throughout the chapters below, I show how liberal and neoliberal reconfiguration of the state of Korea becomes manifested in the emergent discourses and practices concerning the four figures of “foreign worker,” “volunteer-activist,” “multicultural family,” and “multicultural citizen.”

First, in the work of migrant advocacy, while the human rights of foreign workers were linked to the continuing project of (re-)vitalizing “civil society” that was oppressed brutally under the authoritarian governments (Chapter I), it was individual citizens who were mobilized to take care of the well-being of migrants (Chapter II). The mobilization of civic solidarity in the care of migrants reflects a wider process of the “participatory welfare,” a form of neoliberal welfare, that was promoted specifically by the “participatory government” under the late president Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) and more broadly by civil society organizations who had been promoting citizens’ participation in the caring and sharing of the society. The figure of the volunteer citizen



praised by migrant centers as the “carrier of social happiness and hope” operates as the human embodiment of the idea of participatory welfare that relies on active participation of the private and the third sector in the care of the social welfare. In this way, realizing the optimal “harmony between economy and society” that the notion of participatory welfare is based on (Kim IS 2005) depends on an active enrollment of non-public sectors in the work of welfare and/or the redistribution of such a function to the civic sectors. Here, while the state/(civil) society distinction proves useful in promoting further “civic empowerment,” the role of “solidarity” lies in transferring conflicting voices into the project of economizing the state under the name of collective, social progress (Donzelot 1988; 1991). To put it another way, the state requires “the participation of civil society because its successful functioning is based on human capital,” and civil society becomes precisely the “domain for the articulation and formation of the peoples’ interests through governmental technologies” (Cheah 2006: 256).

This last observation leads to another salient point behind the emergence of *damunhwa*, translated as “multicultural” or “multi-culture.” Anthropologists have recently interrogated the ways in which multiculturalism is practiced in different geographic and social settings such as Australia (e.g., Hage 2000, Kowal 2008, Povinelli 2002), Canada (e.g., Mitchell 1997), and Central America (e.g., Hale 2005; 2006). In the case of Australia, while Povinelli (2002) discusses the inherent dilemma of liberal multiculturalism by looking at situations in which indigenous groups have to prove their “authenticity” in order to be entitled to certain rights, Hage (2000) and Kowal (2008) focus their analyses on white multiculturalists and antiracists and their contradictions and conundrums. Coming from a stance more informed by political economy, Hale (2005;

2006) and Mitchell (1997) discuss multicultural practices and discourses in Central America and Canada respectively as the workings of neoliberal governmentality and power. In looking at the emergence of discourses of *damunhwa*, I pay special attention to the situation where state government and its civic and liberal feminist interlocutors speak in almost the same language of the empowerment of migrants, i.e., marriage immigrants and multicultural families (Chapter III), and of the need to re-socialize and re-culturalize the native Korean population into “multicultural ways,” i.e., multicultural citizens (Chapter IV).

In her study on a local NGO project on poor women in India, Arandhana Sharma notes how the state’s attempt to downsize its welfare functions coincide with its implementation of a GONGO—partly “governmental” and partly “non-governmental”—that aims at empowering subaltern women for self-development and self-reliance. In a similar vein, in Chapter III, I seek to rethink the meaning of empowerment that has been highlighted both by state government and civil society groups in their discourses on the multicultural family and the marriage immigrant. Specifically, I explain the state’s “multicultural” programs that aim at the (re-) establishment of the (welfare) function of the family among multicultural families and at the capacity enhancement of marriage immigrants as part of its double efforts to deal with the broader crisis of population and to liberalize its welfare function by promoting the self-development and self-empowerment of the new human capital of the multicultural subjects.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the ways in which the civil society’s call to cultivate multicultural awareness and sensitivity among the native population is shaped in the opposition between civil society’s self-reflexive, self-critical understanding of

multiculturalism and the state's multiculturalism as a disingenuous device to govern migrants—or, between civil society's "humanist" concerns and the state bureaucracy's brutal "objectification" of migrants (Cf. Cheah 2005). I show how the promoted difference and/or conflicts between civil society's search for a "genuine multiculturalism" and the state government's "disingenuous intention" become significantly condensed in the subject of multicultural education as the necessity for Koreans. Here, the binary of state/(civil) society is used to fashion the civil society's self-disciplinary project as some noble, ethical project, on the one hand, and to downplay the fact that the focus on multicultural education among Koreans equally constitutes another significant part of the state multicultural agenda. I will show how the making of *damunhwagongsaengsaehoe*, or "multicultural, coexistent society" that is promoted by both the government and civic groups, depends on the proper (self-) management and the cooperation among each particular population.

### **"Shortening the social gap" and Governing the Senses**

*"Whoever speaks of humanity is a liar."*

(Carl Schmitt quoted by Wilson and Brown (2009: 17))

*"Compassion is a natural feeling, which, by moderating the love of self in each individual, contributes to the preservation of the whole species."*

(Rousseau 1754/1973: 68)

In the summer of 2003, the state government passed a bill for the Employment Permit System (EPS), which was then to be enforced starting the following year. What followed in the following fall was the largest ever mass crackdown on undocumented

migrant workers, which also resulted in a series of suicides and sudden deaths of migrants who got extremely distressed in the situation. Among the migrant advocacy circle, this period of time was called the “situation of death,” while advocates actively mobilized the cases of death to denounce the government’s inhumane treatment of migrants. It was in one of those days in the fall of 2003, that is, when the news of migrants’ deaths and suicides kept following one after another, that I encountered a colleague’s sudden outbreak of tears at the office of Friends of Asia (FOA), the migrant center located in Goyang area where I worked as an intern during the given and the following year. She was reading to me another news of suicide and recited the following in tears as if she was speaking to the dead migrant: “What is Korea to you...what about it that makes you end your life...” It was such a complicated mix of emotions that included not only the sympathy as a fellow human being but also a kind of guilty feeling as a member of the society that is partly responsible for the given death.

There was another scene that I recollect from my fieldwork in 2009, which occurred again in the same office of FOA but involves a different staff member. That day, FOA showed a movie with an audience of marriage immigrants who frequented the office for services such as Korean language classes and childcare. The film shown that day, entitled “Seri and Harr” (2008), featured the story of two girls, Seri—the daughter of a Vietnamese marriage migrant—and Harr—the daughter of undocumented Filipino migrants. After the movie, when everyone was gone and I was the only person around, the staff told me how she felt hopeless and helpless when she saw the tears of the “migrant mothers” flowing upon seeing the discrimination the protagonists went through

in the film. She said, “I don't know what to do with this gap between me and them. Sometimes, I really feel there is a limit in shortening it.”

These two small encounters are some of the important scenes that shaped the memory of my own involvement in migrant advocacy and haunts the back of my head whenever I think about the subject of emotional and sentimental engagement that plays quite a significant role in migrant advocacy and beyond.

In “The Social Question,” Arendt argues about the disappearance of the “age-old indifference” of the suffering of men in eighteenth century Europe (1965). She notes the distinct historical shift where pity and compassion is introduced to the political realm in which the French Revolution serves one of the telling examples. In a similar vein, Thomas Laqueur notes how the human began to be conceived as “the ethical subject—the protagonist—of humanitarian narrative” in the late eighteenth century (2009: 38). Humans “became humane—compassionate, sympathetic, ethical” (Feldman and Ticktin 2010: 4). On the level of practice, noting how both the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the French Declaration of Human Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789 relied on a “claim of self-evidence” (2007: 19), Lynn Hunt discusses the specific practices of imagining human dignity and equality that came about in France in the same era. Notable in her discussion is that for something to gain the status of self-evidence, what is required is an emotional appeal and engagement, e.g., the practice of faith and belief on the side of individuals who imagine it.

Situated in this stream of observations, my dissertation seeks to rethink the power of what Arendt has once dismissed as “cheap sentimentality”<sup>6</sup> (2005: 99) in enabling the

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<sup>6</sup> In her observation of the trial of Eichman, Arendt discusses Martin Buber who called the “execution of Eichman as a ‘mistake of historical dimensions’” because it might “ ‘serve to

political project of making the neoliberal social space in contemporary Korea. By doing so, I join the critics who have seriously meditated upon the ways in which a successful functioning of neoliberal capitalism can rely on the proper mobilization of affect, communal bondage, and ethical conduct (Barry 2004; Joseph 2002; Muehlebach 2007, Cf., Haskell 1985). Specifically, I pay special attention to the ways in which various sentiments such as shame, empathy, neighborly and familial love and affection, and the *feeling of solidarity and of equality* are actively mobilized in the field of migrant advocacy and beyond. In attending to the subject of sentiment and emotion, I am especially interested in looking at how the focus of civic activism such as migrant advocacy is increasingly on promoting and cultivating “proper emotional engagement and disposition” among individuals and between different groups (Smith 2000/1759)—with the above anecdotes exemplifying certain aspects of such a practice. I will call this the “government of senses” and examine how it plays an important role not only in migrant advocacy but also in state project of building a sharing and cohabiting society.

The effect of sentimental mobilization in Korea, I argue, has usually been two-fold: make the call for abstract and universal values and principles such as human rights and solidarity practically workable, on the one hand, and tame the senses of the public, on the other hand. Discussions in anthropology have focused on the work of culture, practice, and translation that make universal norms alive in specific local contexts, e.g., from Tsing’s “engaged universals” in anti-globalization movements (2004), Ticktin’s “biological co-humanity” in the medical humanitarianism in France (2005) and

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expiate the guilt felt by young persons in Germany” (2005: 99). Arendt criticizes Buber by saying, “it is quite gratifying to feel guilty if you haven’t done anything wrong: how noble! ...those young German men and women...are not staggering under the burden of the past, their fathers’ guilt; rather, they are trying to escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality” (99).

Giordano's "religious redemption" in discussions of citizenship in Italy (2008) to Wilson and Brown's focus on the role of empathy (2009). In the following chapters, I discuss how mobilizing shame, sympathy, and sentimental stories become the proven method and strategy among migrant advocacy groups who face the need to translate their call for human rights and/or better treatment of migrants and how affect and sensitivity become the primary domain to mediate social differences and build social solidarity to enable "co-existence" and the welfare of the society.

Specifically, I examine the ways in which shame and sympathy are mobilized to ameliorate the dehumanizing condition of foreign workers and how it effectively limits the rights of the foreign worker (Chapter I). Second, I explore how affection and affective solidarity is promoted in the project of building a sharing society, which in turn complement the wider process of neoliberalizing social welfare (Chapter II). Third, I discuss the ways in which the state project of building "multicultural, cohabiting society" relies on building a "familial mode of solidarity" between the multicultural and non-multicultural population groups (Chapter III). Fourth, I show how civic group-led discourses and practices of *damunhwa* translate multiculturalism as the project of transforming individual sensitivity in the way that is adaptable to the "globalization" within and outside the country (Chapter IV). Overall, I pay special attention to the ways in which the mobilization of sentiments and senses is predominantly shaped in a developmentalist framework where qualities of being human and humane and being tolerant are treated and translated as some kind of moral and historical achievement and elevation (Cf. Asad 2000; Brown 2006; Cheah 2006; Laquer 2009).

## The Chapters

The following dissertation is comprised of two sets of chapters, each corresponding to two different yet interrelated themes of the foreign worker and the marriage immigrant and to different phases of my own ethnographic engagement in the field of migrant advocacy and *damunhwa* in South Korea. The first two chapters talk about the ways in which the issue of the foreign worker has been received and appropriated by civil society actors including migrant centers since the mid 1990s and beyond, while the latter two chapters touch upon the coming of the state and non-state multicultural apparatus in the 2000s.

In the first chapter, I trace the emergence of the field of migrant advocacy in the mid 1990s, and discuss how migrant centers actively link the moral welfare of the foreign worker with the moral and economic development of Korean civil society and state. I examine the ways in which the problem of foreign workers emerge as a prism through which civil society organizations such as migrant centers re-imagine and revalorize Korea's past and present and build workable notions of humanitarianism and human rights.

In the second chapter, I investigate such an emergent moral project further by looking at the ways in which migrant centers mobilize civic solidarity and benevolence for the issue of the foreign worker. I show how the process of neoliberalizing welfare that became accelerated since the late 1990s is reflected in the migrant centers' promotion of civic altruism and volunteering.

The third chapter looks at the ways in which the state government deals with the problem of marriage immigrants and multicultural families that emerged since the early



2000s and examines its multicultural programs within its broader plan to deal with the crisis of the social that is defined by the emergent problem of decreasing fertility and rapid aging and the rapid transformation of population and family.

In the fourth chapter, I turn my focus of analysis to the ways in which migrant centers and other civic groups respond to the state multicultural programs and develop their own discourse and practice of multiculturalism. In this chapter, I discuss the civil society project of cultivating multicultural awareness and sensitivity among individual citizens that emerged as an alternative to the state programs aimed at marriage immigrants and their families.

Overall, the dissertation traces the ways in which the state and civil society actors in Korea think and rethink the issue of foreign and migrant workers, marriage immigrants, and multicultural families through the problematics of civic empowerment and progress, and the economic and moral growth of the state and population. I explore how human rights and the question of being human/humane, civic solidarity and altruism, and multiculturalism and the respect of diversity can be thoroughly subsumed in the long enduring project of moral development.

### **Notes on the Methodological Aspect of Engagement**

This dissertation is based primarily on my own work experience in migrant advocacy in 2003-4 and ethnographic and archival research conducted in the greater Seoul area in 2005-10. The first and second chapters are primarily based on my firsthand experience in the field of migrant advocacy in 2003-4, preliminary fieldwork conducted among migrant activists and migrant centers in 2005-7, and archival research conducted

in 2010, while the third and fourth chapters are based mostly on my preliminary fieldwork conducted in 2006-7 and my long-term fieldwork conducted in 2008-9 among both state and non-state agencies that concern *damunhwa* in the greater Seoul area. During 2003-4, I was blessed to have firsthand experiences in important moments of the early phase of migrant advocacy by participating in the emergency meetings that were organized by the JCMK, *Ijuyeondae*,<sup>7</sup> and the ETU-MB at the dawn of the scheduled mass crackdown of undocumented migrants and in the long-term protest that was organized by the ETU-MB in Myongdong in 2003-4. During my preliminary fieldwork in 2005-6, I was still focusing on the activities of migrant activists and Migrants' Trade Union. However, the outbursts of multicultural apparatuses with the coming of state multicultural programs for marriage immigrants since 2006 led me to rechannel my focus into the emergent discourses and practices of *damunhwa* shaped jointly by the state government and civil society actors.

Anthropology is, “in essence, a tropical discipline, ever disrupted by local conditions and threatened with unexpected breakdowns” (Redfield 2000: 16). Before going back to the “field” in 2008, I was planning to “focus on” two particular organizations that had held many *damunhwa*-related programs in the previous years and do a rather “traditional” kind of fieldwork by situating myself among them for an extended period of time. However, I found that there was no long-term program waiting for me. Instead, for most of 2008 and part of 2009, I spent my time following a series of “events” that were constantly being organized under the name of *damunhwa*—festivals, classes, talks, symposiums, seminars, etc—organized not only by migrant centers, but

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<sup>7</sup> The second largest association of migrant centers that Friends of Asia, where I worked as an intern, was part of.

also by other parties such as state ministries, academia, and other related institutions, interviewing concerned people in NGO and state sectors, and tracing relevant evidence in the documents and other materials produced by NGOs, state ministries, media, and academia. By all means, I see the following dissertation and my mode of engagement in the field of migrant advocacy and *damunwha* in terms of what Trinh T Minh-ha called “speaking near by” (1982) as opposed to the Cartesian mode of engagement of “speaking about” (Cf., Latour 2005; Riles 2001).

## CHAPTER 2

### “FOREIGN WORKERS” AND THE MORAL MATURATION OF “KOREA”

*“Instead of lamenting the horrendous ways in which human labor is commodified...by global capitalism, we should examine how the technologies sustaining global capitalism both enable and disable the actualization of humanity.”*  
(Pheng Cheah 2006: 265)

*“Imported labor, but came the human.”<sup>8</sup>*

#### **Myeondong Cathedral 1995: Shame and the Suffering Other**

“We decided to come to Korea because there was no work in our country and because we wanted to get out of our poverty. We all had good dreams when we left for Korea. However, we can hardly describe the situation we are facing here...Although we are from a poor country and, thus, are being treated like slaves in Korea, we have full human dignity...We appeal to Koreans and their government to treat us not as animals but as equal brethren and human beings.”  
(From the statement of the 1995 sit-in protest by Nepali workers)

On January 9, 1995, thirteen Nepali industrial trainees<sup>9</sup> gathered at the Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul, a symbolic place in the history of civic resistance in contemporary Korea, to hold a sit-in protest. A few weeks before the sit-in, nine of them had fled from their workplaces where they had to work for more than fourteen hours a day, put up with physical and verbal assaults, and receive less than the half of what the initial contract said.

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<sup>8</sup> From the campaign pamphlet for South Korean ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (prepared by *Ijueonda*, the second largest association of migrant centers).

<sup>9</sup> Since 1994, South Korea brought foreign workers under the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) to solve the labor shortage in its small-medium businesses. Under the pretext of passing down advanced skills to developing countries, the ITS defined the foreign workers as “trainees.” The first industrial trainees were those eighty Nepali workers who entered the country in May 1994.

They sought help from Pinancho, Chun Center for Migrant Workers, Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice and other civic groups who helped organizing the protest (Kim WS 2008; Lim 2003; Pressian 2009). On the day of the sit-in, the Nepali migrants tied themselves with iron chains holding pickets that say, "Please don't beat us," "Don't treat us like animals," "We are also human beings," "We are not slaves," "Give us our pay," and "Give us our passports back!"<sup>10</sup>

It is not known whether the visibly self-degrading tone of the protest was something deliberate or not, but it certainly made a huge impact in the public scene of labor migration making it foremost a moral issue and, more specifically, that of transforming the national society. The immediate sensation of the protest had to do with the discomfort of seeing the Other's body incarcerated, exploited, beaten, toiling and treated as less than "fully human". There was, however, something more in the scene that brought an equally powerful discomfort to those who witnessed it. That is, the protest made visible not only the dehumanizing condition of foreign workers but also Korea's own inhumanity that was responsible for it. Such a moral shock and sensation the protest brought about is essential in understanding the dominant characteristics of migrant advocacy that has emerged in South Korea thereafter. Retrospectively, the above event not only gave a birth to the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea (JCMK), then and still the largest association of "migrant centers"—local NGOs for migrant issues—but also shaped the parameters of the activities of these organizations that emerged to better the condition of foreign workers in the country.

This protest was widely covered by various local media outlets, arousing the public with anger, shame, and sympathy. For example, the editorial that appeared in *Chosun Ilbo*,

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<sup>10</sup> From the webpage of the Bucheon Migrant Workers' House.

one of the major local dailies, said that the Nepali workers' cry "made all Koreans appear like beasts and made us all to be ashamed" (January 11, 1995). "Koreans were shocked when they heard that [foreign] workers had their passports taken from them, and hadn't been paid, and had been beaten...I think Korean people felt humiliated" (a local research fellow interviewed by Katharine S. Moon (2000: 154)). Within a few days after the protest, the much revered Cardinal Stephen Kim made a public apology to the Nepali workers, which was followed by the then current Prime Minister Lee Hong-Gu's order for a close examination of the cases of the individuals involved and on the condition of foreign workers in general (Lim 2003: 435).

This chapter addresses the following questions: First, what were the ways in which migrant advocacy groups that emerged in the aftermath of the Myongdong protest translated the problem of the human rights of the foreign worker? Second, what can those narratives that became dominant in Korea say about the problem of human rights more broadly? The foreign worker is neither entitled to the national rights of the host country, which Hannah Arendt argued so forcefully is the basis for one's human rights (1951), nor do the international conventions that recognize the rights of migrants have effective legal force.<sup>11</sup> Under such conditions, and as I will show below, it was the narrative of the suffering of foreign workers and the shame of Koreans that most effectively responded to the state and other actors' abuses against foreign workers. Thomas Laqueur notes how even "law as the bulwark of human rights is not independent of narrative or of the norms that give sad and sentimental tales their resonance ... narratives give prescriptions-norms, laws-meaning; they transform them from a set of rules into 'a world in which we live'"

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<sup>11</sup> By the international conventions here, I am specifically referring to the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the two main ILO conventions on migrant workers.

(2009: 35). Below, I will discuss the ways in which advocacy for universal human rights relies heavily on the narratives of particular interests of the host state, i.e., Korea's moral maturation and the economic value of the migrants. I will try to rethink the limit and paradox of human rights that is revealed when the moral wellbeing of the foreign workers is actively linked to the developmental—both moral and economic—status of the host society and state.

### **Migrant Advocacy and the Foreign Worker**

*“How are the unfortunate relieved when they have found out a person to whom they can communicate the cause of their sorrow!”*  
(Adam Smith 2000 (1759): 12)

The 1995 protest at the Myeongdong Cathedral has been remembered not only as the first significant protest by migrants working in Korea, but also as having opened up an emergent field of migrant advocacy that is constituted by various individuals—church ministers, human rights activists, labor activists, lawyers, lay volunteers, college students as well as migrants themselves—and various groups—churches, migrant centers, labor unions, lawyers' groups, college students' support groups as well as migrants' own communities. Strictly speaking, this protest was, however, not the first one of its kind. Indeed, it is noted that there was another protest in 1994 organized by migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, and Ethiopia. Staged in the building of Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) and jointly organized by other groups, this protest lasted for twenty nine days. Although it did not bring about effects as immediate and powerful as the 1995 protest, it surely had an important impact by encouraging further activities by local NGOs (Lim 2003: 434).

Sources say that, prior to 1995, there were few NGOs who would provide services to foreign workers. After the 1995 protest and along with several Christian groups and other human rights NGOs, these groups formed JCMK. Many of the member organizations of the JCMK were either Protestant churches themselves or affiliated with Protestant and Catholic organizations concerned with democracy, social justice, and the human rights of social minorities. To understand the predominance of the churches and church leaders in the formation of migrant advocacy, it is important to note that progressive Christian groups served as one of the major sites for the nationwide democracy movements under the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s-80s. In the aftermath of the formal democratization of the country in the 1990s, these groups continued to be engaged in civic activism by working closely with other civil society organizations with no religious affiliations.

It is also important to note that, before the adoption of the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2004, the first state governed legal act concerning foreign labor, many of the foreign workers were either brought by the Industrial Trainee System (ITS), administered by the Korean Federation of Small Businesses (KFSB), or entered the country with a tourist or business visa working illegally in local industries. The basic logic behind the ITS lied in taking full advantage of the cheap foreign labor by not recognizing the foreign worker as a full employee with basic working terms and thus saving potential expenditures that can arise otherwise. The ITS also spared the state government from being fully accountable for the condition of foreigners working in the domestic industries. Most of the foreign workers who came as “industrial trainees” would join the undocumented migrant population by running away from their original workplaces or by simply not leaving the country after the expiration of their visa. The overall situation did not change



so dramatically even after the adoption of the EPS, which formally recognizes them as “workers” not as “trainees” and endorses their three labor rights.<sup>12</sup>

This situation may explain why it was not labor groups but migrant centers affiliated with Christian and/or human rights concerned civic groups who took the major role in the emergent migrant advocacy in Korea. Strictly speaking, foreign workers being “industrial trainees” under the ITS were not the subjects of rights. One can even say that it was through the activities of migrant advocacy that the rights of foreign workers finally became an issue to be recognized. The partial abolition of the ITS and the adoption of the EPS, in which JCMK played a crucial role, was an attempt to elevate the status of the foreign worker from “a mere cheap foreign labor force” in the state’s rationale to the subject of three labor rights. However, as will be discussed later, without national rights, the labor rights of the foreign worker were overridden by various levels of instrumental relations in which the EPS itself ironically served as an example.

In the mid 1990s, what seemed to matter most—and indeed became so—were the cases of various abuses, which the protesters at Myongdong Cathedral made so vividly—usurpation of passports, excessive laboring, verbal and physical abuse, and all that spiced up in the perpetrators’ overt contempt on poorer nations where migrants were coming from. It was human rights rather than labor rights that could most effectively and powerfully respond to these problems.<sup>13</sup> Upon publicization, the above cases were defined

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<sup>12</sup> Importantly, neither the ITS nor the EPS allowed them the access to a permanent residency in Korea and a vast majority of migrants who wanted to stay after the expiration of their visa were to become illegal. Thus far, the only way for them to have rights of residency has been marriage with Korean nationals.

<sup>13</sup> In regards to this, one can talk about the inclusive power of human rights applicable universally across the boundaries of membership and entitlement. Paradoxically, however, it is the very inclusiveness of it that renders itself vulnerable to the most narrow definition of “human” as often

as an issue of human rights violations and racial discrimination and prejudices, and then, notably, also as the problem of Koreans' narrow-mindedness, lack of moral maturity, and/or even lack of awareness of foreign cultures and/or cultural diversity. Socially engaged Christian groups were best suited to deal with this issue. They not only had a long history and experience in assisting the “weak part of society” but also had various forms of capital—either monetary or personnel—ready to use for their advocacy activities, e.g., full and part-time staff, volunteers, shelters, funding, and networks.

While the emergent Korean migrant advocacy constantly relied on and derived its main force of action from the discourses of human rights, the category of the foreign worker began to have the connotation of being the victim of various forms of human rights violations. The ITS was soon to be called a “modern slavery” that brings people from poor countries in Asia to Korea and exploits their labor in the sectors that Koreans do not want to work anymore, i.e., the “3D—dirty, difficult, and dangerous—industries.” Such naming was to make visible the institutional aspect of labor exploitation that individual migrant workers went through, but also had a powerful effect in shaping the image of the “generic foreign worker” as those who would take unwanted jobs and suffer from social disdain and exclusion. The figure of the foreign worker was also heavily racialized: because most of the foreign workers in Korea came from the southern parts of Asia with the exception of

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seen in Korean migrant advocacy's representation of foreign workers as the suffering bodies and in Miriam Ticktin's discussion of “biological co-humanity” that emerged in the medical humanitarianism in France (2005). On the other hand, although it lacks such an inclusive power, labor rights do not have to rely on the figure of the suffering or miserable human; rather, it is ultimately based on the “liberal idea of the free human agent who enters into a consensual service contract” (Cheah 2006: 251).

those from China and the former Soviet Union, “foreign worker” and *dongnamain*, or “Southeast Asians,”<sup>14</sup> became interchangeable words.

This new category of “foreigner,” which assumed the word “laborer” to tag along even when it was omitted, was a new addition to the existing categories of foreigners that were imagined through a hierarchical relation. In an interview conducted in 2005, Mabhub Alam, formerly an active member of Equality Trade Union-Migrant Branch (ETU-MB)<sup>15</sup> and then of Migrant Workers’ TV who later published an essay entitled “I am Earthman,” expressed his frustration with the ways in which he would be received in public spaces:

“One day I was walking on the street. And, there was a woman and her little boy coming towards this way. When passing, the boy whispered to his mom, ‘mommy, see the *miguksaram* (“American”).’ She appeared to briefly re-check me and corrected him saying, ‘No, he is not “American.” He is a *oegugin* (“foreigner”).’ That moment, I wanted to turn around and tell them that I am from Bangladesh!”

The word *oegugin*, or “foreigner,” here was used to differentiate him as someone who is not American. More specifically, while the word American can be used for a “white person,” the word foreigner here specifically denotes unidentified foreigners—neither “American” nor Japanese or Chinese—who are often sorted out as those migrants working in factories. Alam used this anecdote as an example of how Koreans differentiate and discriminate against foreigners by their race, nationality, and occupation and talked about his frustrations with the stigmatization of migrant workers as those who suffer from a hard life and are in need of sympathy and care.

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<sup>14</sup> In people’s everyday usage in Korea, terms such as *dongnama* (Southeast Asia) and *dongnamain* (Southeast Asian) can simply refer to the part of Asia that is *not* East Asia, i.e., China, Japan, and Korea, and the people who come from there. That is, instead of strictly meaning the region named “Southeast Asia,” the term *dongnama* often becomes synonymous with what many Koreans habitually think of as the “poorer” part of Asia, and this has become more of an everyday practice since the coming of migrants from different Asian countries.

<sup>15</sup> ETU-MB was the first union for migrant workers, which was founded by a group of activists who did not agree with JCMK in regards to the direction of the EPS and left it.

With migrant advocacy there emerged both institutional and individual forms of paternalism—i.e., between the foreign worker population and migrant centers who became their main advocates and spokespersons, and between the foreign clients and (especially) the senior members of migrant centers. As an example, I quote the interview of Rev. Park Cheon Eung, the founder of the Ansan Migrants' Center—one of the oldest and largest migrant centers in the country—and one of the most well-known activists in the field of migrant advocacy in Korea. When asked to recall the first moments of his own engagement in migrant advocacy, Park narrated as follows:<sup>16</sup>

“So, I began to settle down in Wongok-Dong<sup>17</sup> around 1989. One day in the year 1992, I was just walking by the telephone booth, which is still there at the entrance to the Wongok district office. One moment, I heard a foreign worker calling me. “Please help me,” in English. At first, I did not know if it was me whom he called. So, I was just going to pass when I heard him calling me for the second time. I realized there was no one but me around and asked him why he called me. He stammered in English and *asked me where he was*. It seemed that he had to go somewhere but, being new to the area, he did not know how to go.... So, I gave him directions. Afterwards, however, I was faced with existential questions. Questions like who I am and what my pastorate duties are.... You know, it was by accident that I met the foreign worker on the street.... But, his questions would not leave my mind. His voice would come up again and again, asking for help. Then, I did not have so much interest in the issue of foreign worker, either. But, yet, I could not escape from these questions. You know, the Bible says God stays with the lowly. If it is where God stays, then, I thought, it must be where I could serve. But, still, I was not sure of getting involved so much. I wished others could do something. But, others, too, said it was not their job. So, I thought, okay, then, perhaps it is mine.” (Emphasis added)

From Park's anecdote above, one may easily think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Certainly, it is a story of assisting a stranger in need whom one accidentally

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<sup>16</sup> Interview appeared in *Chosun Ilbo* (December 2009), electronically accessed at [http://www.tagstory.com/video/video\\_post.aspx?media\\_id=V000386427](http://www.tagstory.com/video/video_post.aspx?media_id=V000386427)

<sup>17</sup> The district of Wongok Dong in Ansan, an industrial city located on the outskirts of Seoul, is known for its large migrant population. With the publicization of the issue of migrant workers and the emergence of the state multicultural programs, this relatively tiny place has attracted numerous social projects and programs organized by both state and non-state actors since the mid 1990s.

meets on the road. For Park, it initially required no more than giving him directions. However, not only as a good Christian but also as a young minister in search of the meaning of his own pastorate duty, Park could not let go of his encounter with the foreign worker, and this led to his own efforts in linking the meaning of his own existence and pastorate duty and the foreign worker's question asking where he was. However, for the equation to occur, the conception of the Other as someone in need of assistance had to precede first. And, to make it his own case and job, he had to make sure that there was no one but himself who could do the *assisting* (Cf. Haskell 1985). Park's anecdote certainly represents the motivations of many individuals—especially, of those Christian leaders—who became involved in the emergent field of migrant advocacy in the 1990s. But, more importantly, it gives us a good sense of what constantly tagged along whenever the word “human rights of foreign workers” was mobilized in Korea and what thus constituted both the conceptual and performative sense of the given term: “the direction-less Other” who calls for one's attention and assistance and “one's responsibility for the urgency of the matter.” Below, I will discuss how this problem of the “vulnerable Other” and that of improving his condition became gradually linked with a matter of progressing the civil society of Korea and of maintaining moral integrity to its history of labor migration as migrant advocacy came of age.

### **Reputation, Responsibility and the “frog that has forgotten its past”**

The mid-1990s and mid-2000s is marked by a boom in various legal, medical, and charity services for migrants in Korea. At the same time, the number of migrant centers increased significantly. While there were about five such groups in the early to mid-1990s

in the greater Seoul area, now the number is somewhere around fifty across the country (Rainbow Youth Center 2008). The centers typically offer free Korean language classes, legal counseling and support as well as free medical services and shelters to both migrant workers and women marriage migrants. Whenever it was deemed necessary, centers organized activities not only with other individual migrant centers but also with other civic groups, e.g., groups of human rights activists, medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, media groups, and individuals who would take part as volunteers. Although migrant centers varied in organizational affiliation and membership, most of them were relatively small with usually five or so full-time staff with a large pool of individual volunteers who worked part-time as Korean language teachers, baby sitters, drivers, cook, and so on. Not only were the centers usually successful in procuring other's assistance, but also there seemed to always be the individuals and groups who were willing to offer their expertise, labor, and free time for migrants. Such a situation was evidence that the issue of foreign workers and migrants became one of the important and, indeed, "popular" topics in the landscape of social issues in Korea by the early 2000s.

Aside from these daily activities, it should also be noted that most of today's prominent migrant centers gained their reputation by engaging in what can be called "activist politics." Examples of this range from the publicization of cases of human rights violations in the workplace, immigration and police offices, and the detention centers to organizing campaigns, rallies, and pressuring groups against various state regulations and policies on foreign labor relations. Certainly, the biggest achievement of the JCMK as the largest association of migrant centers since 1995 was a gradual weakening of the ITS and the introduction of the EPS in 2004. Although this "achievement" was soon to be tainted

by the fact that the new system made various restrictions on migrant worker's freedom to choose their own workplace and enforced the largest ever crackdown and deportation of undocumented migrants in 2003 thus resulting in internal fragmentation in the field of migrant advocacy, it should be still noted that until then the biggest effort in the migrant advocacy circle was concentrated on replacing the ITS with a new and supposedly better system.

I have already discussed above how the protest at the Myeongdong Cathedral in 1995 brought about a nation-wide moral shock and sensation. The goal of the migrant advocacy in this period, I should say, lay in maintaining that shock and the urgency of the given problem. Migrant centers and various media outlets actively publicized the problem of foreign workers as a matter of caring about Korea's international image and reputation. For example, on November 28 1994, in an interview with *Kyung Hyang Shinmun*, Kim Jae-oh, the director of a citizens' group who assisted returned migrant workers in receiving delayed pay and compensation for industrial accidents, argued as follows: "The indifference of the employers and the government in the issue of foreign laborers will not only result in the corruption in business ethics but also, in the long term, will fatally taint our international image...although illegal, these foreigners are here out of our own necessity. Even if not through the UN declaration of human rights or the ILO's, should we not respect their minimal human rights as workers?" Kim continued, "Their misfortune does not end at their individual level, but cause hatred in their communities toward Korea..." On June 22, 1995, *Kyung Hyang Shimun* itself published an editorial that shared the same sentiment: "The foreign industrial trainees and illegal migrants are filling the labor shortage by working in the 3D industries that are shunned by the locals. The

government's neglect of their living condition is responsible for the increasing stigmatization of Korea as a country that violates human rights.”

Most of the civil society actors, however, went further than mobilizing the significance of Korea's international reputation and image by defining the issue of foreign workers in terms of the progress of Korean civil society. Indeed, since the democratization and with the burgeoning of civil society organizations since the early 1990s, human rights had been largely associated with the deepening of social justice and democracy and the amelioration of social inequality. In particular, the human rights of the marginalized and/or of minorities had been given prime attention by concerned civic groups as one of the new areas to intervene in order to continue the project of liberating and vitalizing civil society that was significantly oppressed under the strong military state. In 2009, reflecting such a sentiment, a human rights activist looked back on the Myeongdong protest as follows: “Instead of simply being ‘their own problems,’ the issue of the human rights of migrant workers became an important common issue for the whole society (*urisaheogongdonguimunje*). However, not only did the state policy and system ... not change so much since then, but also social prejudices and stigmatization against migrant workers still remain. We believe, however, that the cries of migrant workers will keep progressing our society by awakening our conscience and mentality that is enslaved by capital and economic interests” (*Pressian*, December 18, 2009).

Notably, too, through the activities of migrant centers as primary advocates of foreign workers, individual Korean citizens emerged as those to be responsible for the human rights and welfare of foreign workers. For example, in his lecture delivered at Seoul National University in 1998, Rev. Kim Hae Sung, one of the well-known activists in



migrant advocacy in Korea and the founder of the House of Korean Chinese, said, “Who on earth is to be responsible?” (Han 1998: 342). His lecture was part of a lecture series named “The Growth of East Asia and the Issue of Human Rights.” Kim continued by saying, “So many foreign workers are still seeking help in hardship. To protect the human rights of foreign workers, what we need now is your readiness to share their pain and your participation in improving their current situation” (Han, 342). Migrant centers actively mobilized the responsibility of individual citizens in the condition of foreign workers and defined civic benevolence and empathy as a necessity in protecting the human rights of the latter. Shaped in the rhetoric of greater civic participation and sharing, the mobilization of individual social responsibility was soon to be materialized in the rapidly increasing volunteer work and donations that were given on behalf of the issue of foreign workers.

Along with concerns for Korea’s international image and the progress of civil society, migrant centers also sought to present a familiar picture of the foreign worker by mobilizing Korea’s own history of labor migration. A popular narrative that thus emerged was “we were also foreign workers.” For example, Friends of Asia, a migrant center I worked for as an intern in the mid 2000s, had the following in their pamphlet: “... there are about 20,000 migrant workers in the Goyang/Paju area. As Koreans went to the U.S., Germany, and Saudi Arabia in search of work 40 years ago, so now migrant workers are coming to Korea from 80 countries from ten years ago. However, they are facing the problem of cultural difference and racial prejudice...” When it was said that Koreans also experienced the same hardship 40 years ago, people could empathize more closely with the plight of foreign workers. The suffering of foreign workers was also made vivid and concrete with a circulation of images of migrants with fingers cut in the press machine or

bruises on her body, but at the same time that suffering was conveyed as if it could be or could have been our own problem.

Here, I would like to note how this commonality between “us” and “them” was often utilized to provoke a particular kind of shame. For example, in a rally organized in May 2008 to denounce the state government for detaining Torna Limbu, then the newly elected chairperson of Migrants’ Trade Union (MTU), one of the two trade unions for migrant workers existing in Korea, an activist said as follows<sup>18</sup>:

“Such a thing did not happen in Saudi Arabia thirty years ago where I was working. Our ancestors immigrated to the US, Germany, and other countries in the world. *The frog forgets about the time when it was just a polliwog.* How can they treat people from other countries in such a way now that the economy is a little bit better? How can they persecute the union, which foreigners made by themselves to protect their own rights, with the man hunts and targeted crackdowns on its leaders?” (Emphasis added)

The message here was clear: those who forget about their past should be ashamed. Shame was not only about how others will think about oneself but also about living up to one’s internal image of the self (Williams 1994). The shame that was mobilized above appeared to be qualitatively different from the anxieties about international image and reputation in that it actively talked to the moral principle of one’s own. It was not about what others will think of me, but about what I think I should be like. In mobilizing a common history, it relied on what Luke Gibbons has termed a “postcolonial ethics of sympathy” that, he argues, can emerge from a shared experience of suffering (2000). Discussing the issue of guest workers in Ireland, Gibbons observes how rights of and tolerance towards other people and cultures in and outside Ireland were not couched in

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<sup>18</sup> MTU, previously called ETU-MB, is one of the two trade unions for migrant workers existing in Korea. However, it is not legally recognized by the state and has a status which can be categorized neither easily as a union nor as an NGO. In reality, its activities can be defined as being somewhere between the two.

abstract and ahistorical terms but were mobilized through a shared experience of oppression. As the sympathy for the Other through a shared history of suffering became an ethical alternative to the practice of “mimicking the master” in Ireland (Gibbons, 93), so, too, did the above activist argue that Koreans should not forget about their own history and should refuse to act like a new master.

While the above narrative and others like it actively mobilized the shame of Koreans and their moral responsibility vis-à-vis their own past and the present suffering of migrants, the rights of foreign workers and the claims of the Migrants Trade Union, however, became actively circumscribed. Before discussing the limit of such moral claims and the postcolonial ethics of sympathy, I would like to briefly note another strategy of advocacy that became popular among migrant centers and migrant activists themselves: the appeal to the economic utility of foreign workers. Here, I am specifically concerned with the state of emergency that came about in the fall of 2003, which was defined by the government’s massive crackdown on undocumented migrants and a series of deaths and suicides of migrants I briefly mentioned in the Introduction.

**“We (They) are here for the benefit of your (our) economy”**

By the early 2000s, the ITS apparently has become identified as the source of many problems including the rapid increase in “illegal” migrants, i.e., about 80% of the total migrant population, and the corruption involved in the process of migrant sending and receiving, let alone the human rights violations mentioned above. This subsequently led to a close partnership between the state government and JCMK who served the role of NGO expertise in preparing for the EPS. Indeed, it was JCMK and other civil society groups

who strongly argued for the need to make a new system of importing foreign labor and to transfer the administrative role from the Korea Federation of Small Businesses to the state government. The EPS, however, turned out to be a more “rationalized” version of the ITS as the system of utilizing cheap foreign labor. In it, the state expressed its will to directly regulate and govern foreign labor. The EPS gave employers the permit to hire foreign workers rather than giving the latter the permit to work, by which it meant the foreign worker did not have the right to choose his or her own workplace, and the newly recognized three basic labor rights for the foreign worker practically became subject to the employer’s rights to (hire/fire) the worker. Second, it was based on the principle of the five-year rotation, by which the migrant has to leave the country after filling the five years. And, third, the official enforcement of the EPS required the elimination of existing illegal foreigners to enforce the system anew.

It was around the year 2001 when some of the activists who did not agree with the direction of the new system left the JCMK and founded the Equality Trade Union-Migrant Branch (ETU-MB). This group of activists was inclined more towards the labor rights of migrants and defined their activities as part of larger labor movements. They demanded a labor permit system equivalent to those found in the more “migrant labor friendly” countries of western Europe. ETU-MB and their supporters were also critical of various levels of paternalism built between local NGOs and foreign workers. They argued that the workers themselves, not Korean NGOs or churches, should become the primary subjects in their fight against the oppression of the state and capitalism. This internal fragmentation also evolved along the anti-paternalism discourse that emerged within and outside, which problematized the then already popularized representation of foreign workers as those in

hardship and thus as objects of care and protection. In an e-mail interview conducted in 2005, Samar Thapa, a Nepali migrant and one of the early chairpersons of the union who was deported in 2004, would even describe the split between his group and JCMK as a “conflict between the young generation and the old generation.”

However, at the dawn of the adoption of the EPS in November 2003, the two split groups and other “solidarity groups” met to discuss what they can do collectively to stop the government’s mass crackdown on undocumented migrants that was scheduled to start the following month. While the two groups could not narrow down the gap between their different agendas even in the given state of emergency, what followed thereafter is worthy to note in our discussion of the rights of the foreign worker.

Confronted with the obvious inhumanness of some of the specific provisions and reconciling their humane concerns, JCMK took a rather remedialist stance on the EPS arguing for more flexibility, for example, with the five year rotation policy and the elimination of existing migrants. On the other hand, ETU-MB demanded a complete stop of the crackdown, the legalization of all existing migrant workers, and a labor permit system in place of the EPS. Apparently, for ETU-MB and its supporters, JCMK appeared to be “compromising” to the state’s interests, whereas for JCMK and its sympathizers, the demand of ETU-MB appeared to be “unrealistic.” Starting in November of 2003, the two groups held separate sit-in protests in two different sites in downtown Seoul. The protest by JCMK organized at Seoul Cathedral of Anglican Church ended in one month, while the one organized by ETU-MB at Myeongdong Cathedral lasted almost a year, resulting in the arrest and deportation of some of its key members including Samar Thapa, who led the early phase of the protest.

While the two groups clearly had different demands, I would still like to note that both of them sought to make their claims precisely through the state's economic rationality when confronted with the immediate threat of the government crackdown and deportation. They argued that it is economically more beneficial for the state and employers to keep the "old migrants" who have learned basic skills and Korean language than importing the new people who would mean new expenditures. They also argued to recognize the economic contributions by foreign workers who filled the otherwise declining small-medium industries.<sup>19</sup> Consider, for example, Samar Thapa's letter to "Korean citizens," which was written when he was detained in a facility for foreigners in the Southern port city of Yeosu (*Hankyoreh*, March 3, 2004):

"Dear citizens. I am Samar Thapa, a Nepali migrant worker who has been living in Korea for ten years by now... We demand an 'end to crackdown, legalization of all migrant workers, and the freedom to choose our own workplace.' ... Dear citizens, we migrant workers have been working hard for the benefit of Korean economy from long time ago...

... Is it really what President Roh meant [when he talked about elevating the human rights of foreign workers at his inauguration] to pay us to migrant workers who have been toiling for Korean economy for such a long time? Does not the Korean government have some responsibility for our and our family's rights to life (*seangjongwon*)? At present there are four hundred thousand migrant workers working in Korea. We are here because the country needs migrant workers. If the country does not need us anymore, we will go back to our countries voluntarily. Even in 1998 when Korea suffered from economic crisis, many migrant workers voluntarily returned to their home countries. The Ministry of Justice does not even have to arrest undocumented workers.

... Those migrant workers who are already working in Korea, not those who will newly arrive, should become the subjects of a labor permit system. Your sympathy and attention can save us migrant workers from death. Dear citizens, let us make

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<sup>19</sup> By the same token, however, the migrant worker's economic subjectivity had to be limited not to arouse the image of "those foreigners who are only driven by economic self-interests." Thus, in this rationality, the image of "bad foreigner" needs to be suppressed so as not to interfere with the image of the "good foreigner."

the progress of the country together. Let us bring a real democracy to it. Let us make it into the ‘pride of Asia’ as was said in the slogan for the last World Cup.”

In demanding the attention of citizens in their struggle for the freedom in the workplace and a labor permit system, Thapa repeatedly and foremost emphasized the economic contribution of migrant workers. Furthermore, and as seen with migrant centers above, he also linked their cause directly with the progress and democracy of the country and with its developmentalist interests—both economic and moral. In the state of emergency that threatened the welfare of existing undocumented migrants, while the economic utility and value of migrants became most effective and viable source of legitimacy in arguing for their rights, such a situation at the same time revealed the threshold of the rights claims available to the foreign worker. To put it another way, if the protests organized by ETU-MB and JCMK against the government’s crackdown on existing migrants were a claim to the human dignity that was being threatened by the state’s brutal economicism, the tactics that were employed evidently relied on rendering the value of the foreign worker as visible as possible within the same economic and developmental instrumentality of the state (e.g., Yee 2009).

### **Conclusion**

Thus far, I discussed how Korean migrant advocacy that emerged with the 1995 Myeongdong Protest relied on mobilizing the moral responsibility of local civil society and the state on the dehumanizing conditions of foreign workers. The specific tactics adopted by civic groups such as migrant centers sought to link the human dignity and rights of the foreign worker to the matter of caring about Korea’s international reputation and image and its history of labor migration, and to the progress of its civil society and its economic

growth and well-being. Wilson and Brown note how “arousing sympathy and awakening moral qualms, and connecting them to real and imagined self-interest, appears to be the proven method for the realization of human rights” (2009:10). In Korean migrant advocacy, the process of realizing the human rights of foreign workers has equally been the process of making visible their moral and economic value within the host state and society.

It is in this context that a postcolonial ethics of shame and sympathy should be rethought. The effect of appealing to the common history of suffering and hardship primarily lay in rechanneling the primacy of the given matter, i.e., the rights of the foreign worker, into the necessity of Korea’s own moral maturation. As the right of the foreign worker is potentially at odds with the state’s economic interest and sovereignty, the narratives of shame carefully limited the agency of the foreign worker as secondary to that of Korean civil society and state by translating and, thus, transforming the whole issue into that of Korea’s moral corruption and inhumanity. In this way, the narratives that invoked the shame of Korea as an ex-migrant sending country shared a mutual interest with the claims for international reputation that relied on a rather crude version of nationalist sentiments. Among the advocates of foreign workers, these narratives of shame and reputation became effective strategies that can fill the abstract necessity of the human rights of the foreign worker and make it more real. One can also talk about how the politics of human rights that followed such a route was shaped by a constant dialectics between humanizing and dehumanizing forces. If the narratives that highlight Korea’s moral improvement relied on rehumanizing the foreign worker by limiting his political agency vis-à-vis the host state’s sovereignty, the economic narratives that sought to appeal to the



state's interests did so by capturing the humanity of the foreign worker through his economic value.

This whole process also reveals the important role played by civil society actors in Korea in governing different groups of populations in accordance with the liberalization of the global economy. Civic groups such as JCMK and others complemented the state's economic governance of foreign workers by mobilizing civil society and individual citizens to be accountable for the moral welfare of the foreign workers. Their mobilization of national shame and the importance of international reputation and image, on the other hand, worked to discipline the society and individual citizens in the values of human rights and the humane treatment of foreign workers. The EPS, for example, can be understood more or less as the product of the joint efforts of the civic groups to morally advance the country and of the state to optimize the system of using cheap labor.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “VOLUNTEER ACTIVISTS” AND THE MOBILIZATION OF AFFECTIVE CIVIC SOLIDARITY

*“... democratic modes of governance and social scientific ways of knowing (re)produce citizens who are capable of governing themselves, of acting in their own interests and in solidarity with others. Citizens are not born; they are made”*  
(Barbara Cruikshank, 1999: 3)

*“Our principle is to manage the organization by citizens’ spontaneous participation and avoid relying on the government aid as much as possible.”*  
(Asia Culture and Human Rights Solidarity)

*“Foreign Migrant Workers, Not Strangers But Our Neighbors!”*  
(Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea)

It was spring 2008, and I was attending the orientation program organized for the volunteers for the *Migrants’ Arirang*—the largest multicultural festival in South Korea organized since 2004 by Damunhwa Open Society, the association of several migrant centers, and sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Lee Ranju, the founder of Asia Culture and Human Rights Solidarity and also a key member of the Damunhwa Open Society, was presenting a brief history of foreign migrant workers in the country—more or less a history of their suffering highlighted by stories of industrial injuries, incomplete payments, and racial prejudice. At one point, Lee said to the 217 volunteers, “Many of the migrant workers you will meet during the festival are classed as

such [undocumented/illegal]...it is important for you to think about how you will treat them...” Lee then turned to the topic of marriage immigrants: “You must have heard of them a lot on TV, haven’t you?” Responding to Lee, Woo Sam Yeol, another speaker at the presentation and one of the organizers of the festival, said, “Marriage immigrants, who constitute about ten percent of the total migrant population in the country, are facing gender discrimination, the problem of patriarchy, language barriers, and cultural issues in their everyday life...[their] multicultural families...especially those children...our society should pay special attention to them ... and support them.” In the above orientation program, volunteers were mobilized to sympathize with the suffering and hardship of migrants, mind their own attitudes and language when interacting with migrants, and become more engaged in this social issue of migrants.

One month before, I was paying a visit to Serapina Cha Mikyung, a long time international solidarity activist and the founder of Friends of Asia, a migrant center located in Goyang and Paju in the northern outskirts of Seoul, where I worked as a volunteer intern in 2003-4. Cha said, “These days, it is not hard to find people with good will. What is hard is to find those with strong political consciousness.” She was deploring the situation where she could easily find volunteers who would take part in the activities her center organizes and to assist foreign workers and marriage immigrants with free legal counseling, Korean language class, and medical and shelter services, but cannot find those who approach the given matter of labor and marriage migration more seriously. Two years before this in 2006, Kim Dae Gwon, another staff member working at Friends of Asia, told me what used to be called the “migrant labor movement” will disappear sooner or later because so many migrant centers that had been critical of the state policies on migrant workers since

their emergence in the early 1990s are now receiving funding from the state government for organizing welfare programs for marriage immigrants. Kim described such a situation as NGOs getting subsidies to do the state programs. While Cha's dissatisfaction conveyed the desire of her own and of many other activists working in migrant advocacy to see more volunteers viewing their own activities as part of the larger civil society movement, Kim's nonchalant look when talking about the migrant centers receiving the state funding still revealed his bitterness about the state power encroaching the space of migrant centers, especially since the coming of the state multicultural programs for marriage immigrants. Kim feared that migrant advocacy as a whole will lose its power to effectively criticize the state on behalf of migrant workers.

Since I became involved in migrant advocacy in 2003, I have been trying to make sense of the meaning of migrant centers and their activities in the broader politics of "civil society" and the state in Korea. As citizens' spontaneous associations that emerged since the 1990s to improve the condition of migrant workers, the role of migrant centers was not just limited to demanding the state to respect the human rights of migrant workers (which I discuss primarily in Chapter I); they also actively solicited the civil society of Korea and individual citizens to pay attention and give support to the situation of migrants. While the support from civil society was to be materialized through individual volunteering and donations, its mobilization relied on the idea that helping migrants also meant making a "better society" by citizens' spontaneous participation. In other words, the activities of migrant centers were fundamentally based on civic solidarity to take responsibility in the betterment of society. The faith and pride that staff and volunteers I have met so far had in

their work derived from the idea of spontaneous civic participation in realizing “social progress.”

In this chapter, however, I approach the question of social progress and the civic solidarity that it mobilizes from a different angle. Instead of treating those claims of the “social” and society as givens, this paper seeks to situate them in a broader politics of the state and civil society relation. From this framework, not only does the autonomous space of civil society as a liberal institution from the state interests and imperatives—the subject that greatly concerns progressive activists such as Kim and Cha above—becomes questionable (e.g., Cheah 2006), but also “civil society” itself becomes “at the same time both object and end of government” (Burchell 1993: 272). This paper specifically seeks to understand the ways in which the volunteer citizen emerges as the subject/object of the social government<sup>20</sup> that encourages and shapes the conduct of citizens in the way that is good for the “society” as well as for the state.

In interrogating the mobilization of “civil society,” I rely on Foucault’s concept of “liberal government” (Burchell 1993). Foucault approaches liberalism not as “a theory, an ideology, a juridical philosophy of individual freedom, or any particular set of policies adopted by a government” but rather as “a rationally reflected way of doing things which functions as the principle and method for the rationalization of governmental practices” (Burchell 1993: 269). In this framework, liberalism constantly seeks a relationship between the state and society that ensures the optimal environment for the market to perform. As liberalism itself went through a series of transformations from its early Anglo-Scottish

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<sup>20</sup> By government, I refer to Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” or “conduct of conduct,” that includes “any program, discourse, or strategy that attempts to alter or shape the actions of others or oneself” (Cruikshank 1999:4).

form to what is today called “neo-liberalism,” so too has the place “civil society” occupies in liberalism has gone through enormous changes. According to Graham Burchell, “During the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and throughout the present century, it [civil society] was fundamentally recast into what some call the social, or just society, by all those governmental techniques we associate with the Welfare State. Today, under the influence of what we are calling neo-liberalism, we are witnessing attempts to transform it again and to give it, if you like, the capacity to function autonomously by reshaping its characteristic model of action” (269-70). In a similar vein, and more recently, other social critics have noted how “civil society” is being actively promoted as part of the neoliberal project against big government (e.g., Munck 2005; Sinha 2005).

Broadly, it is through this framework of neoliberal government that I approach the question of the volunteer and “participatory welfare.” By participatory welfare, I refer to both the specific government welfare policies that emerged in mid 2000s and the related discourses and practices that were espoused by concerned civic organizations and academics. Specifically, I define migrant centers’ call for the attention of civil society and individual citizens in the issue of migrant workers as the process of “responsibilizing” the society in the care of itself (Burchell 1993: 276). By examining the question of volunteers who made up the crucial part of the manpower in the activities of migrant centers, I seek to address the following questions: What role did the figure of volunteer play in the politics of migrant advocacy specifically and in the “participatory citizenship” and “participatory welfare” that was promoted since the early 2000s? What kind of civic solidarity and citizenship is mobilized in the discourses on volunteering? How does the emergent notion of solidarity (re-)define the meaning of equality and/or what kind of equality does the

notion of solidarity emerging via volunteering rely on? Below, I will pay special attention to the ways in which affect and sensitivity are mobilized as the site to build the solidarity with the socially weak and vulnerable population, as exemplified in the volunteers' orientation program for the *Migrants' Arirang* that I began with.

### **Foreign Volunteers and the “Grateful giving”**

*“We need to present migrants as persons (saram).  
They are not guests but ‘new neighbors.’”*  
(A staff member at Ansan Migrants' Center)

With the emergent activities of migrant centers since the 1990s, while foreign workers emerged as the objects of “neighborly love” and “civic care and sharing” and represented variously as the “neighbors in need,” “socially weak,” and even “Asia in us,” Korean civil society and individual citizens were urged to participate in this new social issue of foreign workers (Choi 2004) and show their civic sharing and care. In noting how foreign workers emerged as the objects of such a form of care and share, my interest, however, does not lie in simply lamenting how migrants became objectified and patronized in the NGO projects as much of the critiques appeared in Korea could not emphasize enough, but on showing how the everyday activities of migrant centers that depended largely on the spontaneous participation of individuals operated as technologies of social government by generating notions about the ideal citizen and citizenship. That is, not only how individual citizens' participation and acts of sharing kept small grassroots organizations such as migrant centers get going, but also how migrant centers served as the site where citizens and citizenship that are desirable to the functioning of the “society” and for the social “co-existence” were made.

I have noted in Chapter I how migrant centers and other advocates of the human rights of foreign workers sought to present a familiar picture of the foreign worker by highlighting the shared experience and history of migration between Koreans and migrants. Here, I would like to note another way of representing foreign workers that also worked to familiarize the face of foreign workers vis-à-vis the general public but with a different aim and effect. That is, the foreign worker as “our neighbor” and/or as the socially vulnerable. These categories were used for soliciting not so much the empathy of citizens for the condition of their suffering, but, rather, the physical acts of sharing and caring to be done on behalf of migrants. This naming actively reinscribed the problem of foreign workers within the social space of Korean civil society and redefined foreign workers as the objects of civic solidarity and love. Certainly, depending on the contexts and the organization, the civic solidarity for this issue of foreign workers would be variously translated as the “Christian love of one’s own neighbor” or as “citizens’ greater participation in social issues.” However it was defined, the main point here was to mobilize individual participation in sharing the “pain”<sup>21</sup> and “suffering”<sup>22</sup> of foreign workers living in Korea. Such a civic solidarity and love was specifically materialized in the form of individual volunteering in the area of legal counseling, Korean language and culture education, free medical and shelter services, and recreational and cultural activities.

Notably, too, foreign workers would be often represented as the presence of “Asia in us.” This phrase emphasized the role of Korean civil society and its solidarity with other civil societies in Asia for achieving democracy in the region. Such a discourse that was actively generated both by NGOs and academics assumed an imagined community of

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<sup>21</sup> *Asia Human Rights and Culture Solidarity*

<sup>22</sup> “Making a happy relationship with your neighbor” by Park Chun Eung



“Asian civil society” and highlighted the role of NGOs in different countries and their transnational networking in the issue of migration. Migrant centers and other civic groups would organize joint conferences and workshops with the civil society organizations from both migrant sending and receiving countries of Asia. In this framework, migrant workers were often defined as the potential leaders in the development of civil societies in their home countries. At a more concrete level, some of the migrant centers extended their activities to the countries where migrants were from by assisting the returned migrants in readapting and reestablishing at home. For example, in an interview conducted in winter 2009, Lee Wan at Asia Culture and Human Rights Solidarity of Bucheon told me about the program his organization just started in Nepal. According to him, they ran a motorcycle repair shop that hired both returned migrants and local youths. Lee expressed his hope that the repair shop will not only help returnees in readapting in Nepal but also serve as a site that educates, prepares, and thus “empowers” the potential migrants.

On the other hand, although migrant workers mostly remained in the other end of civic giving and benevolence usually as its recipients, I would like to note how their own participation in the activity of sharing were received as one of the most touching cases of solidarity. For example, when migrant workers themselves served as volunteers in the Taean peninsula that was seriously damaged by one of the worst oil spills in 2007, local media praised it as an incident that completes human solidarity. Under the title “To restore Taean, foreign workers too rolled up their sleeves,” a *Newsis* article covered the thirty some migrant workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Russia participating with Korea Migrants’ Center as volunteers to help restore the damaged areas (December 14, 2007). The *Hankyoreh* article that appeared the following day under the title of “The waves of

volunteers clear the damage of Taean” noted how seventy thousand volunteers that included “children with their parents, the residents of Yeosu who also experienced a similar damage, and even foreign workers” provided their support in the collective efforts to clear the oil sludge stuck in the inflicted areas of the peninsula (December 15, 2007). The article added how such a wave of volunteers even touched the clearing experts dispatched from the US and Spain. It ended with the interview with Rev. Kim Hae Sung from Korea Migrants’ Center, who remarked on the foreign volunteers by saying, “Half of them are undocumented migrants and are busy living from hand to mouth. However, they willingly joined to help by saying ‘they also received Koreans’ help in the time of the Tsunami and earthquake.’”

The above articles unanimously highlighted how these foreign volunteers expressed their wish to *pay back* their indebtedness to Koreans. If foreign workers as the neighbors mobilized civic solidarity in the given issue, foreign workers as the volunteers touched the very heart of the given solidarity. In noting the relationship between foreign domestic workers, civil society, and the state in Singapore, Pheng Cheah says that the civil society’s arguments on behalf of foreign workers have hierarchical implications from the very start (2006: 257):

“FDWs, who can never be part of the Singapore *bios*, are not members of and equal participants in its civil society. At best, they are only objects of benevolence, the recipients of goodwill from civil society because the end of their existence in Singapore is to make life easier for its citizens. The most that can be done is to safeguard their welfare during their stay and to upgrade their skills so that they can have better job opportunities when they return home.”

Within the biopolitical hierarchy and exclusion, foreign workers are the least expected to take part in civic solidarity. In the end, as Cheah succinctly notes, they are not part of the given civil society and its *bios*. Nonetheless, what I would like to note is that the

nice surprise that is always expressed in the phrase “even foreign workers...” or “foreign workers too...” did more than just redraw that thick line of difference and exclusion; it actually worked to reinforce a form of civic solidarity that is based on the notion of equality in giving. The volunteering foreign worker—situated in the utmost margin of the society and at the bottom rung among the foreigners—touches the heart of a person who is in a better position—the criteria for which can be widely inclusive—and enrolls him/her in the beauty of sharing. When the recipients of benevolence take part in the acts of giving himself, it powerfully consolidates acts and sentiments of social solidarity. Foreign workers’ participation in volunteering *was* an occurrence of adding more “warmth”<sup>23</sup> to the society and material for media coverage.

By the very virtue of his own exclusion and marginalization from the imagined community of civic sharing, the figure of the foreign volunteer can become the subject that consummates the virtue of unconditional civic sharing. With more weight on duty than on the rights of its members, the form of social solidarity that was invoked by this notion of equal capacity for empathy and compassion sought to enroll from the most needy to the most affluent in the social space of Korea. Not only did this solidarity praise the notion of *noblesse oblige*—which, for example, sparked the founding of a number of private foundations who actively promoted corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organized “sharing campaigns”<sup>24</sup>—but also was to be enhanced further through the cases of what I will call the “grateful” and “sacrificial” giving from the most needy of the society. If foreign workers who volunteer to pay back their indebtedness to the benevolence of Korean society serve an example of the “grateful giving,” the figure of *gimbap granny*

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<sup>23</sup> *Shimin Ilbo*. “Foreign workers participate in the love of sharing.” January 30, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Examples include Beautiful Fund, CJ Nanum Foundation and Daum Foundation.

exemplified the “sacrificial giving.” By the *gimbap granny*, I refer to the series of appearances of senior women who lived on selling *gimbap*<sup>25</sup> and the like most of their life and got publicized widely for donating their entire life savings (that were usually accumulated by incredibly stingy lifestyles) for the education of needy youth. The dominant discourses that emerged around the phenomenon heavily moralized it by highlighting the sacrificial quality of the grannies’ giving that was accentuated by their own “difficult living” (*eomneunsallimedo*). In the end, their inhuman and inhumane frugality, so was usually said, was meant for a graceful sharing and “social return,” not for some selfish, endless, and purposeless accumulation.

The sociality that was imagined through the grateful and sacrificial giving by the needy not only resembles the “most intimate and unmediated” space of the social that was imagined long ago by Adam Smith (Muehlebach 2007) but also echoes the idea of “respectable poor” that emerged in the eighteenth century in Europe (Procacci 1991: 159). Giovanna Procacci notes the ways in which poverty and pauperism were treated differently in a “social economy” that emerged in the eighteenth century with the works by Sismondi and others. Unlike pauperism, poverty was not the object to be eliminated in the rationality of a social economy that aimed at “social equilibrium,” not at the elimination of the poor. Instead, poverty became the site of social government. Procacci says, “In these terms, the ‘poor’ could figure in the scenario only as virtuous exemplars of renunciation of pauperism and adhesion to the values of well-being. These model personages were evoked from time to time in the literature as the ‘respectable’ or ‘independent’ poor” (159). In an interesting way, I would like to note, the figure of the *gimbap granny* or the volunteering foreign

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<sup>25</sup> *Gimbap* is a popular Korean dish. In this context, “selling gimbap” refers to the typical means of livelihood accessible for (aged) women of a low income background.

worker reincarnates the idea of the “respectable poor” and the rationality of social government that is embedded in it by reducing poverty within the framework of individual agency. By praising almost acetic and self-effacing giving by the donors, the given discourse effectively moralizes poverty and neutralizes its politico-economic origin.

Notable, too, in this context, is the dominant use of the cliché, “the need to relieve the social distance,” that appeared in the discourses on minority and social difference among civil society groups and socially engaged academics since the 1990s. In such discourses, the “gap” was to be ameliorated by individuals’ sentimental engagement with the Other’s situation (Smith 2000 (1759)). For example, arguing for what he calls a “strengthening of solidarity through the sensitivity,” in a paper delivered at the Human Rights Symposium held in Jeju in 2000, Han In Seop said, “Direct contacts and conversations with minorities will make one to be aware of their problems and to be moved by their situation” (2000: 49). While Han focuses more on the propriety of attitudes that individuals in the position of the majority need to cultivate, another commentator went further than this by saying that, “Minority groups like to be helped when they are in need. But, they themselves can be the ones who help others” (Yoon 2002: 6). This kind of discourse emphasized the domain of affect as the means for achieving social solidarity and mobilized the reciprocity of compassion and care between different populations. As I will discuss next, in the context of migrant advocacy, such a society was thought to materialize through more volunteer work and donations by individual citizens. The idea of volunteering was based on the notion of equality as an equal ability to empathize and share the hardship of the other, which then nicely came to serve as an ideological support for the notion of participatory welfare.

## “Volunteer activists” and the Participatory Welfare

*“As the person who is principally interested in any event is pleased with our sympathy, and hurt by the want of it, so we, too, seem to be pleased when we are able to sympathize with him, and to be hurt when we are unable to do so”*  
(Adam Smith 2000 (1759): 13)

In her column entitled “‘I am relieved because you are there’: Ordinary individuals who help migrant workers,” Seok Won Jeong, the director of The Association for Migrant Workers’ Human Rights, a migrant center located in central Seoul, talks about her joy of encountering individual Koreans who help foreign workers “without any self interests.”<sup>26</sup> She says, “They are not the object of the media spotlight nor running for the human rights awards. They simply share their everyday lives with migrant workers.”<sup>27</sup> The examples of the good-willed individuals who bring her tremendous joy range from a taxi driver who forgot about his business hours to accompany a Pakistani man to Seok’s office located in the top floor of the building, an employer of a foreign worker who sought her assistance in helping his employee to receive the incomplete pay from the former employer, a lady who regularly brought her Pakistani neighbors to Seok’s office to get her assistance, and to a kiosk owner in Dongdaemoon who took care of the Iranians in the neighborhood who called her “mom”.<sup>28</sup> Seok ends her column by lauding the hope that these individuals of good will can bring to the society: their good deeds that do not ask for any reward bring

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<sup>26</sup> *Pressian*, June 14, 2007

<sup>27</sup> *Pressian*, June 14, 2007

<sup>28</sup> *Pressian*, June 14, 2007

hope to both the migrant workers working in a foreign country and the Korean activists like herself who assist them.<sup>29</sup>

In a similar vein, in an essay named “Making a happy relationship with your neighbor,”<sup>30</sup> Rev. Park Chun Eung of Ansan Migrants’ Center, a migrant center located in Ansan, defines what a person can do to create happiness in society:

“Those who create happiness in the world...have special interests and affection towards the marginalized and the socially vulnerable. Love can transform itself into justice...Creating happiness in the world cannot be done with a temporary act but requires continuous self-devotion.”

Many of the migrant centers in the greater Seoul area that I came to be acquainted with since 2003 were usually comprised of the following two groups: a small number of full time staff who focused on organizing the main programs and a large group of volunteers who assisted them and foreign workers in areas such as legal counseling, Korean language classes, and free medical and shelter services. Mostly coming from the local areas and as individuals and/or as part of volunteers’ associations, the volunteers made up the major source of manpower in the everyday activities of migrant centers. These good-willed and caring individuals, as praised in the above essays by Seok and Park, literally meant the “hope” to better the situation of foreign workers and the cause of migrant advocacy and, more broadly, the “happiness” of the society. The volunteers as the mobile subjects bridging the social gap between different populations certainly personified the social solidarity based on the direct contacts and affective engagements.

Here, I situate the volunteer, the carrier of social *hope* and *happiness*, from the framework of solidarity that was espoused by what was broadly named the “participatory

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<sup>29</sup> *Pressian*, June 14, 2007

<sup>30</sup> [http://migrant.or.kr/xe/?mid=column&page=14&document\\_srl=18655](http://migrant.or.kr/xe/?mid=column&page=14&document_srl=18655)

welfare” under the Participatory Government of the late president Roh Moo Hyun (2003-2008). According to Lee Jang Won, participatory welfare aims at:

“...providing the social protection for the unemployed and the socially vulnerable population (*sahoejeokchwiyakgyecheung*) by attracting the spontaneous participation from the market (enterprise) and the private social welfare facilities. It is an active welfare with a long-term outlook that aims to realize a social integration by creating jobs for the socially vulnerable and having them autonomously grow the economic pie for distribution (Kim 2005: 118).”

As a complementary revision of the “productive welfare,” the model of welfare administered by the previous government under the late president Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), the participatory welfare sought to further economize the state’s social expenses by promoting the participation and spontaneity of the private and the third sector. If productive welfare aimed at improving the quality of life of the recipients of welfare by promoting their employment and rehabilitation, the success of the participatory welfare relied on “procuring resources (e.g., social solidarity fund) that can minimize or avoid budget deficit, the spontaneous cooperation of regional governments, private welfare facilities, and education and training facilities and the system that motivates such a cooperation, and finally on whether all these can produce the added value that will enable rehabilitation” (Kim, 118). Premised on the optimal “harmony between the economy and the society” (Kim, 97), this model of welfarism mobilized further *responsibilization* of the third sector in the care of the employment and rehabilitation of the socially vulnerable population such as the unemployed aged and disabled and of social safety (e.g., Muehlebach 2007).

Volunteerism in Korea has a longer history, of course, which cannot be captured only from the angle of participatory welfarism. Nevertheless, talking about it in reference to the specific dynamics of the state-society relation allows us to better understand the



politico-economic role that altruism, good will, neighborly compassion, and love plays in changing contexts. For example, consider the following definition of volunteerism by *Beotimmok* (meaning “prop”), one of the ten volunteers’ associations that work for Ansan Migrants’ Center. Here, volunteers essentially constitute the human part of participatory welfare:

*What Is Volunteerism...?*<sup>31</sup>

1. *Individuals’ Self-Realization*: Through volunteerism, individuals can have the opportunity to meet with people of diverse backgrounds, exercise their ability, and thus enrich their life.
2. *Realization of Social Welfare through Facilities*: Volunteers help establish and run the welfare facility by assisting the staff. By promoting the socialization of the facilities, volunteers contribute to the realization of the social welfare.
3. *Local Solidarity through Household Services*: By assisting the disabled or the aged, volunteers can help solve individual problems, eliminate discriminative treatment and prejudices, and thus establish solidarity among local residents.
4. *Activation of Local Society*: Volunteers bring vitality to the society by practicing neighborly love.
5. *Development and Amendment of Social Policies*: Volunteering helps individuals to see the society in a larger framework, to have the ability to solve problems, and allows them to participate directly in the activities for improving the social system. These activities transform the society in a better way.
6. *Education on Welfare Society*: Volunteerism offers the opportunity to learn and educate about welfare society.

According to the above description, through volunteering, individual citizens realize their true self, help eliminate discrimination and prejudices, bring vitality to the society and thus consolidate social solidarity, and participate directly in the welfare through facilities and through individual contacts and in the development of social policies. Importantly, too, through volunteering activities, individuals not only practice welfare but also learn and

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<sup>31</sup> <http://old-migrant.or.kr/wood/6-1.htm>

teach about welfare society. The volunteer is the champion as well as the embodiment of the social solidarity that is promoted by the notion of participatory welfare that relies on greater participation of the third and private sector in the care of social security. The autonomous citizen takes care of the well-being of the society through volunteer work while their gratuitous labor assists the state government in keeping the optimal balance between “the economy and the society.”

On the other hand, the meaning of the volunteer went through a significant change in the 2000s, which, I would like to note, reflects another symptom of *responsibilization*. Specifically, I am concerned with the movement that appeared among the “progressive” and “politically correct” civic groups to replace *jawonbongsaja*, the term for volunteer, with *jawonhwaldongga*, meaning “volunteer activist.” These groups included various civic groups that relied on volunteering and ranged from large organizations such as the Beautiful Fund to small and more locally oriented civic groups such as Friends of Asia. One of the first things I learned when I began working at Friends of Asia was that the staff there call volunteers *jawonhwaldongga*, or volunteer activists, and treat them as equal members of the organization. Compared to *jawonbongsaja*, which has the implication that one is only secondarily involved, *jawonhwaldongga* elevated the status of the volunteer almost as the equal of the full time staff and activist and gave equal weight and importance to the works volunteers did. This switch radically reduced the difference between the full time staff and the volunteer to the extent that questions over how much time individuals spend for the organization and whether they are paid or not can be significantly downplayed as secondary and even *too worldly* relative to the individuals’ almost *sacred* will to participate and share. There also emerged strong atmosphere that saw those who

still use the old term as not only old-fashioned, but also unaware of the meaning and potential of volunteering within participatory citizenship and democracy—and, thus, in the progress of civil society. The shift gave greater meaning to volunteering from a secondary charity activity to a means to realize the true self of individuals and the true civic solidarity, thus offering practical support to the idea of the social welfare and well-being enabled by greater civic participation.

In her discussion on volunteering and care labor in Italy, Andrea Muehlebach says the citizenship that is promoted under the neoliberal welfare state demands “‘human’ experience of love and solidarity” (2007: 88). Unlike social citizenship of the old welfare system, this new model of citizenship that she calls “ethical citizenship” is not “dedicated to the equalization of citizens,” but is rather “built through compassion and solidarity” between those unequal parties” (88). Muehlebach’s discussion certainly pertains to Korea where, as I discussed so far, discourses of solidarity through sensitivity, affection, and reciprocal care have become widely mobilized. The form of sociality and solidarity that emerges through the idea of participatory welfare highlights and even sacralizes the “little hearts that want to share [with migrant workers] despite the [individual members’] different backgrounds and economic statuses (*gajingeot*).”<sup>32</sup> Such an emphasis on the common sentiment of solidarity that overcomes and overrides the social difference serves to redefine the meaning of equality as citizens’ equal capacity to empathize, share, give, and participate. This is precisely what makes the volunteer citizen an apt subject in the two political rationalities that constitute the notion of participatory welfare: participatory governance and neoliberal welfare. The success of participatory welfare relies on an

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<sup>32</sup> <http://old-migrant.or.kr/wood/1-1.htm>

effective mobilization of this form of equality. And, vice versa: the equality is *enabled* precisely when citizens activate their capacity to participate and share.

### **Migrant Empowerment and “Those who are not aware”**

While it does not aim at the equalization of citizens in the politico-economic domain per se, the politics that emerge in this context of participatory welfare are certainly far from dismissing the *moral* value of equality. Worthy to mention in this regard is how the term volunteer activist assumed more egalitarian relations, not only between the full time staff and volunteers, but also between volunteers and foreign workers. It sought to eliminate un-egalitarian ringing that *jawonbongsaja*, the old term for the volunteer, can convey: the volunteers who are involved in the old-style charity work for the “pitiful foreigners” and the foreign workers as the objects of such a charity.

The term volunteer activist was part of the turn towards politically correct language and representation that predominantly appeared since the 2000s. What I would like to note in this regard is how this politics of “feel good” equality also required proper cultivation of egalitarian, non-discriminative sensitivities among individuals. I have mentioned above how discourses on the solidarity with the socially weak emphasized the domains of affect and sensitivity. In this framework, while the question of equality was narrowly defined as non-discrimination, the actualization of equality was thought to be realized further through the cultivation and education of proper attitudes, awareness, and sensitivity among individuals. Various educational programs that were organized by civic groups such as Sarangbang Group for Human Rights in the theme of anti-discriminative sensitivities serve

a good example of the technologies of citizenship (Cruikshank 1999) that produce citizens who can govern themselves properly on behalf of the social harmony.

Within the context of migrant advocacy, while migrant centers sought to cultivate non-discriminative and egalitarian attitudes among the individual citizens with their own volunteers as the main target group, they aimed to “empower” migrant workers by offering “leadership programs” in which migrants can learn about the context of their own exploitation, e.g., global capitalism and the migration of capital and labor, and of their own rights—recognized either at the international level by the UN and ILO or by the host state of Korea under the Industrial Trainee System and/or the Employment Permit System. For migrant centers, educating citizens of the value of equality, on the one hand, and empowering migrant workers by helping them aware of their own exploitation and rights, on the other, became another mode of “shortening the gap” between the citizens and the migrants. For example, in this context, the problem of paternalism was closely linked to the problem of empowerment among migrants. While discussing the capacity enhancement for the “multicultural youth” at a workshop organized by Rainbow Youth Center in 2009, Cho Youn Ryung rephrased this by saying, “Paternalism and charity all become barriers to the empowerment of migrants.”

However, the political meaning of such empowerment is still ambivalent. The discourse around empowerment soon generated two categories of migrant worker: those who are aware and conscious and those who are not yet so, i.e., the famous “false consciousness.” When I asked him to explain the seeming irony between the self-evidence of “migrants as autonomous subjects” and the education of rights awareness aimed at migrants, Choi Hyun Mo of the Korea Migrant Workers’ Human Rights Center in Incheon

reiterated the instrumental role of migrant centers in assisting “migrants to be aware of their own human rights and helping them in changing the system.”<sup>33</sup> What is noteworthy here is that the very process of empowerment presumes a process of “enlightenment.” Given the context of global neoliberal capitalism, it is the meaning of this enlightenment that appears ambivalent. While observing a similar situation that involves human rights NGOs and the rural poor in the context of sustainable development, Pheng Cheah notes the ways in which concerned NGOs problematize the ignorance of the poor as the barrier to their own empowerment (2006: 168): ““one of the major issues is how to overcome the barrier of ignorance on the part of the rural poor about their rights, including the right to organize [, because] to make matters worse, the poor do not know they are poor” (2006: 168).

While not dismissing the necessity and importance of talking about the rights of migrant workers, it becomes important to rethink migrant centers’ call for the empowerment of migrant workers in the context where the practical validity of exercising migrant workers’ rights is already seriously limited by various instrumental relations that constitute the hierarchy of the international division of labor and by the regulation of human capital by labor-sending and receiving states and other actors through techniques of bio-power (Cheah 2006). The real question that seems to appear here is not simply whether this empowerment is possible or not, but what that discourse of empowerment does in this particular context (e.g., Asad on “human rights discourses” (2000)).

Here, I reconsider the call for the empowerment of migrant workers within the context where the activities of migrant centers as the voluntary welfare agency take care of the margins of the “state care” and thus complement the state’s economic interests. From

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<sup>33</sup> In an interview conducted in 2007

the perspective of biopolitical hierarchy and exclusion, foreign migrant workers are perhaps most denied of the state's welfaristic responsibility. Unlike marriage immigrants who have emerged as an important part of Korean *bios*, migrant workers are mostly excluded from the state's consideration for welfaristic care. Nonetheless, the activity of migrant centers and their volunteers as the primary care provider for migrant workers—while it is not explicitly promoted by the state—yet significantly supplements the state's interest in promoting “sound” industrial relations and a good quality of human capital at its minimal involvement and cost. The services that are organized by migrant centers from free language and culture classes to leadership programs not only “empower” individual migrants but also, and by doing so, “upgrade” them into “learned labor” while free medical and shelter services improve their “capacity to work” (the idea of rehabilitation). All these services given to migrant workers from the civic sector work to complement the state interests and the well-being of the local population that relies on the labor of these migrant workers.

### **Summary**

*“It [liberalism] is a form of government that seeks to minimize government in the name of society.”*  
(Pheng Cheah 2006: 256)

Thus far, I have explored the ways in which volunteering and the civic solidarity that it mobilizes emerged as the site of social government in the context of migrant advocacy.

First, I noted how the representation of the foreign worker as “our neighbor” and/or the “socially weak” worked to promote volunteering and donations from individual citizens. The solidarity and sociality that thus emerged, however, was reliant on the notion

of equality as an individual's equal capacity to empathize, share, and participate (in giving). This notion of civic solidarity that praises the grateful and sacrificial givings and promotes affective equality moralizes social inequality and neutralizes its politico-economic origins.

Next, I moved on to discuss how this new notion of solidarity and sociality is reflected in migrant centers' mobilization of civic benevolence for migrants. While the civic assistance done on behalf of migrant workers was, strictly speaking, not a direct part of the government's welfare policy, the specific discourses and practices that emerged around the activities of migrant centers still served as a good example of the technologies of participatory welfare—defined as the process of transferring more responsibilities to the “civil society.” It is in this context that it becomes important and necessary to intervene in the promotion of good will, neighborly love and solidarity and to readdress the place “civil society” has in these claims.

Lastly, I briefly examined how the politics of solidarity and volunteerism was accompanied by the discourses that highlight the importance of cultivating egalitarian attitudes among Korean citizens and of empowering migrant (workers). I sought to rethink the meaning of such an empowerment in the context of participatory welfare where migrant centers discipline migrant workers into a learned labor force and thus supplement the state economy. Such an empowerment, however, exists amidst tension, which can be best exemplified when the claims of rights by migrant workers make the very state instrumentality bare.



## CHAPTER 4

### “MULTICULTURAL FAMILY,” SOCIAL CRISIS, AND THE CARE OF THE NEW BIOS

*“The rise of the social and the crisis of the family are the two fold political effect of these same elementary causes.”*  
(Delueze 1979: xi)

#### *Scene #1:*

(In an elementary school classroom. A girl narrates.)

“Today is parents’ day.  
My classmate Gwang Joon has not finished drawing his mom’s face.  
Today his mother seems to be late.  
People say Gwang Joon’s mother is different,  
But in my eyes she is just another mother like mine.”

(Adult woman’s narration)

“Republic of Korea is one family.”  
“Multicultural Family Love Campaign is provided by *Yuhan Corps* and *Yuhan Family*.”

#### *Scene #2:*

(Photo slides of women migrants and their families)

“You and I have different skin colors and languages.  
So our beginnings were different.  
But now we breathe in the same air,  
Share food with each other,  
And are creating the future of our family and of the Republic of Korea  
“We” who live and share together  
We are *iussachon* (“cousin neighbors”).”

“This campaign was brought to you by the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family.”

*Scene #3:*

(A Korean woman and a Filipina are reading something together in a typical farmhouse of rural Korea.)

Korean woman: (in a very slow voice) “Practice ten times what you missed.”

Narration: “Everyday Minji’s mother reads the teacher’s message for Joonho’s mother who is not good with the Korean language.”

(A boy of mixed ethnicity plays with other kids.)

Narration: “Thanks to your love, Joonho can grow up too as the dream of the Republic of Korea.”

Filipina woman: “Sister, thank you.”

Narration: “Multicultural society is a society with more love.”  
“Korea Broadcasting Advertisement Corporation.”

In 2008-9, when I did my long-term fieldwork in the greater Seoul area, I would often encounter the above kind of public education campaigns on TV and in public spaces such as subway and train stations. Provided by the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family and by private social welfare agencies and socially engaged corporations, these public campaign advertisements promoted an affective and familial mode of social integration of “marriage immigrants” and their “multicultural children.” By using the metaphors of family and *iussachon*, these campaigns asked the viewer to embrace marriage immigrants and their children as an important part of the “national kinship” and give them familial attention, love and care.

This chapter seeks to intervene in the coming of the state’s explosive attention on marriage immigrants and the multicultural family and of its promotion of the idea of a “multicultural society” via such an affective social relationship. Although the international

marriage between Korean men and foreign women through marriage brokers had existed since the mid to late 1990s, it was only around the mid 2000s when the state government of Korea began actively supporting marriage immigrants and “multicultural families,” as they were named in the state programs. I pay special attention to the fact that the emergence of this governmental interest in the multicultural family coincides with the problematization of Korea’s decreasing fertility and rapid aging—noted as one of the worst depopulation and aging rates in the world. Specifically, this chapter is motivated by the following questions: What are the ways in which the state government appropriate and use the term “multicultural”? How does it respond to the human rights violations and domestic violence against migrant women that were often problematized by local critics and media? What are the ways in which the critics of the state programs seek to redefine and rework the state’s use of “multicultural”?

Many of the local (feminist) critics have denounced the state’s multicultural programs as a process of patriarchal nation-building that confines marriage immigrants in the boundary of familial and reproductive roles. Their critiques often described both the state and provincial governments and the spouses and the family-in-law of the migrant women as the agents of national patriarchy that force them to become like Korean women and abide by Korean cultural and family values. In my observations, however, many of these local critics seem to overlook the fact that the state government has been increasingly interested in realizing gender equity in the family (including the multicultural family) and in the “empowerment” of women (including migrant women). Or, even when they acknowledge the fact, they have often disregarded it as a mere “lip service.” In looking at the state’s attention on marriage immigrants and their multicultural families, this chapter

seeks to offer an alternative view that does not rely on the language of national patriarchy oppressing (migrant) women. In other words, I suggest we see the state's intervention in the multicultural family not so much as a revival of some nationalist and patriarchal familism but rather as part of the state's consistent interest in the family as a strategic site of governing the society and population. In doing so, I approach the state and its critical interlocutors' mutual interest in the protection of human rights of migrant women from domestic violence and their common emphasis on the empowerment and capacity building not as a vehicle to migrant women's "liberation," *but* from the framework of governing social difference and risk. I also re-read the use of familial metaphors that frequently appear in the promotion of the integration of the multicultural family (as seen in the campaigns above) not so much as the mobilization of patriarchal familism but more as the governance of the social via affective solidarity.

### **Commercial Marriages, Domestic Violence and Migrant Women**

Compared to the labor migration that started around the late 1980s, "marriage immigration" in Korea has a relatively short history emerging around the late 1990s. Distinguished from other types of international and interracial marriages that have existed before, this new marriage usually involved Korean men and foreign women who rely on brokers to arrange their marriage as middlemen. In 2007, about 60 % of these women were from China (many of them being ethnic Koreans), about 13% from Vietnam, and about 5% from the Philippines. Other countries of origin included Cambodia, Mongolia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Uzbekistan.

From the very beginning, international marriage of this kind has been heavily stigmatized as a form of “purchasing marriage” and/or “human trafficking.” While the issue of international marriage has been always filled with shocking cases of domestic violence that sometimes resulted in the death of the women, the first half of its history is particularly filled with media led sensations. As was widely publicized in the media, these marriages involved the “male client’s” visit to the country of his choice to spend a few days where he goes through a process of “bridal selection” out of twenty or thirty “candidates.” Following the final selection and a simple wedding ceremony that is arranged in her hometown, the bride goes through the paper work necessary to enter Korea, and the marriage becomes complete when she arrives in the country to meet with her husband.

The presence of marriage brokering agencies that play a crucial role in every procedure from the first meeting in the bride’s country to her entrance into Korea shaped the heavily commercial aspect of these marriages. Before it was finally banned in 2008 for reasons related to human rights violations, commercialization of sex, and sex discrimination, one could easily encounter advertisement banners in the streets across the country, which said: “Marry a Vietnamese lady.” Such a phrase would be often followed by another that said, “They never run away,” “They are respectful of parents-in-law,” and/or “First marriage, second marriage, or the disabled: Anyone is welcome.” Much criticized for their representation that reduces the foreign women into some kind of commodity, these banners somehow mirrored the average expectation of the male clients: women who can take care of the parents-in-law and who do not take advantage of the marriage as a pretext to enter the country. By advertising the truthfulness of the

“Vietnamese ladies,” these advertisements also reinforced the existing stereotypes of women of different ethnicities and nationalities.

Notably, and as the above advertisement alludes, most of the male clients of the marriage brokering services allegedly faced difficulty in finding marriage partners in socially more acceptable ways for various reasons. The stereotypes of the men that arose with the increase of international marriage said that they are either poor, too old, disabled, live in rural areas, and/or are seeking a second or third marriage. It was also said that the male clients usually paid high bride fees to the agencies and regularly send a certain amount of money to the bride’s family as part of their marriage agreement. In some cases, this created a situation where the husband and his family expect the foreign wife to “perform” in accordance with the money paid to bring her to Korea. Local NGOs who provide services to women migrants would note that the money involved in realizing the marriages became one of the significant factors in the rapidly increasing divorce rates among the international couples. For example, when interviewed by *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, a staff member working in a local shelter for migrant women said, “Some of the Korean husbands of these women have the wrong idea in thinking that they can do whatever to the women since they paid a lot of money to the brokers” (July 7, 2008). He continued, “there are many cases where these men demand things of the foreign women they would not if it were Korean women.”<sup>34</sup>

By around the mid 2000s, the commercial aspect involved, the visible inequality among the couples, and the public image of the men as “losers” all worked to enhance the negativity and abnormality associated with these kinds of marital unions. A few cases of

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<sup>34</sup> *Kyung Hyang Shinmun* (July 7, 2008)

domestic violence and murder that were widely publicized by the media also played a significant role in creating public concerns in the safety of the women migrants and in the need to regulate the booming brokering industry and raise awareness among migrant women's spouses and their families. For example, when a twenty year old Vietnamese woman was killed by her forty some, mentally ill Korean husband within a week after her entrance to the country in 2010, public concerns were again raised on the subject of regulating international marriages and the brokerages.

Since 2006, the state government has increasingly sought to intervene in domestic violence and human rights violations by providing hot line services for migrant women (through the Ministry of Gender Equality) and by regulating, but not banning, the booming marriage brokering industry (mandating their registration). Also responding to the increasing social prejudices, state government and others sought to balance the public image of international/-racial couples and their family by presenting "happy stories" of individual couples. For example, *Love in Asia* was aired every week through KBS, the national broadcasting service, focused on showing individual international couples' "love stories" and how they are not at all "different" from other couples and families.

Above all, it was the Multicultural Family Support Act that was introduced in 2008, which mirrored the ways in which the state government wanted to deal with the problem of the multicultural family. It declared the state's interest in alleviating the inequality inherent among "multicultural" couples and the marginalization of migrant women by emphasizing proper education of the spouses and the family-in-law and migrant women's capacity enhancement. Importantly, too, it sought to remedy the social stigma attached to the multicultural family and the children by promoting "multicultural education" in other parts

of the population. Below, I will first discuss how the state's increasing interest in assisting migrant women and multicultural families emerged out of its increasing recognition of their economic and reproductive value and how the emergence of the state measures on the new population produced civic skepticism and critiques that in turn created the binary between the "genuine multiculturalism" and the "assimilationism in disguise of multiculturalism."

### **Recognition of Value Versus Recognition of Difference**

By the mid 2000s, international marriage rapidly increased from 3.7% of total marriages in 2000 to 11.4% in 2004.<sup>35</sup> In 2007, 40% of the men in the farming and fishing industry were said to have foreign wives.<sup>36</sup> The rapid increase in the number of international marriage coincides with the growing recognition both by the state and provincial governments in the economic and reproductive value of marriage immigrants and their multicultural children.

It was perhaps the provincial governments who first recognized the immediate value of international marriage. In rural areas that have been undergoing a serious labor shortage, marriage immigrants and their children were considered to be the new resource to solve the problem. In a workshop on "Marriage Immigrants and Human Resource Development" held in the Center for Asian Women at Sookmyung Women's University in 2008, Choi Joon Ho from Daegu Kyungbook Human Resource Development Assistance Center described the economic utility of marriage immigrants as follows: "The children of the women will constitute important manpower in rural areas in the future." According to Kim

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<sup>35</sup> *The 1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Basic Plan, 2006-2010* (2006: 51)

<sup>36</sup> Park Nan Sook (2006), "Services for the Multicultural Family by Lifecycles."



Hyun Mee, in 1992 some provincial governments had already began encouraging rural bachelors to join marriage tours to China (2007: 109). Later on in the 2000s, provincial governments continued to encourage international marriage by giving subsidies to rural bachelors. According to Han K, by 2007, sixty city and provincial governments adopted laws that promote and subsidize international marriage (Kim HM 2007: 110).

At the level of the state government, as many have noted, international marriage increasingly appeared as an alternative to the problem of decreasing fertility and rapid aging. Before it was transferred to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the first department of Multicultural Family was under the Low Fertility and Aging Section of the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family, thus clearly revealing the state's rationality vis-à-vis marriage immigrants and their multicultural families (See also Kim HJ 2007: 67).

Around this time, the state government began actively promoting international marriage by holding informational expos for potential bridegrooms and seeking to optimize the industry by mandating the registration of individual brokering agencies and by introducing pre-education programs for the potential spouses of migrant women.

However, the state and provincial governments' investment in international marriage and the reproductive value of the multicultural family met continuous criticisms from groups working for migrant women, i.e., *ijuyeoseongdanche*, and feminist academics. These groups had been already denouncing the international marriage through brokers as "women trafficking" and human rights violations. They argued that the provincial governments' subsidization of rural bachelors in finding marriage partners cannot be a serious solution to the depopulation and underdevelopment in rural areas (e.g., Han GY 2007a; Kim HM 2007). More importantly, it exacerbates the "commoditization of migrant

women” and is based on “patriarchal idea that sees migrant women as the instrument for reproduction and elderly care” (Han GY 2007a). When the state government announced a series of legal measures to assist marriage immigrants and multicultural families in 2006-8, these groups denounced the state’s overture as an attempt to assimilate migrant women into Korea’s national patriarchy and reduce them within the boundary of the family. For example, discussing “Measures of Social Integration and Assistance for Women Marriage Immigrants’ Family” that was prepared by the state government in April 2006, Han Gook Yeom, the founder of Women Migrants’ Human Rights Center, argued as follows (2007b):

“The multicultural policies that are pushed ahead by the state and local governments including this one seem to be yet driven by ‘assimilationism’ and focus more on the integration of marriage immigrants into Korean family than on the protection of their individual dignity and human rights—while they nominally demand the resolution of discrimination....Here, the question we have to ask is if it is right to force them to Koreanize themselves and assimilate them into the patriarchal Korean family system under the pretext of social integration.”

Local women’s groups, including Han’s, especially criticized Korean language proficiency as the necessary condition for the naturalization of migrant women and the Korean culture classes that were organized as part of their integration process as the evidence of the state assimilationism and its efforts to Koreanize migrant women.

Interestingly, when arguing against the state’s “multicultural programs,” these groups often presumed the opposition between “genuine multiculturalism” and “disingenuous multiculturalism.” The state’s assistance for marriage immigrants and multicultural families, it was argued, is indeed “assimilationism in disguise of multiculturalism” (Kim YO 2007: 136). The state programs for multicultural families “based on *jus sanguinis* and nationalism” “ultimately aims at protecting ‘the patrilineality of the Korean nation’” and thus are “no more than the state strategy of governing

immigrant groups” (Kim YO, 136). Echoing the prevalent concerns of the civic groups advocating for migrant workers, another critic notes how “Korea’s state-led multiculturalism is still not free from the nationalist ideology of pure blood” for the state government actively tries to integrate only “the foreigners who are in blood relationship with Koreans such as marriage immigrants and mixed persons,” “while yet discriminating against and/or indifferent to ethnic Chinese or migrant workers” (Kim HJ 2007: 76).

It is obviously important to recognize the fact that the state’s programs for marriage immigrants emerged as “measures for population control” (Kim HJ, 67; Kim YO, 134) and are based on the recognition of their reproductive and economic value. However, I am reluctant to reduce it all to a “national patriarchal project.” At the same time, and at the practical level, the binary between the genuine multiculturalism and the disingenuous multiculturalism of the Korean government can be misleading. Here, it is important to recognize that in the first place the state’s use of the term *damunhwa* or “multicultural” has been far from suggesting multiculturalism as the new political ideology to define the Korean state. Rather, it has been always used as the adjective to refer to a particular group of the population, e.g., *damunhwa gajok* or *damunhwa gajeong* (“multicultural family”) or *damunhwa adong* (“multicultural children”). In this way, instead of assuming some disingenuous intention of the state government that contradicts the spirit of “multiculturalism”—whatever it may be—it becomes necessary to recognize that the state multicultural programs emerged out of its rather consistent efforts to deal with and intervene in the emergent problem of international marriage and in the massive emergence of a racially and ethnically mixed population. In this way, when the state government and its ministries repeatedly invoke the phrase *damunhwa gongsaeng sahoe* (“multicultural,

cohabiting society”), an important question to consider is, not whether it is from genuine intention or not, but *what form of governance* is being activated and promoted by that given term.

While it may not help so much to see the state rationality of governance vis-à-vis the multicultural family, the binary between “genuine multiculturalism” and “disingenuous multiculturalism,” that was often promoted by local critics, had a “real” life. What is important to see is how the term *damunhwa* became the object of such a heated debate in the mid to late 2000s. When I worked at Friends of Asia in 2003-4, the term *damunhwa* was already in use among some migrant centers but more in the context of multicultural education programs aimed at Koreans. By 2006, the state and provincial governments were looking for a new term to replace *honhyeorin*, or “mixed person,” which had been criticized by civic and academic groups for being discriminative towards the concerned population.<sup>37</sup> Around this time, it was the term “multicultural family” that was considered to be one of the least discriminative and derogatory and hence came to be used in the government sectors. Government’s appropriation of the term *damunha* obviously came with various programs aimed at marriage immigrants and multicultural families and with the new apparatus of multicultural programs that encompassed not only many of the existing migrant centers but also local welfare facilities and cultural and educational institutes.

In an interview conducted in 2009, Lee Eunha, who works at Seong Dong Foreign Workers’ Center, told me she felt “betrayed” ever since the term *damunhwa* became such a catchword with the coming of the state and non-state programs. She expected the recognition of multiculturalism would bring “real change” but instead it was used to

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<sup>37</sup> *My Daily*, April 11 2006, “What will replace the term mixed person?”

“remarginalize” the multicultural family. The sentiment expressed by Lee is not only shared by most of the critics of the state multicultural programs, but also is the key to understanding the opposition between genuine multiculturalism and fake multiculturalism that has been promoted by them. I argue this assumption of the opposition made up another important reality in the multicultural scene in Korea as follows: First, the presumed gap and/or binary was used to differentiate civil society from the state, and, more specifically, civil society organized multicultural programs from the state programs for marriage immigrants and multicultural families. Second, it tended to emphasize the domain of “culture” as opposed to the state’s (some “disingenuous”) political intentions. For example, in stressing the role of “civil society,” some of the activists I met expressed their fear of *damunhwa* “being politically used by the government.” Some even told me that, in the *damunhwa* situation in Korea there is no “culture” but only “politics.” Third, that binary always assumed the presence of a model and/or textbook multiculturalism outside the country, thus leading to the numerous seminars held to discuss the cases of other countries such as Australia and Canada and the invitation of the “multicultural specialists” from overseas. Last, and in relation to the second and third points, it was almost always narrowed down to the importance of multicultural education aimed at majority Koreans and their cultivation of “multicultural awareness and sensitivity.” Interestingly, however, the state government (especially through the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism) also placed an emphasis on “culture,” seriously studied overseas models, and promoted the importance of multicultural education has been seriously overlooked and/or downplayed by these critics.

Below, I will look at the ways in which the state's emergent interest in marriage immigrants is broadly shaped by its concern with the recent transformations with the family. In this framework, the state multicultural programs appear as a response to what has been diagnosed by both the state and non-state actors as a crisis of the society caused by the phenomenon of decreasing fertility and rapid aging. Without looking at the specific ways in which the state seeks to restructure the society and reestablish the family, one only overemphasizes the power of the "Korean patriarchal nation" oppressing migrant women. Below, I consider the state's growing concern with the human rights and capacity enhancement of marriage immigrants at face value without assuming some disingenuous intention or hidden strategy of (patriarchal) domination. But, by doing so, I argue for another way of looking at the workings of (the state) power.

### **Preventive Welfare and the Multicultural Family**

As briefly mentioned above, it was in 2006 when the state government became more actively involved in the issue of international marriage and providing support for women migrants. With the coming of state programs, migrant women started being called by the new name of "marriage immigrants" and their family as "multicultural family." Terms such as "marriage immigrants" and "multicultural family" not only gradually replaced old terms such as "migrant women," "Kosian family," or "international marriage family," but also defined the multicultural landscape of Korea where the state government played a paramount role. Basically, it was only when it launched its programs to support what it called a "multicultural family" that public discussion on multiculturalism began erupting on a mass scale in the country. In this way, and as I discuss briefly above, discourses on

multiculturalism in Korea have been inherently shaped by the public concerns around the presence of marriage immigrants and their racially mixed families and questions over how to build a society that accommodate and govern the changing social reality.

I have mentioned above how the state multicultural programs cannot be understood separately from its broader plan to deal with the newly emergent problem of “low fertility and rapid aging” and with the rapid transformation of population and the family. It was around the mid 2000s when the state government actively began engaging with the given problem. Specifically, in 2005, the state government prepared what is known as the “Low Fertility and Aging Bill” that aims at “maintaining the component ratio and level of population that secures the state’s continuous growth” (Kim HJ 2007: 71). Notably, the basic structure of the “Measure for Marriage Immigrant Support” (2006), the first state policy regarding marriage immigrants and their children, was prepared by the Committee on Low Fertility and Aging Society, which clearly reveals that the state’s interest in the group is shaped by its concern with population change (Kim HJ, 66-67). Here, it is necessary to look at the ways in which the state government evaluates the current crisis in the population and reevaluates and redefines the role of the family, and how it organizes its intervention in marriage immigrants and multicultural families within its renewed agenda on the family.

What I am especially concerned with is the *1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Basic Plan, 2006-2010* (*geongang gajeong gibbon gyehoek*) that was prepared by the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2006 and concerns eleven other ministries.<sup>38</sup> According to the plan, the family in Korea is now undergoing the two following transformations: a reduction in the family

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<sup>38</sup> This includes the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, of Education, of Justice, of Information and Communication, of Public Administration and Security, of Labor, of Foreign Affairs, of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, and of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.

size, i.e., the increase in smaller households, and the diversification in the family forms, e.g., single parent household, remarriage, and international marriage.<sup>39</sup> This transformation is noted to have brought about a crisis in the family's reproductive function, its nurturing and educational function, and its role as a welfare provider, which in turn produces new forms of "social risks" and makes it necessary for the state to come up with a new family policy.<sup>40</sup>

The plan notes how the family is now facing "functional overloading" due to the increase in women's employment and nuclearization of family. It argues for the need to "restructure not only the family but also the broader social environment including the enterprises and local societies in a gender equitable and family-friendly way" (2006: 10). While it argues for the redistribution of the caring function of the family to other sectors, it emphasizes their "functional deficit" (*gineungjeok gyeolpip*) when it comes to the emergence of "diverse forms of families" such as single parent families, multicultural families, and the family of the aged, of the disabled, of the North Korean "settlers," and with adopted children. This issue, according to the plan, cannot be overlooked anymore as it was in the existing policy that focuses on the traditionally vulnerable groups such as the child head households and the senior single households (14). The "diverse families" emerge as the new currents of the "socially vulnerable populations," who need the state's care and support. The social safety now significantly depends on their functional reestablishment as family, their social integration (especially in the case of multicultural family), and their rehabilitation and self-reliance (in the case of the senior family and the family of the disabled). Especially noteworthy is the notion of "preventive family policy"

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<sup>39</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Basic Plan, 2006-2010* (2006: 2-4)

<sup>40</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Basic Plan, 2006-2010* (2006: 5-10)



that appears in the plan (14). Absent in the existing family policy that is based on “minimal intervention on the family” and the notion of “aftercare,” this notion of the preventive family policy should be what defines the new policy on the family (14).

Looking at *The 1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Basic Plan, 2006-2010*, it becomes clear how the state’s various services for the multicultural family emerged out of its concern not only with the new population but more broadly with the crisis of the family and, thus, of the society at large. While the family reemerges as the site for the social government, the society itself needs to be restructured to *share the caring and nurturing function of the family*. Especially with the diverse families, it becomes important to help reestablish their functional capacity as family. In an interview conducted in 2008, Lee Gi Jeong, the director of the Department of Multicultural Policy at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sports at that time, reiterated the state’s concern with the multicultural family as such as follows:

“The women marriage immigrant is a social phenomenon unique to Korea. This group emerged due to the labor shortage in rural areas, low fertility, and the difficulty faced by the farmers in finding marriage partners. This group usually stands below the average in their social, educational, and economic capacity. They usually lack the capacity for self-reliance. This is why it becomes necessary to support them actively and for the state to intervene.”

In “Making Multi-Cultural Society: Policy Tasks for Korean Society and the Cases of Germany and the US,” a symposium held in May 2008, Park Nan Sook from the Department of Multicultural Family at the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family specified the state plan on the multicultural family with what is called “Services by Life Cycle” (*saengae jugibyeol matchumhyeong seobiseu*). These services are divided by “Pre-Arrival Marriage Preparation Period,” “Family Relationship Establishing Period,” “Settlement and Child Nurturing Period,” and “Capacity Enhancement Period”:

Table 1. “Services for the Multicultural Family by Lifecycles” (Park 2006: 59)

<i>Life Cycles</i>	<i>Services Provided</i>
Pre-Arrival Marriage Preparation Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulation of international marriage brokering agencies</li> <li>• Counseling and informational sessions on life in Korea for marriage immigrants</li> <li>• Education of the Korean spouses</li> </ul>
Family Relationship Establishing Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Korean language education</li> <li>• Maternity support (at pregnancy and child birth)</li> <li>• Translation/interpretation services</li> <li>• Crisis intervention</li> <li>• Family integration education</li> </ul>
Settlement and Child Nurturing Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child raising support</li> <li>• Employability enhancement                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agricultural skills training</li> <li>- Employment training</li> <li>- IT training (<i>jeongbohwa gyoyuk</i>)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Capacity Enhancement Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment Assistance</li> <li>• Training for fostering migrant women as the leaders of multicultural social integration</li> </ul>

According to the above plan, the state seeks to intervene in the life of the marriage immigrant and the multicultural family from the pre-arrival period to the post-child nurturing period. The emphasis is given not only on their proper integration into family and child nurturing—which has been foremost criticized by women’s groups as confining the women migrants into the boundary of family—but also on their “empowerment” through the employment and capacity enhancement—which has been equally proposed by the same groups. It also responds to the criticisms on the harmful effects of brokering agencies by regulating the industry and on the domestic violence and the misbehavior of the husbands of migrant women by mandating their education in the pre-arrival period and intervening in a time of “crisis.” Therefore, the focus of intervention is not simply and only on the migrant woman but on the proper integration of each member into the family (e.g., family integration education). In this way, the preventive family policy aims to achieve the following: The (re-)gaining of the function as a family among the “vulnerable families” and the securing of their self-reliance and individual productivity.

In the workshop on “Marriage Immigrants and Human Resource Development,” held in the Center for Asian Women at Sookmyung Women’s University in 2008, that I mentioned above, Lee Geum Soon, another official from the Department of Multicultural Family, began her presentation with a little personal note: “At present, there are about a hundred twenty thousand marriage immigrants living in the country...Personally, I used to have pride in the idea of a homogenous nation...However, since I was located in this department, I came to question my own thought.” Lee continued by saying, “in the early 2000s, the focus [of the government] was on assisting [marriage immigrants] to live as

Koreans,” “however, by 2007, we realized it was impossible to Koreanize them.” “Doing so [Koreanizing migrants] was also perceived as a significant barrier to their human rights.” Lee ended this part by saying, “what is most important is mixing-and-coexisting (*eouullyeo saraganeun*),” thus reemphasizing the idea of “social integration.” According to her presentation, the new emphasis was given on the education of the husbands and the family-in-law, giving assistance to the multicultural children at school age, developing migrants’ employability as well as regulating the marriage brokers. Interestingly, in this workshop, it was the presentation by Oh Jae Rim, the director of the Center for Asian Women at Sook Myong, that most strongly argued for the importance of human resource development among the migrant women. Oh argued for the need to “grasp, organize and develop their capacity and develop appropriate programs.”

With the coming of the state services for the multicultural family, the number of the Multicultural Family Centers, formerly called the Marriage Immigrants’ Family Center, increased to more than a hundred by the year 2008.<sup>41</sup> These facilities provide various welfare services to the multicultural family and were located throughout the country and varied greatly in organization: some of them were newly established especially in the areas with no existing social facilities, while many others were added to the existing local welfare, educational, and cultural facilities who received subsidies from the government. It was around this time when many migrant centers and migrant women’s centers as those who were traditionally engaged with providing welfare services for migrants began receiving more funding from the government. In 2008-9, this apparatus of “multicultural care and integration” literally exploded, often times resulting in the repetition of so many similar services offered by different facilities in one area. Sometimes, I would hear

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<sup>41</sup> Rainbow Youth Center (2008), 127.

individual staff of migrant centers making negative comments about the situation where migrants almost became like “shoppers” looking for better services or about the inadequacy and/or lack of ability of some of the facilities and their staff who were new to migrant related work.

Here, some of the strong critiques that emerged among migrant centers focused on problematizing the government’s lack of expertise, experience, and efficiency and its obvious inability to rationalize and centralize the multicultural programs scattered throughout different state ministries. In criticizing the state government, activists promoted civil society organizations specializing in migrant affairs, e.g., migrant centers, as the primary agencies to deal with multicultural and migrant related affairs. For example, in an interview I conducted in March 2009, Lee Young, the director of the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea (JCMK), the largest association of migrant centers, criticized the state government’s lack of efficiency, expertise, and immediacy by saying, “We who work in centers are right in the field, close to what is happening. The state officials cannot be as responsive as we are to the demands of migrants.”

While so many critiques appeared from the non-state sectors in 2008-9, the biggest irony seemed to be that they spoke more or less the same language as the state government. When I met him for the last time before coming back to the US in the winter of 2009, Kim Dae Gwon at Friends of Asia attested to it by saying that capacity enhancement and migrant empowerment were becoming the most popular project among migrant centers. While some of these empowerment programs more or less focused on enhancing migrant women’s employability, economic self-reliance, and necessary trainings, e.g., Korean language classes, computer classes, and various other skills training, others, especially

those who relied on the language of “cultural difference,” emphasized the “cultural empowerment” of migrant women through activities such as play, painting, and video making. For example, at “Vision and Policy Tasks for Multicultural Society” held in October 2008, Kim Young Ok of Migrant Women Human Rights Forum and one of the vociferous critics of the state programs argued for the “capacity enhancement of migrant women through culture and arts education.” Kim also argued that multicultural education needs to be a “two way education” that “upgrades the citizens’ basic culture (*gibon soyangeul sanghyang jojeong*),” on the one hand, and “empowers migrant women through arts and culture such as video activism, storytelling, and play,” on the other. Interestingly, however, Kim’s notion of “two way education” reverberated Article 5 of the Multicultural Family Support Act (2008) entitled “Promotion of Awareness of the Multicultural Family.” This article specifically stipulated the duty of the state and provincial governments to “prevent social discrimination and prejudice against the multicultural family and take measures such as multicultural education and promotion that helps the social members recognize and respect cultural diversity.”

### **“Multicultural Cohabiting Society” and the Limit of Empowerment**

*“... ‘happiness’ now appears part of an articulated project which brings into relation distinct sectors of the population and takes control of their reciprocal connections”*  
(Procacci 1991: 156)

In his foreword to *The Policing of Families* (Donzelot 1979), Gilles Deleuze notes how the rise of the social created mutations with and in the family and how they had different implications among the rich and the poor: “the marital duty of the poor wife will cause her to turn back toward her husband and children (to prevent the husband from going

to the cabaret, etc.), whereas that of the rich wife will give her expansive control functions and a role of “missionary” in the field of charitable work” (1979: xii). This framework is helpful in understanding the rationality of governance that is manifested in *The 1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Plan, 2006-2010* and in the state services aimed at the marriage immigrant and multicultural family. In Korea in the 2000s, decreasing fertility and rapid aging became the new name of “social crisis” that interferes with the vision of the “continuous growth” of the country. It became necessary to reorganize the mode and method of intervention in the family and population. Here, while it became increasingly important to make the social environment that ensures the employment and productivity of educated, middle class women workforce, it became equally important to (re-)consolidate the educational, nurturing, and welfarist function among the “vulnerable families” such as the multicultural family. The idea of preventive welfare thus seeks to respond to the emergent social risks and insecurity by *preparing* the individual members of the multicultural family *into* the family and marriage life and helping them gain their function as a family (e.g., all the educational programs offered to the marriage immigrants, their spouses, and their family-in-law before their arrival and even after the completion of the union), on the one hand, and by promoting their proper integration into the society and assisting migrant women in building their employability and, thus, their self-reliance, on the other.

In this way, the rhetoric of a “multicultural, cohabiting society” becomes a mode of governing the social and different populations. As discussed above, it has different repercussions among the “multiculturals” and others. While the multicultural family has the duty to build itself as a “healthy family” free of human rights violations and domestic violence, their sound integration into society and the nation largely depends on the moral

maturity and affective solidarity of other groups. This is precisely the context where the multicultural education of the general public and the cultivation of their multicultural awareness and sensitivity becomes important in order to make the society “free of prejudices and stigmas.” This is also where the mutual feelings of connectedness and relatedness (e.g., through the mobilization of the idea of Korea as a “one family” and of the “familial care” between its old and new members) become the necessity for the success of the given social government. Here, the “family” becomes both a strategic site of securing “social safety” *and* the metaphor for mobilizing the necessary social environment. In this way, the idea of “redistributing the caring and nurturing function of the family into other social sectors” that appears in *The 1<sup>st</sup> Healthy Family Plan* should be read not only as the state’s will to ameliorate the “functional overloading” among the middle class families but also as an expression of building a familial and affective mode of solidarity among different population groups.

NGOs and the critics of the state’s multicultural programs played a significant role in promoting multicultural education for Koreans and empowerment for migrants. I especially would like to note how the liberal feminist approach that uniformly assumed the state’s patriarchal violence oppressing migrant women revealed its biggest limit when it tacitly treats the spouses and the family-in-law as the local agents of such violence. In arguing for further education of the Korean men and the in-laws and for the empowerment of migrant women, local feminist and women’s groups increasingly come to share mutual interest with the state government. While it is widely known that most of the clients of international marriage brokers and the spouses of migrant women are from urban and rural poor backgrounds, the subject of their own “marginalization” and/or of international



marriage as the monopoly of the new poor (or of the so-called the “losers”) in neoliberal Korea hardly received serious attention in their critiques that almost always gloss over these groups’ class backgrounds in favor of the language of the victimization of migrant women by the national patriarchy (Cf., Abelman and Kim’s discussion on the role of mothers-in-law in transnational marriages and the emergent “maternal citizenship” (2005)). With the coming of multicultural discourses, these critiques tended to reify things into “cultural agency” vs “cultural violence.” While the cases of the Korean husbands and/or the family-in-law’s expectation of migrant women to abide by local cultural and social norms became increasingly interpreted as the violence against the women’s rights to cultural difference, individual migrant women were increasingly defined as “autonomous cultural subjects” who in and of themselves defy the patriarchal assimilationism. My contention, however, is that the language of “cultural difference” and “cultural agency” seriously reified the complex relations that involve various levels of inequality and became in complicity with the state’s project of *damunhwa* that relied equally on “culturalizing” the given process. In the following chapter, I will examine this civic part of the *damunhwa* governance.

## CHAPTER 5

### “MULTICULTURAL CITIZEN” AND THE MOBILIZATION OF MULTICULTURAL SENSITIVITY

*“The duty to improve and civilize oneself was ... a social duty and not merely a personal one, because the health of a society depends upon the civilization of its members.”*  
(T. S. Marshall 1950: 16)

*“Currently, multiculturalism in Korea is focusing too much on governing foreigners who constitute only 2% of the population, but it should rather focus on transforming Koreans who constitute 98%.”*  
(A migrant center staff member)

*“Does that mean that I am some kind of commodity?”*  
(An ethnic Korean Chinese woman)

By the time I made an appointment to meet with Attorney Jeong one late morning in the fall of 2008, I had been already overwhelmed with the sprouting up of the countless events and programs that were being organized around multiculturalism. More than a half-year had passed since I started my long-term fieldwork in the greater Seoul area the previous winter. This time, I was forcing myself to finally accept the fact that I could hardly follow all those “happenings” and do “ethnographic research.” Not only was I overwhelmed by the tremendous number of symposiums, seminars, conferences, lectures, festivals, and classes that were organized with the theme of multiculturalism, but also by the range of experts involved in this “booming multicultural industry.” Participants included researchers in disciplines such as pedagogy, cultural anthropology, sociology,

women's studies, linguistics, social work and public administration, various professionals in the field of Culture & Arts, elementary and middle school teachers, and to various non-governmental and civil society organizations from the UNESCO Korea office, and, of course, to local migrant centers.

From my perspective as a researcher who had been studying the issue of migration in South Korea through the activities of migrant centers and migrants' trade unions, the abrupt emergence of a "*damunhwa* ("multicultural") apparatus" that transcends traditional migrant advocacy groups reflected a magnificent shift in the politics of migration in the country. At an individual level, I was seeking to understand how the work of some of the migrant center staff was quickly shifting from rights advocacy to organizing cultural events.

"It's hypocrisy," said Jeong, when I asked him how he would describe the current situation that is being unfolded under the name of *damunhwa*. I first met Jeong in 2004 when I worked as an intern at the Friends of Asia (FOA). At that time, he had just started his career as a "public interest lawyer" and FOA was where he began to assist migrants with his legal expertise. I knew that he had a mild and gentle personality but also that he could be very sharp and critical when it comes to politics. Jeong continued, "The current situation makes me think of an animal zoo...and it is all happening within the fence drawn by the state government." Quoting *Television and the Zoo* by the French philosopher Olivier Razac,<sup>42</sup> Jeong told me that the ways in which multiculturalism is being represented in Korea through various state-funded and civil society organized programs

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<sup>42</sup> In the book, the author discusses how "living natives" from Africa and America used to be displayed in the museums and expos to educate and entertain the Western audience about the world of difference and diversity in metropolises in Europe and America in nineteenth century through the early twentieth century.

with their extreme focus on “displaying” the “cultures of migrants” reminding him exactly of the “zoo” that is discussed in the book. Jeong said, “Multicultural conflicts should work as a creative and productive force. But, the Korean multiculturalism is what has already been defined by the government. It exists simply to prevent multicultural conflicts...”

Less than a week after this meeting, I had an opportunity to participate in a two-day multicultural class in a local junior high school in Ansan, a suburb of Seoul known for its industrial complexes and its large migrant population—the largest in the country. I was invited to this event while conducting an interview with Rev. Ryu, the director at the Ansan Migrants’ Center and the board member of the Borderless Village,<sup>43</sup> who then complained that the host school’s request did not give his center enough time to prepare for the multicultural classes. “My work here is full of meetings outside,” said Ryu. “It takes time to see who is available each time and schedule accordingly. And, then you need to buy and prepare materials to bring to those classes and so on...It was such short notice, you know.” According to him, the city of Ansan recently selected “damunhwa” and “sports” as its two main “specialties” and appointed some of the local schools as *damunhwa sibeom hakgyo*, or the “showcase multicultural school,” who in turn have to allot a certain portion of its curricular activities to “multicultural learning.” Ryu told me that the center had been offering a number of multicultural classes to local schools since the previous year. Usually, the center had a pool of migrants from various countries who are fluent in the Korean language and thus are able to serve as one-day instructors in local schools.

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<sup>43</sup> A group affiliated with the Ansan Migrants’ Center, who organized various multicultural programs in 2006-8.

When I arrived in the center building to accompany the instructors to the host school, I saw how hectically organized class preparation was. I learned that this time four teachers will be sent to the school to represent and provide basic information about their home countries—Bangladesh, China, Cote d’Ivoire, and Mongolia. The Mongolian teacher caused the others to worry by being late, while the one from Cote d’Ivoire was upset that there was no poster for his country. While he made an ad-hoc poster of his own, another teacher—an ethnic Korean Chinese woman who was teaching about China—complained of how late Rev. Ryu contacted her this time, as an emergency replacement for the person who regularly takes the “Chinese part.” Half jokingly, she said, “You know what Rev. Ryu said, when I complained to him? He said, that just me, myself, will do! Does that mean that I am some kind of commodity?” While I reflected on the complexity of this brief remark, the delayed Mongolian teacher returned with the milk to show students how to make Mongolian style tea. And, in a rush, all of us—including the four “multicultural teachers,” one staff member from the center, and I—quickly managed to get into a van. That day, each teacher taught two fifty-minute sessions to the students. Some focused on giving basic information about their home countries (e.g., location, climate, ways of greetings, and so on), while others focusing more on giving the students the opportunity to directly “experience” the country hands-on, (e.g., through food and music).

These two anecdotes poignantly capture the dilemma and the paradox of multiculturalism in Korea. I met many good-willed activists in the migrant advocacy field who shared the bitterness and dismay that Jeong conveys above. Certainly, this negativity stems from the state’s sudden entry in “multicultural affairs” and the rather abrupt emergence of the “damunhwa apparatus” that has grown to encompass provincial and

municipal governments, institutions of higher and secondary education, and a variety of civil society groups and NGOs. Some of the activists I met said that many civil society organizations like migrant centers would soon either simply subsidize state programs or disappear. However, at the same time, many civil society groups welcomed the state's entry in migrant and multicultural affairs. As this chapter will discuss below, the real dilemma here is that the "civil society" that aspired to create an alternative vision of multiculturalism, whether by working with the state government or not, is revealed to have played an important role in suppressing what Jeong calls "creative and productive forces" and, thereby, producing more "governance." On the other hand, the above ethnic Korean Chinese teacher's question points to a paradoxical situation. Amid humble intentions to educate citizens and build a better society in which migrants and their children do not face discrimination, migrants themselves were not only excluded from this process but also progressively reified as the mere instruments for Koreans' own ethical project.

This chapter is guided by the following questions: What are the specific ways in which civil society actors responded to the state multicultural programs? To what extent are the problems of social inequality and justice involving migrants in the country redressed in local civic groups' promotion of the ethical value of tolerance and multiculturalism? Below, I will start by discussing the discourse of tolerance and what I call the "Korean difference" that serve as a "moral imperative" to migrant centers' discourse and practice of multicultural sensitivity that emerged later in the mid 2000s. Throughout the chapter, I use the term *damunhwa* to refer not simply to another variation of multiculturalism but to the specific and contested set of discourses and practices that generated the sorts of political and ethical dilemmas and paradoxes illustrated above.

## **Tolerance as a Thing of Another and the Name of Social Progress**

In order to map out the discursive landscape of *damunhwa*, I will start with the political theorist Wendy Brown's critique of tolerance and liberal multiculturalism as the discourse of power (2006). Not only is her critique of the politics of tolerance conceptually relevant for my discussion of the practices and discourses of *damunhwa*, but the reviews her book received upon its publication in Korea are interestingly symptomatic of what I will call the discourse of "Korean difference." This is a discourse that relies on and highlights a conception of difference between Korea and the West and, thus, serves as a ground for justification for certain developmentalist and disciplinary practices. The recent emergence of *damunhwa* discourses that focus on the education of the Korean citizenry is one telling example of such practices.

With the emergence of the political rhetorics of "Islam, nationalism, fundamentalism, culture, and civilization" in the aftermath of September 11, Brown argues, a discourse of tolerance was re-articulated as a "civilizational discourse that identifies both tolerance and the tolerable with the West, marking nonliberal societies and practices as candidates for an intolerable barbarism that is itself signaled by the putative intolerance ruling these societies" (2006: 6). The history of imperialism of the nineteenth to early twentieth century and the event of September 11 now merge together to re-endorse the opposition between "the free, the tolerant, and the civilized on one side, and the fundamentalist, the intolerant, and the barbaric on the other" (6). Brown argues that, although the tolerance in civilizational discourses is not the same as liberalism, it is nonetheless "mediated by" a "liberal grammar and analytics" and "also constitutes an element in the constitutive outside of liberalism over the past three centuries" (8). She

says, “if tolerance today is considered synonymous with the West, with liberal democracy, with Enlightenment, and with modernity, then tolerance is what distinguishes ‘us’ from ‘them.’”

I reapply Brown’s imperialist dichotomy between “us” as the West and “them” as the rest for the Korean context. In Korea in recent years, tolerance as the “good” has been translated and mobilized by turning Brown’s dichotomy on its head, i.e., “tolerant they” and “intolerant us.” Not only is “tolerance” interpreted as another name for liberal democracy and “progressive politics” that the “advanced West” represents, but also represents what Korea does not—not yet fully—have. If the discourse of tolerance as a disciplinary power regulates the Other both inside and outside (Brown 2006), the Korean discourse of tolerance is a narcissistic one shaped tremendously by the problematics of the self and its development. Such a problematization of the self projects the imaginary Other as the “good,” i.e., the West, democracy, modernity, and freedom, and the self as being in a chronic state of deficiency. Through this, tolerance, belonging to others and representing advancedness, operates as a disciplinary power by mobilizing one’s shame and embarrassment over one’s incompleteness, on the one hand, and one’s will and zeal to improvement, on the other.

To illustrate how the discourse of tolerance is interpreted in the Korean context, and how the dichotomy of “us” versus “them” is problematized, I will consider Korean readers’ reviews of Brown’s book on the website of *Aladdin*, one of the major booksellers in the country:

*Reader #1*

“Anyway, I agree with her when she [Brown] says the discourse of tolerance depoliticizes things by neglecting historical backgrounds and the problem of power.



On the other hand, I would wonder if such discourse [of tolerance] has ever fully *taken root in Korean society...?* Her critiques may not apply to the current situation in Korea...”<sup>44</sup> (Emphasis added)

*Reader #2*

“Tolerance as the empire’s instrument for governance? Perhaps it may not be easily accepted in the Korean society that is *full of intolerance...* The tolerance that this book discusses is mostly that of the US and Europe, which operates as a strategy of governance. There seems to be a difference between the tolerance found in the US and Europe where there has been already such a mixture of different races and where the idea of *noblesse oblige* has developed fully, and the tolerance in Korea...”<sup>45</sup> (Emphasis added)

*Reader #3*

“With the publication of *I am a taxi driver in Paris* in 1995, the idea of tolerance introduced by the author Hong Sehwa widely appealed to our society. At the time when there was a serious *lack of tolerance*—and, it is still the case now— tolerance became the culture of the haves (whether what they have a lot is knowledge, money, or power).<sup>46</sup> (Emphasis added)

It is striking that each commentator relies on the notion of the Korean difference and treats “tolerance” as a measurable thing. According to them, there was a “serious lack of tolerance” before, but even now, it has not yet “fully taken root” in Korean society. Thus, although a critique of tolerance may be possible and justifiable in the context of the US or Europe, it is not applicable to Korea, which is “full of intolerance.” It is also noteworthy how the commentators either explicitly or implicitly reendorse tolerance by treating it within a developmentalist framework in which only two options exist—to achieve tolerance or fail.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.aladin.co.kr/shop/wproduct.aspx?ISBN=8961950231>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.aladin.co.kr/shop/wproduct.aspx?ISBN=8961950231>

<sup>46</sup> <http://100in.tistory.com/1454>

Again, the question I want to raise is not whether Korean society has become more tolerant or not, but what tolerance has been synonymous with, and in which ways the discourse of tolerance has been mobilized in the country and for what end. As the last commentator points out, tolerance became a popular term—at least within civil society circles—with the publication of an essay entitled *I am a taxi driver in Paris* in 1995. Written by Hong Sehwa, a former employee of a trading company posted at Paris, who was branded an agent of the North Korean regime in the 1970s and exiled in France until mid 1990s, the book is a combination of the author’s life stories and his reflections on French society.

In 2007, twelve years after the publication of Hong’s book, it was featured in the “50 Greatest Books of Our Time” series by *Hanguok Ilbo*, a major daily in the country. The headline read, “Making into a book one’s own experience of co-existing with difference in the land of liberty” and “Tolerance, still valid in the age of neoliberalism.” The *Hanguok Ilbo* article claims that Hong’s book “received such an arduous response by offering an opportunity for Korean society, which lacked the virtue of recognizing difference even after democratization, to look back on itself.”<sup>47</sup> From his own experiences of living as an “exile as well as a migrant worker,” Hong saw the value of tolerance as the defining feature of French society.<sup>48</sup> Tolerance, continues the article, was “like a mirror image that reflects not only the dire political and social situations in Korea of the 1960s and 1970s but also the ‘invisible’ machinery of oppression that was yet dominating our

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<sup>47</sup> *Hanguok Ilbo*, May 17, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> *Hanguok Ilbo*, May 17, 2007

minds.”<sup>49</sup> The book, which enjoyed tremendous success (sixty editions were printed before the book was revised in 2006), became a “must-read for college freshmen” since its publication.<sup>50</sup>

This article defines tolerance and the recognition of difference as features of “consummate” democracy (e.g., “offering an opportunity for the Korean society, who lacked the virtue of recognizing difference even after the democratization, to look back on itself”) and as something that is “still valid in the age of neoliberalism.” It not only equates tolerance with progressive politics and democracy but also defines the practice of tolerance as reflecting on one’s conduct. Here, it is important to note how liberal discourses that emerged among self-identified progressives in Korea produced practices of policing “illiberal” practices. A good example is the so-called “anti-paternalism” discourse that developed in reaction to paternalist representations of foreign workers and migrants, which prevailed in the 1990s. Anti-paternalist discourse usually argued that foreign workers should be represented as “equal subjects” and criticized Koreans’ prejudices and ignorance of foreigners, and the media and civic representations of foreign workers as those who need the care and assistance from Korean society.

A discourse of tolerance, which relies on the notion of “Korean difference” and other kinds of liberal discourses that have emerged since the mid to late 1990s, I argue, served as the antecedent of the practice of *damunhwa* of 2000s that translates inequality into “cultural difference” and focuses on cultivating Korean individuals’ sensitivity to the difference of migrants. The equating of tolerance, liberal multiculturalism, and progressive politics that prevailed among civil society organizations in the 1990s helped facilitate the

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<sup>49</sup> *Hanguok Ilbo*, May 17, 2007

<sup>50</sup> *Hanguok Ilbo*, May 17, 2007

partnership between civic groups such as migrant centers and the state government when the latter began embarking on its multicultural project in the mid 2000s. I will discuss how the renewed partnership between the two existed amid disillusionment and skepticism, generating questions about what should be a better way to achieve “genuine multiculturalism.”

### **The Question of Genuine Multiculturalism and Culturalization of Inequality**

It has not been long since the term *damunhwa* emerged as a catchword in public arenas in Korea. 2006 is noted as the year when the *damunhwa* industry exploded, in which the state poured money into the civil and academic sectors, producing a new public space for discussions of multiculturalism. Since then, a number of state ministries have begun offering integrationist and welfare services to so-called “marriage immigrants” and their “multicultural families” while, at the same time, funding civic groups to organize related programs. Among the state and non-state groups alike, the term *damunhwa* was employed as the opposite of *danil munhwa*, or “monoculture,” and a remedy to *danil munhwa*’s limitations and problems. Notably, too, progressives and conservatives alike interpreted multiculturalism as a code of social ethics and policy for the age of globalization.<sup>51</sup> Within civil society groups, discussions have been mostly confined to the debates over *damunhwa* versus assimilation, or civil-society-led-*damunhwa* versus state-led-*damunhwa* (e.g., Kim 2007; Kim et al 2007; Lee 2007; Oh 2007). Meanwhile, ideas of

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in 2008, *Yonhap News* featured the preparation meeting for Hanguk Damunhwa Center where “the conservatives and the progressives, and Buddhist and Christian leaders united themselves for an advanced Korea through the establishment of *damunhwa* society” (December 1 2008).

tolerance and the recognition of difference and the Other that are the foundation of *damunhwa* have seldom been challenged, but rather have been reinforced.

The state government's multicultural agenda, as laid out in the Korea Immigration Service's and the Committee of Alien Policy's 2007 "Policy on Foreigners, Current Progress and Future Plan" aims to support marriage immigrants and their families with various programs, on the one hand, and to promote the value of co-existence and respect of difference and diversity among the Korean citizenry, on the other. In so doing, it is supposed to realize an "open society that cohabits with foreigners." In this plan, the "open society" is inherently tied to "social integration," "minimizing social conflicts," and thus "enhancing national competitiveness"<sup>52</sup> in the global scale. Just before this, since 2006, the Department of Multicultural Family, which was then under the Low Fertility, Aging Society section in the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (hereafter MHWFA) had launched services for marriage immigrants and their children. Meanwhile, the Department of Multicultural Policy in the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sports (hereafter MCTS) began funding civic groups such as the Borderless Village and the Damunhwa Open Society to organize multicultural festivals and related programs and events.

State investment in multiculturalism since the mid 2000s generated a renewed partnership between the state and migrant centers,<sup>53</sup> in which the state mainly funded organizations while the larger migrant centers with more expertise and experience in

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<sup>52</sup> "Policy on Foreigners, Current Progress and Future Plan" (Korea Immigration Service and the Committee of Alien Policy 2007)

<sup>53</sup> In the early 2000s, the Joint Committee with Migrants in Korea and the Kim Dae Jung government worked together to make the plan for the Employment Permit System, the first state regulated foreign labor policy.

migrant and related cultural affairs took on the role of primary organizer of the actual *damunhwa* programs. This partnership between the state and the larger migrant centers and/or the association of the centers, however, was not always an easy one as it constantly generated public debates and critiques over the government's multicultural policy and the definition of "genuine multiculturalism." Notably, some of the most vocal critiques from civil society came from those activists whose organizations had begun to create multicultural programs with state funding. Indeed, regardless of whether they received government money or not, migrant centers and other concerned civic groups constantly evaluated the government's conduct. Specifically, their critiques revolved around the following themes.

1. *The exclusion of migrant workers in the state's multicultural policy.*

Oh Gyung Seok, a sociologist and former member of the Borderless Village, argued that the state government relies on the "divide and rule policy" and seeks to regulate different groups of migrants differentially (Oh 2007: 35). Oh specifically refers to the situation in which the state's multicultural focus is concentrated on marriage immigrants and their so-called "multicultural families" while it maintains its regulatory policy on foreign labor by regularly deporting undocumented migrants. By doing so, Oh continues, the government prevents unity among the different groups of migrants. Oh's position captures the general sentiments among migrant centers, many of which have denounced the government for policing undocumented migrants. For example, in an anti-crackdown rally and press conference organized in Seoul on May 15, 2008 following the arrest of Torna Limbu, then the newly appointed chairperson of the Migrants' Trade Union, activists and staff from migrant centers and various "solidarity groups" chanted, "Multicultural society in the front,

and targeted crackdowns in the back! Lee's government is lying!" While migrant centers appealed to a more inclusive model of *damunhwa* that includes migrant workers, most of them, however, were in fact ambiguous and ambivalent when it came to legalizing undocumented migrant workers and/or extending the rights of residence to migrant workers. Their criticisms against the state government were more or less limited to the human rights violations in the deportation and detention of migrants.

*2. State intervention in the private lives of marriage immigrants and their "multicultural families."*

The second line of critique came most vocally from the groups working for migrant women. NGOs and feminist academics alike argued that the state only aims at "Koreanizing" migrant women and assimilating them directly into the Korean patriarchal system with a variety of programs offered through the MHWFA and the regional Multicultural Family Centers. Criticizing Korean language classes offered to marriage immigrants, some even argued that it is "more multicultural" to give them and their children opportunities to learn and use their own mother tongues. Many of these critiques drew from discourse on "cultural autonomy" and the "rights to difference." For example, in a symposium held in Sook Myong Women's University in spring 2008, Jeong Hye Sil, the representative of the Multicultural Family Association, denounced the MHWFA for ignoring migrant women's diverse cultures and their different ways of raising children.

Despite the surge of critiques and debates over the better way of realizing multicultural society, numerous multicultural programs have appeared since the mid 2000s, either through close partnerships between state and civil society organizations or between private funding organizations and smaller civic groups. These multicultural programs rely

heavily on the idea of *re-socializing* and *re-culturalizing* individual Korean citizens in multicultural ways and thereby cultivating their “multicultural sensitivity.” They were indeed part of an effort to appeal to both the culturalist tones in civic rhetoric and the funding available to civil society organizations for the creation of *damunhwa* projects. These programs were often predicated on the idea that Koreans, rather than migrants, have to adjust to the new social reality created by the growing migrant population.

The discourse and practice of *damunhwa* thus defined, however, did not significantly challenge the agenda already shaped by state interests as much as conceived by the civil society organizations themselves. As I have noted, the state had already developed a plan to promote multicultural values among the Korean citizenry with an aim to realize an “open society that cohabits with foreigners.”<sup>54</sup> Within the state bureaucracy, it was the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports that undertook the task of promoting cultural diversity in the general citizenry and funding many migrant center-organized multicultural festivals and classes. In an interview I conducted in May 2008, Lee Gi Jeong, the former director of the Department of Multicultural Policy at the MCTS, rephrased the government’s position as follows:

“After all, the issue of immigrants should be approached from a *cultural perspective*. It becomes important to embrace diverse cultures and, thus, to prevent cultural clashes from happening like you see in the west...If mobilizing the notion of the homogeneous nation was useful in the task of developing the country in the 1970s, now in the age of globalization, it is not valid anymore. Our perspective on immigrants needs to change. It is important to change our people’s awareness” (Emphasis added).

Lee above clearly notes how the mode of development has changed from that which is reliant on “ethnic nationalism” to that which embraces and promotes “diversity.”

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<sup>54</sup> “Policy on Foreigners, Current Progress and Future Plan” (Korea Immigration Service and the Committee of Alien Policy 2007)



Here, I would like to highlight how much the language of “culture” seized both the state government and civil society organizations. It not only offered a space for the two to work together—albeit not seamlessly—but also facilitated the process in which questions of inequality became reduced to so-called “cultural difference” and the attitudinal problems involving it. I will proceed by examining the ways in which the discourse of *damunhwa* among migrant centers developed as a project of creating the new citizen-subjects who can better adjust to the social changes brought by increasing migration and globalization. More specifically, I show how the project of engendering multicultural sensitivity among individual citizens with an aim to better the living environment for immigrants and migrants in the country and, thereby, producing “collective justice” becomes a self-disciplinary project. In this project, the question of the Other is used to create a sense of moral satisfaction in the Korean self. In the practice of *munhwa cheheom*, or “cultural experience,” which depends upon the purified difference and otherness of migrants, the boundary between the “education” of difference and the “consumption” of difference is easily blurred.

### **Damunhwa as a Project of Creating New Citizen Subjects**

*“Our society has been overlooking cultural infrastructure so far. Immigrants are a gift to us. They mean an opportunity for Korean society to be reborn in the world. We need to utilize the current situation actively and positively”*

(A presenter at a public hearing organized by MCST to make a legislative plan for multicultural assistance, May 20, 2008)

It is important to understand how the reception of multiculturalism in Korea in the 2000s has been inseparable from the subject of education, i.e., the education of the citizens. In other words, and especially among concerned civic groups and academics, there often

has been no clear-cut distinction between the discourses on multiculturalism and the discourse on multicultural education—from those that focus on the abstract and philosophical notion of cultivating a “new sensitivity” to those that focus on the practical implementation of multicultural curriculum within secondary institutes. Among the concerned civic groups and activists, such a focus on the citizen’s education has been usually represented as changing the national ethos and transforming people’s consciousness.

During my fieldwork, I met many individuals who would tell me that changing Korean people’s consciousness and awareness of migrants and their different cultures was a better, “more genuine” way of realizing a multicultural society. Lee Wan, the chief director of Migrants’ Arirang<sup>55</sup> used to tell me about what he called *gungmin jeongseobeop*, translated as the “law of people’s sentiment.” According to Lee, this “law” was superior to any formal law as the latter will have to be based on the principle of the former. By using such a metaphoric expressions, Lee emphasized that people’s consciousness and sentiments can be more powerful than written law in promoting or delaying social justice.

The discourse of reshaping individual citizens’ consciousness often merged with existing critiques of the old-fashioned, statist-nationalist, and/or hierarchical educational system. With followers in fields ranging from pedagogy to cultural anthropology since the 1990s, alternative education discourse argues for creativity and autonomy, which they claim have been sacrificed in mainstream education that focuses on getting into college, and the so-called *juipsik gyoyuk*, or “rote learning,” that only emphasizes students’

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<sup>55</sup> The largest multicultural festival in the country held since 2005 that was organized by the Damunhwa Open Society, an association of migrant centers, and hosted by the MCST.

performance in exams. Joining the discourse of alternative education, the discourses of multiculturalism and multicultural education in Korea placed emphasis on the subject of the *body* as the medium of the new education that will serve an alternative to the “exam- and brain-centered” education in particular and the old way of socialization in general.

Cho Yong Hwan, a professor of education at Seoul National University, relies on a similar opposition between the “body” and the “head” when he argues, “Understanding of multiculturalism should be done not through the head but through the body (embodied understanding)” (2008: 252). For Cho, multicultural education should be fundamentally about “seeking a better life and a better world” and about “reorganizing the way of life and the mode of existence accordingly with a recognition of the fact that the life in the late modernity is essentially a multicultural one” (252). Cho’s argument for multicultural education that is mediated through bodily domains and that derives from the notion of remaking the social life according to “the life in the late modernity” precisely captures how the discourse and practice of *damunhwa* developed among migrant centers. Their multicultural programs focused on cultivating “multicultural sensitivity” among individuals and on giving individual participants opportunities to “experience” the material cultures of migrants and improve their sensitivity to difference through such sensory activities.

Many of the migrant centers I encountered during my fieldwork in the greater Seoul area had at least one *damunhwa* program, either multicultural festivals or multicultural classes.<sup>56</sup> These *damunhwa* programs usually offered the participants a chance to

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<sup>56</sup> Here I do not include other programs which only contain the word *damunhwa* and do not actually differ from conventional programs migrant centers organized in the past, e.g., language classes, counseling programs, and various other support programs. Why these activities are carried out under the name of *damunhwa* needs to be addressed separately.

experience various foreign cultures in the form of costume, cuisine, custom, play, performance, and so on. As I showed in the anecdote I had while visiting Ansan Migrants' Center, often the migrant centers' clients with a good command of the Korean language would be sent out as one-day instructors to local schools to teach about and represent their home countries. In this setting, the counterpart of Cho's notion of *damunhwa* education that relies on the body was the idea of *munhwa cheheom*, or the "bodily experience" of cultures. In the Korean language, *gyonghom* is generally the term that gets directly translated into "experience." The basic difference between *cheheom* and *gyeongheom* is that, whereas *gyeongheom* assumes a certain distance from its object, *cheheom* is experience that is not mediated by cognition but rather through the body and the senses, assuming directness and wholeness between the experiencing subject and the object of its experience. Here, I would like to emphasize how neatly the idea of *cheheom* compromises what migrant centers often called the social distance and the social gap between Koreans and migrants that, they argue, is generated by the former's ignorance of the latter.

In an interview I conducted in 2006, the representative of the civic group that initiated one of the first such programs explained that it is necessary for Koreans to develop cultural sensitivity in order to co-exist peacefully with migrants. She especially emphasized that Koreans are ignorant of diverse and different cultures and how this ignorance is a significant barrier to bridging the social gap and distance between Koreans and migrants. Another interview I conducted in the same year with an activist from a different organization echoed the same logic. Unsurprisingly, children, more often than adults, were the main target group for the *damunhwa* educational programs. The two interviewees agreed that *damunhwa* education is much more effective when given to

youth. The children who learn to respect others' differences and rights would grow to be good multicultural citizens. For example, a pamphlet for the "Human Rights Class - Difference Means Beautiful," a program for children organized by a local migrant center, describes itself as follows:

"Our Human Rights Class - Difference Means Beautiful is an Asian cultural experience and human rights education program that supports our children to become free from prejudices and fear of what is different from us and to grow up as healthy and tolerant members of society who are capable of cohabiting with global citizens through experiences in cultures of various Asian countries."

The program focuses on developing multicultural sensitivity among the "native," or racially or ethnically Korean children who are referred to as "our children" vis-à-vis migrants and their children. The subject of multicultural sensitivity is almost always marked as native Koreans distinguished from their "objects," i.e., migrants and racially mixed people and families (cf. Brown 2006). No less importantly, the migrant centers' emphasis on *cheheom* and sensitivity training mobilizes the body of individual citizen-subjects as the site to *mediate* various forms of inequality—pertinent to class, gender, and race—and as the site to negotiate with them. If migrant centers' mobilization of the *sensitive and tolerant self* individualizes social inequality and injustice, their everyday practices that focus on the individual body and the enrichment of its degree of *cheheom* turn the whole politics of inequality into a body management; things become the matter of correcting and modifying one's body, soul, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, and this to achieve a state of moral perfection (Foucault 1988). Here, an individual's moral perfection becomes equivalent to a nation's moral perfection and "cultural" advancedness (Marshall 1950).

In discussing the relationship between multiculturalism, neoliberalism, education, and citizenship in three cases of Canada, the UK, and the US, Katharyne Mitchell argues that multicultural education in these countries is shifting from a “concern with the formation of tolerant and democratic national citizens who can work with and through difference” to that of “strategic cosmopolitan” who can compete better in the deterritorialized, neoliberal global economy (2003: 387). If multicultural state subjects were strategic under a Fordist regime of accumulation where state boundaries were more or less fixed, she says, this kind of subject becomes increasingly irrelevant in the post-Fordist, neoliberal world order. What is worth noting in Mitchell’s discussion is the intimate nexus between the institution of education, state, and the economy, where the production of citizen subjects that function within the demands of the neoliberal market order, and restructuring the state accordingly, becomes an important matter.

South Korea serves an example in which the discourse of bringing up multicultural citizen subjects who coexist harmoniously and respectfully with other members of society—what Mitchell calls the Fordist model of multiculturalism—and the discourse of producing “strategic cosmopolitans,” or neoliberal multiculturalism, do not contradict one another. Rather, they essentially constitute the two sides of the idea of the “national competitiveness” that the state government explicitly promotes and civil society groups either explicitly or implicitly endorse. Indeed, more often than not, some conservative groups such as Hanguk Damunhwa Center and conservative media promoted multiculturalism explicitly within the framework of “enhancing the national competitiveness.” For example, while *Donga Ilbo* notes, “The foreigners who face difficulties in medical services, education, and welfare would easily have antagonistic

sentiments toward Korea, which in turn will work against our national image and competitiveness” (February 2, 2009), *Chosun Ilbo* praises “*damunhwa* as the most powerful source of competitiveness in the global economic era” (December 8, 2009).

Additionally, and at a more fundamental level, if one can still talk about an ethics of neoliberalism, then there is no surprising contradiction between the multiculturalism that is “accompanied by the spirit of the ethical self” (Mitchell, 399) and the neoliberal multiculturalism based on a concept of culture as another form of capital. I suggest that the Korean case serves as a good example of the promotion of the culture of tolerance becoming part of the political project of reorganizing the “social” as well as the “ethical” in a way that is amenable to a neoliberal regime.

### Coda

I have explored the ways in which the discourse and practice of *damunhwa* among civil society organizations like migrant centers are designed to produce new citizen-subjects who know how to respect others’ differences and value diversity and who can therefore adjust to the changing social environment brought about by globalization within and outside the country. This practice of *damunhwa* finds its antecedent in the discourse of tolerance that emerged since the mid 1990s, which drew from the prevalent notion of the “incomplete (Korean) self” and served as a powerful justification for disciplinary and developmentalist practices. Situated in this genealogy, the practice of *damunhwa* based on educating individual citizens and enhancing their multicultural sensitivity inherently relies on and is maintained by the reified otherness of migrants.

I have also discussed how the making of multicultural and cosmopolitan citizen-subjects fundamentally constitutes “enhancing the national competitiveness” in the global market. This linkage has been promoted by a variety of actors from the state government to conservative groups and media. This does not yet exclude those “progressive groups” who may not explicitly endorse the neoliberal notion of “competitiveness” but, nonetheless, operate based on the idea of making the new citizens and the new society according to the globalized, postmodern world order. Rather than simply saying there is no difference among progressives and conservatives, and civil society and the state in Korea, I suggest we see how their seemingly different multicultural agendas may closely intersect in the idea and the effort to reengineer Korean society and nation according to the demands of the global economy. I also suggest that the political dilemma found here transcends essentialist dichotomies between the political categories such as the conservative and the progressive, and that any effort to explain it will necessarily involve an interrogation of the ways in which the question of “state” and “(civil) society” has evolved in Korea since the 1990s.

In the winter of 2009, while wrapping up my long-term fieldwork in Korea, I had an opportunity to meet again with Lee Wan, by then the former director of Migrants’ Arirang, which would no longer be held because the state government had decided not to fund it. He told me that the Damunhwa Open Society, the association of migrant centers that was established to organize Migrants’ Arirang, was in the process of being dissolved. He also told me the Department of Multicultural Policy that was created only in November 2007 did not exist anymore and that now there was only one official in charge of multicultural affairs in the MCTS. On the other hand, he said, “although Migrants’ Arirang is gone, the state government continues to assist with regional multicultural festivals and ARTE is the



one who is practically in charge of them. Migrants' Arirang had a symbolic meaning. Now, we cannot even find enough people and money to meet the increasing demands for multicultural education."

Lee appeared bitter about the dissolution of Migrants' Arirang and the Damunhwa Open Society and yet proud of the recent developments. It was true that, since the coming of the new government under President Lee Myung Bak in 2008, there had been a great deal of personnel and structural reorganization within the state government, which in turn crucially affected the non-governmental and civil society sectors. However, as noted by Lee above, the change was more or less confined to the level of organization and the key agenda still remained, which dispels worries that the new government will discontinue the multicultural programs enacted by the previous one. Notably, according to Lee, there has been a growing interest among corporate owned, private funding agencies, e.g. CJ Nanum Jaedan and Daum Jaedan, in funding small CSOs to organize multicultural programs. Again, the question provoked by this situation would not be "if not multiculturalism, then what?" but rather "what are the conditions under which multiculturalism has emerged as such an irresistible force in Korea now?"

## EPILOGUE

“Neoliberalism” has been the subject of heated debates within anthropology and beyond generating diverging and competing visions of “how it works” in different parts of the world and of “what it is” and “what it is not” (e.g., Anagnost 2004; Ferguson 2002; Kipnis 2007; Nonini 2008; Ong 2006; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). Andrew Kipnis, for example, sees two currents of theorizing neoliberalism that became hegemonic in anthropology, one being the “Marxian ideological critique” and the other being those influenced by Foucault’s notion of governmentality (2007: 384-388). I certainly share the sentiment when Kipnis cautions against competing definitions of neoliberalism (which, for example, have led to contradictory interpretations of allegedly the same phenomenon) and the reification of neoliberalism that has often become a source of counterproduction.

Having said that, I still want to ask if a critique of “neoliberalism” that does not consider the question of “liberalism” can be valid. Here, I would like to call attention to what Barry Hindess calls the “striking disjunction between liberal practice [that often has relied on illiberal and authoritarian practices] and the ‘liberalism’ in political theory [that defends and promotes individual liberty]” (2004: 30). For me, such a disjunction leaves a clue to understanding the seeming paradox between the self-evidence of the migrant worker as the autonomous subject and the necessity of awareness education among migrant workers, as well as between the equality among persons and the education of equality among the population. My dissertation then has sought to understand ways in

which postcolonial liberal developmentalism (Korea's self-civilizing mission to upgrade its humanity through both economic and moral measures) and the project of "civil society" (i.e., that of empowering "civil society" and disciplining the government which gained momentum in the so-called post-democratization era) offer the *soil* to the neoliberal restructuring of the social that became heightened since the "crisis" of the late 1990s when the country went through the government of liberal imperialism (e.g. IMF). I argue that anthropology that attends to the specificity of the social life, local histories, and global interconnections should better understand the ways in which such a "conjuncture" comes into being.

On the other hand, yet on a related note, my current account more or less treats the Korean migrant advocacy and the multicultural apparatus as some kind of unitary whole vis-à-vis the larger state project and does not fully explore the disjuncture and tension between and within different groups, traditions, and projects that constitute the field, e.g., Protestant and Catholic leaders, civil society activists, union organizers, human rights lawyers, social scientists, public intellectuals, and liberal feminist and migrant women's advocacy groups. In Chapter I, while focusing on showing how the tension between humanitarian and human rights-oriented groups and labor groups can be condensed in the narrative of the moral and the economic utility of the foreign worker, I have not, for example, fully discussed how the conception of the "human," human rights as well as labor rights, can have different formations between Church based groups and labor groups, as well as how paternalism towards the socially weak may inform the framework of Christian social work, yet can also arouse fierce resistance informed by the tradition of theological egalitarianism. Likewise in Chapter II, I did not examine multiple meanings of

volunteering and the multiple projects they may involve, especially between the secular, civil society groups and religiously inclined or Christian groups, those who constitute the majority of the field of migrant advocacy and thus responsible for the ensuing tension and conflicts that have been present in the field since its outset. In Chapter III and IV, I rather focus on showing how the emergent discourse and practice of *damunhwa* complement the state programs that deal with the crisis of the population and the demographic reconfiguration of society informed by the force of globalization. However, the remaining question to be explored is how we fully address the development and appropriation of multiculturalism and the idea of tolerance that already had existed before the coming of the state *damunhwa* apparatus. Certainly, the biggest question that my dissertation has yet to unravel has to do with the multiple and often conflicting voices and projects that form the field of migrant advocacy and *damunhwa*, and how they can be subsumed within the state agenda but not entirely for being part of larger transnational projects that often challenge the politics of the state—e.g., Christianity, civil society and NGOs, labor activism, multiculturalism, and liberal feminism.

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