



The demographic evolution of South Korea's Multiculturalism: An Indian perspective

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Abstract

Due to low birth rates and fast ageing, Korean society has recently seen changes in its demographic structure; in this regard, the migration of foreign immigrants is playing a significant role. In Korea, the economy, culture, and education are all being impacted by the growing number of foreigners from a variety of backgrounds, including foreign workers, international students, and marriage immigrants. Foreign experts and students help to improve Korea's technological capabilities and competitiveness by providing top-tier talent, while foreign workers have become vital members of the Korean economy, especially in the manufacturing, agricultural, and construction sectors. Additionally, as the number of foreign residents rises, so does the number of multicultural families and children from many cultural backgrounds, creating greater challenges for social integration and education. Examining Korea's changing demographics, the social and economic impacts of foreign immigrants, and proposing challenges and future directions for the nation's multicultural society are the objectives of this article.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Immigrants, Demography.

Introduction

Despite its reputation as a homogeneous nation, Korea has rapidly transformed into a multicultural society in recent decades as a result of the influx of foreign workers and the growth of multicultural homes. In terms of cultural, social, and economic aspects, multiculturalism is becoming more important and has a range of repercussions on Korean society and its citizens. The 1990s saw a dramatic rise in the number of foreign workers in Korea as the country sought to expand its economy and begin the process of becoming a multicultural society. In particular, multicultural homes have become more prevalent as the number of immigrants, foreign workers, and their children has increased.

As of 2020, the percentage of multicultural homes was at 3.2% of all households, according to Statistics Korea, and this percentage has been rising annually (Yoon 2021).

Opportunities to experience many cultures are made possible by multiculturalism, which also gives Koreans an opportunity to comprehend and appreciate the customs and cultures of other nations. This helps Korea create a society that is more inclusive and open. For instance, being bilingual and exposed to a variety of cultural backgrounds increases the likelihood that children from multicultural households would develop into global talents. Multicultural families are seen as one way to address Korea's demographic problems, which include an ageing population and birth rates that are

below average for the world. Marriage immigrants and their offspring have the ability to join the labour in the future and contribute to the population expansion of Korean society. Multicultural families and foreign employees often face prejudice and discrimination in Korean culture. This is because institutional flaws, cultural disparities, and language hurdles may make it difficult for mixed families to integrate socially. The problem of bullying or discrimination against children from multicultural households is still a major one, particularly in schools. A mentality that can successfully use and welcome Korea's diversity is required, since it has already become an inevitable societal reality. Despite the difficulties, Korean society may benefit from a more varied and stimulating cultural experience as a result of the shift to a multicultural society (Yun 2011).

Changes In Demography

Korea may become a more open and inclusive society by embracing multiculturalism, which is now a significant component of Korean society rather than an outside influence. It has long been believed that Korea is a homogenous country. However, as a result of globalisation and demographic shifts, Korean society is progressively becoming more multicultural owing to the rise in foreign workers and multicultural families. Numerous repercussions, both good and bad, are being seen in Korean culture as a result of this diversity. In Korea, the number of multicultural households started to rise quickly in the 1990s. In

response to concerns about labour shortages and economic development, a large number of foreign workers arrived in Korea at this time, and the number of multicultural families created via international marriages also rose. To assist multicultural families and aid in their assimilation into Korean culture, the current South Korean government is putting a number of programs into place (Kim 2019). Koreans have a broader view of the world because to multiculturalism, which introduces other cultures to Korean society.

The influx of foreigners and mixed families introduces new habits, language, dress, and food to Korean society. For example, some multicultural families provide Koreans new cultural experiences on traditional Korean holidays like Chuseok and Seollal by celebrating their own holidays. Foreign labour is vital to the Korean economy. Many foreign workers are employed in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors that are essential to Korean society. As a result, South Korea has been able to address the issue of workforce shortages, which has positively impacted economic growth. Additionally, multicultural families are contributing to the diversification of the consumer base and the encouragement of economic activity. Foreigners and mixed families continue to face prejudice and discrimination in Korean society. Some Koreans find it difficult to accept variety because of their negative perceptions of multicultural homes or foreign workers. Particularly, children from heterogeneous homes often experience identity ambiguity and discrimination in society and schools. When people from different cultural backgrounds coexist, cultural conflicts may inevitably arise (Khoo 2011). Language, cultural, and lifestyle differences may sometimes lead to misunderstandings and arguments. Particularly, children from multicultural homes may have trouble identifying with themselves since they are brought up in a culture different from their parents. They could thus find it difficult to blend in with Korean society. Numerous important elements have impacted multiculturalism in Korea. Korea, which was formerly thought of as a homogeneous country, is becoming increasingly multicultural as a consequence of globalisation and economic progress, which are attracting people from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. The evolution of multiculturalism in Korea has been significantly impacted by social and economic changes, demographic concerns, and globalisation. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Korea's economy grew rapidly, requiring workers in a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. At the time, Korea had a tiny labour force and a workforce shortage, especially in low-wage, unskilled labour sectors (Draudt 2016).

One important factor contributing to Korea's increasing diversity is international marriage. Due to the decline in rural populations and the scarcity of appropriate spouses, foreign weddings have become more common, leading to a considerable rise in multicultural households. More Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino women are marrying into Korean homes, establishing families in Korea's rural and urban areas, and blending in with Korean culture. In Korean culture, international marriages have created a new kind of family structure, and as a result, the children of these multicultural families will surely contribute significantly to the demographic composition of the nation in the future. As they grow up, these children are exposed to both Korean and their parents' cultures, and their appreciation of variety has gradually grown. The number of foreign professionals and students has increased as a consequence of Korea's expanding research and education sectors. A growing number of foreign students are visiting Korea, which has excellent research and educational facilities, as a result of the Korean Wave's recent spike in popularity (Park 2014).

Their study and research in Korean universities and research bodies is further diversifying the multicultural composition of Korean society. Additionally, foreign workers are entering a range of sectors, including as banking, entertainment, healthcare, and IT, which contributes to the globalisation and knowledge of Korean society. Korea's ageing population and low birth rate have also had a big influence on the country's growing diversity. As its working-age population continues to shrink, Korea, which has one of the lowest birth rates and the world's fastest-aging population, is facing social and economic challenges. Highlighting the assistance for multicultural families and the inflow of foreign workers, both of which aid in the shift to a multicultural society, is one way to address this problem. Policies pertaining to the education and social support of children from mixed households are becoming more crucial in order to solve these demographic concerns. Due to Korea's improved economic and cultural standing outside, more foreigners are showing interest in the country, which has increased tourism (Kim 2019).

The country's shift to a multicultural society is accelerating due to the large number of international visitors who come to Korea to experience its culture, particularly as a result of the popularity of the Korean Wave. A closed-off, one-ethnic society is giving way to a multicultural one in which several ethnic groups coexist in Korea. Multiculturalism improves social inclusion by fostering a social atmosphere that respects and tolerates a range of cultural customs. Living with

individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds teaches people to appreciate and embrace variety, which should reduce prejudice and discrimination. This is essential to the growth of a society where everyone has equal access to opportunities and encourages equality among its members. Additionally, variety promotes awareness of equality and human rights as well as respect and consideration for social minorities. In order to assist the nation as a whole get closer to greater equity and justice, more protection and support for international residents and multicultural families is creating an atmosphere in which they may settle down permanently in Korean society. Other advantages of diversity include social integration and the development of a feeling of community. For people from diverse cultural backgrounds to live together in a society, communication and understanding between them are essential. As members of a community, people learn to respect each other's differences and cooperate to accomplish common goals (Hahm 2014).

Conclusion

Language barriers and cultural differences are likely to cause academic challenges for children from multicultural families. There may be an educational gap if kids who don't know Korean struggle to acquire the fundamental abilities needed for learning. Over time, these problems with their schooling may prevent them from fully assimilating into Korean culture. To facilitate the social integration of multicultural families, policies and programs are required, and these initiatives need substantial funding to run. For instance, running programs for multicultural families that include social adaptation, language instruction, and educational assistance may be seen as a societal expense that society and the government should share. Children from multicultural households must be able to study Korean and their native tongue at the same time via a bilingual education program in order to obtain an education free from prejudice. To help them engage with other students in a smooth manner, children from multicultural homes should also have access to a range of educational programs and awareness-raising courses. Legal frameworks and protections must be established in order for multicultural families and foreign workers to be welcomed into society without encountering discrimination. In particular, it is necessary to strengthen the safeguards against job discrimination and to support multicultural families. Outreach and education are necessary to promote positive perceptions of diversity. To do this, the media should promote a multicultural society and offer a range of multicultural events and activities in schools, businesses, and communities.

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