

Multicultural at the Meso-Level: Governing Diversity within the Family in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

Departing from extant studies that largely focus on gender roles, norm diffusion, or ethnonationalism, this paper highlights policy siting as one understudied factor in determining why and when states manage cultural diversity. Using the case of South Korea's family-centred multicultural policy, the paper contributes to the growing body of literature on comparative policymaking, multiculturalism, and multi-level citizenship by foregrounding the processes by which governing elites target specific meso-level social institutions as privileged sites of diversity governance. The paper draws on immersive field research conducted between 2017 and 2023 to introduce and analyze the concept of familial multiculturalism to explain how the state locates diversity governance mainly *within* the family and *between* family and broader society. Siting diversity governance in powerful meso-level institutions like the nuclear family in shaping state multiculturalism is not unique to Korea. Rather, the paper contends that these institutions play a significant role in cultural management endeavours worldwide. While the content of a multicultural site depends on history and national context, states worldwide seek to mitigate social friction and political backlash by targeting certain intercultural relations and negating or delegitimizing others. The paper concludes with a discussion of the contemporary political ramifications of Korea's multiculturalism and prospects for future broadening and deepening.

Keywords: multiculturalism, policymaking, familism, international marriage, meso-level, South Korea

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Introduction

Political debates on multiculturalism in Asia are experiencing a renewed boom, as democracies worldwide grapple with how to accommodate and regulate diversity and minority rights while preserving national character and historical connections to the imagined community. While twentieth-century instantiations of state multiculturalism focused on immigrant integration in Western democracies, the 2020s popular debates have adopted the political lexicon from decades of scholarship on citizenship and ethnicity and embraced the language of intersectionality and inter-ethnic power relations. Recent countries of immigration—many of which are postcolonial, third-wave democracies—implemented additional protections for minority rights, immigrant incorporation, and diversity governance.

These debates are evident in South Korea (hereafter Korea), where growing numbers of foreigners seek long-term residency or naturalization in a country long adherent to a bloodline-based citizenship regime and monocultural identity. Korea's immigration turn is now familiar: beginning in the early 2000s, a consistent flow of temporary labour migrants and permanent international marriage migrants have worked, studied, lived, and integrated into the erstwhile homogenous society. The dominant discourse and tangible policy outputs over the past twenty years have triggered broader political debates over how to reconcile ethnic-based membership with liberal democratic tenets. Governing elites gained political support via an instrumental framing of international marriage—which, at its peak in 2005, accounted for 13 percent of all marriages (figure 1)—as an expedient method to counteract low marriage rates, declining birthrates, and workforce shortages. Following the passage of the 2008 Multicultural Family Support Act (*Damunhwa gajok jiwon beop*), the lion's share of government attention has focused on the long-term integration and welfare support of female marriage migrants from China and Southeast Asia (figure 2).

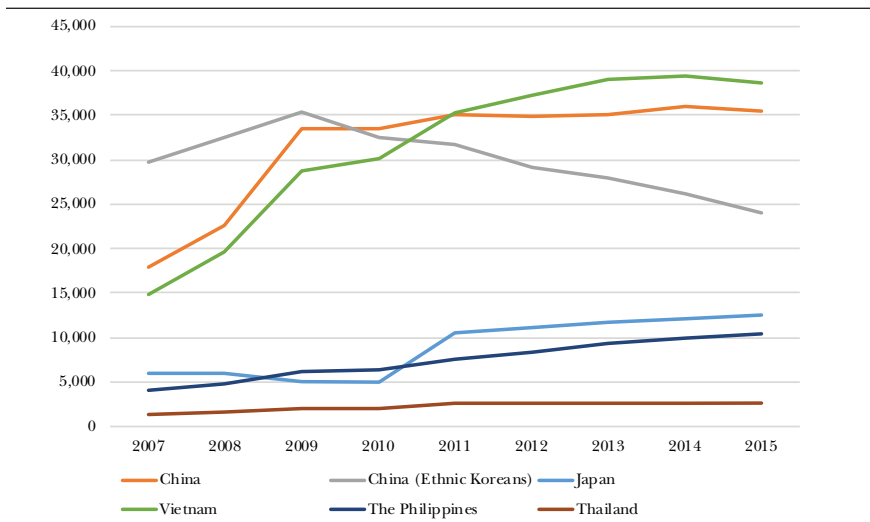
In Korea, the nuclear family has served as a conduit for state and societal actors to address cultural disparities and social frictions while establishing the basis for nationwide diversity programs and principles tied to citizenship. This paper highlights policy siting as one understudied factor in determining why and when states manage cultural diversity. Drawing together literature on comparative policymaking and multi-level citizenship, the paper contributes to the growing body of research that investigates the sites governments target for cultural recognition, welfare and educational support, and legal protection by examining how meso-level institutions influence the national immigration frameworks. The role of meso-level institutions, like the nuclear family, in shaping state multiculturalism is not unique to Korea. Rather, the paper contends that these institutions play a significant role in cultural management endeavours worldwide. While the content of a multicultural site depends on history and national context, states worldwide

Figure 1
Marriage trends in South Korea, 1990–2018 (in thousands)

	Total number of marriages	Marriage with a foreign spouse	International marriages as % of total
1990	399.31	4.71	1%
1995	398.48	13.49	3%
2000	332.1	11.61	3%
2005	314.3	42.4	13%
2010	326.1	34.2	10%
2015	302.8	21.3	7%
2018	257.6	22.7	9%

Source: Korean Statistical Information Service (2021).

Figure 2
Female marriage migrants by country of origin, 2009–2018



Source: Korean Statistical Information Service (2020).

seek to mitigate social friction and political backlash by targeting certain intercultural relations and negating or delegitimizing others.

The scope of this study applies to multiculturalism as a doctrine of immigrant integration. While constrained in scope, Korea's debates have predominantly centred on managing the ethnic difference arising from recent flows of inward migration. The policy communities that negotiated the terms and boundaries of multicultural policy adopted creative strategies to locate diversity within the family, rather than inter-ethnic relations or racial, religious, or gender identities per se. The paper introduces the concept of familial multiculturalism to describe the state initiative to recognize and manage cultural diversity at the nexus of family, cultural differences, and the global imagination. Familial multiculturalism contrasts with existing scholarship on multicultural policy that analyzes either the macro-level factors that produce multicultural policy design that targets immigrant groups and minority rights, or the micro-level implementation gap between policy intent and outcome. Familial multiculturalism can be understood at two levels: as a policy site and policy problematization. In terms of policy siting, familial multiculturalism designates the act of state and societal actors—collectively a policy community—in defining cultural relations and rights primarily in terms of family structures. Family structures can include marriage ties, practices toward in-laws, and the cultural gaps *within* the family and *between* family and broader society.

This study follows a relational approach that privileges the dynamic political and social contexts in which state and non-state actors make sense of the political world and incorporate meaning into our analysis.¹ The original data was produced via immersive fieldwork, conducted over multiple visits to South Korea between 2017 and 2023. This multi-method qualitative approach included interviews and informal conversations with officials from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, as well as experts and NGO officials closely involved with policy formation, review, and implementation. To understand the problematization of multicultural policy in Korea's contemporary political landscape, I also conducted participant observation at national and municipal public forums and migrant support centres, including interviews with administrators and advisors.² I compare these reflections to interpret and explain historical public forum proceedings, government reports, and legislative transcripts. Interviewees were selected based on their long-term

¹ Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (September 1997): 281–317, <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>; Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith, "Comparison with an Ethnographic Sensibility," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 126–130, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516002286>.

² Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read, *Field Research in Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

involvement in immigration policymaking. Interview questions included: How has the government categorized diversity, rights, and citizenship? What were the major points of contention among officials, politicians, civil society, and migrants? How have multicultural themes (*damunhwa*) as policy prescription in Korea evolved or resisted change over the past two decades? These methods produced data aimed to go beyond the methodological nationalism³ inherent in extant liberal and critical theories of Korea's multicultural policy by demonstrating the multilevel and disaggregated nature of multiculturalism.

A core focus of this paper is contemporary policy elites' re-evaluation of the 2008 Multicultural Family Support Act (MFSA) and follow-on programmatic initiatives, leveraging policy community reflections and analysis of the state of the field today. Because diversity management depends on immigrant integration into a Korean family, familial multiculturalism restricts debates on minority rights in Korea to this day. In addressing these themes, the paper also asks: What can these constructions teach us about cultural difference, family, and the state? The findings have broader implications for how we study emergent and feed-forward properties of policy design and mediated multicultural policy. Group-differentiated treatments of racial and ethnic minority groups receive outsized attention in extant literature on multicultural policy, but in reality differentiated rights and recognition depend on political processes embedded in cultural, social, and economic contexts.

The first section of this paper critiques dominant theories that explain multicultural policy in dialogue with their extant application to studies of Korea's multicultural family. I use this review and critique to build to an alternative approach that foregrounds the role meso-level social institutions play in the policy process particularly as it relates to rights and recognition. The second section of the paper traces the discursive shift to incorporate migrant wives as privileged foreigners amid the globalization strategy in the 2000s, through which state and societal actors iteratively problematized international marriage and cultural gaps within the family as the central problems of diversity governance. Legal stipulations set a precedent to manage cultural differences between migrant wives, their husbands, and parents-in-law. However, these legal and welfare benefits necessarily come at the cost of excluding other immigrants and citizens. In other words, Korea's multicultural policy became family policy, rather than an issue of inter-ethnic politics, minority group protections, or liberal rights. In this sense, the study finds that Korean multiculturalism is categorically different from liberal multicultural policy in traditional immigrant-receiving societies. The third

³ Fiona B. Adamson, "Spaces of Global Security: Beyond Methodological Nationalism," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogv003>.

and final section expands the concept of familial multiculturalism to explain how meso-level institutions that mediate diversity governance vary according to historical and sociocultural context. The paper concludes with a discussion of the contemporary political ramifications of Korea's multiculturalism and prospects for future broadening and deepening.

Governing Multiculturalism at the Meso-Level

That South Korea—a paradigmatic ethnonational state only recently open to immigration—would embrace the language of multiculturalism has triggered copious scholarly attention to understand the causes and effects of a multicultural policy that explicitly and exclusively targets families with one immigrant and one Korean parent (*damunhwa gajok jeongchaek*), especially its gendered, racial, and neoliberal underpinnings. Scholars have predominantly concentrated on how Confucian values, conservative ideologies, or ethnonationalism have prompted state actors to include female marriage migrants from developing countries.⁴ This incorporation occurs through patriarchal institutions and heteronormative roles, portraying this migrant as the archetypal Korean wife, mother, and daughter-in-law.⁵

Other scholars have linked Korea's multicultural policy to neoliberal governance of the productive family unit, wherein foreign brides pursue transborder upward mobility by falling into traditional social reproductive roles within Korean host families.⁶ Building on the seminal work by political

⁴ Jia Hong, "Jendeojeong sigag-eseo barabon hanguk eollon-ui damunhwa damnon: gyeonghyang, donga, joseon, hangyeore gisa bunseok-eul jungsim-euro" [The multiculturalism of Korean newspapers in the gender perspective: analysis of Kyunghyang, Dong-A, Chosun, Hankyoreh], *Eollon gwahak yeongu* 10, no. 4 (2010): 644–678; Minjeong Kim, "Citizenship Projects for Marriage Migrants in South Korea: Intersecting Motherhood with Ethnicity and Class," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 455–481, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxt015>; Hyunah Yang, "Gajok aneuro deureoon hanguk-ui damunhwajuui (multiculturalism) silheom" [Experiment of the "multiculturalism" in Korea taking place in the family], *Jeoseutiseu* 134, no. 2 (2013): 298–335; Erin Aeran Chung, "Creating Hierarchies of Noncitizens: Race, Gender, and Visa Categories in South Korea," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (2020): 2497–2514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1561061>.

⁵ Hye-Kyung Lee, "International Marriage and the State in South Korea: Focusing on Governmental Policy," *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 1 (February 2008): 107–123, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020701794240>; Jaeeun Kim, *Contested Embrace: Transborder Membership Politics in Twentieth-Century Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Hae Yeon Choo, *Decentering Citizenship: Gender, Labor, and Migrant Rights in South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁶ Nancy Abelmann and Hyunhee Kim, "A Failed Attempt at Transnational Marriage: Maternal Citizenship in a Globalizing South Korea," in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 101–123; Caren Freeman, "Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea," in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 80–100; Nicole Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 49–64, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085133>; Hyunok Lee, "Political Economy of Cross-Border Marriage: Economic

philosopher Will Kymlicka,⁷ scholarship on Korea's multicultural policy broadly construes it as an imported version of Western ideals.⁸ EuyRyung Jun and Nora Hui-Jung Kim have separately assessed Korean multiculturalism as a national development project, where state and society pursue the global norm as part of Korea's progress among elite advanced nations.⁹ Critical studies judge multicultural ideals and practices as products of settler-colonial countries (the United States, Canada, Australia) or traditional countries of immigration (Germany, Great Britain, France), making them inherently ill-suited to homogenous societies with deep-seated ethnonational traditions.¹⁰

Rather than begin with the assumption that Korea's family-centric multiculturalism is a diluted or incomplete version of its Western analogues, this paper identifies the historically contingent and context-specific ways in which state and societal actors draw on framing strategies at the nexus of gender roles and family institutions that shape access not only to rights, but also legal categorization. Here, multiculturalism is defined as a state effort to recognize cultural difference and regulate minority rights. Multicultural policies comprise laws, programmatic initiatives, and official discourse.

Extant theories on multicultural policies presume a linear movement toward or away from greater inclusion and diversity, largely defined in terms of ethnic or religious groups. Derived largely from traditional countries of immigration in North America and Western Europe, this literature grapples

Development and Social Reproduction in Korea," *Feminist Economics* 18, no. 2 (April 2012): 177–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2012.688139>; Junmo Kim, Seung-Bum Yang, and Ador Revelar Torneo, "Marriage Immigration and Gender in South Korea: Accounting for Gender Disparities in International Marriages," *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 12, no. 2 (2012): 14–32.

⁷ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸ Hye-Soon Kim, "Gyeolhon jju yeoseong-gwa hanguk-ui damunhwa sahoe silheom: choegeun damunhwa damnon-ui sahoehak" [Migrant brides and making of a multicultural society: a sociological approach to recent discourse on "multicultural Korea"], *Hanguk sahoehak* 42, no. 2 (2008): 36–71; Joon K. Kim, "The Politics of Culture in Multicultural Korea," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 10 (2011): 1583–1604, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.613333>.

⁹ EuyRyung Jun, "'We Have to Transform Ourselves First': The Ethics of Liberal Developmentalism and Multicultural Governance in South Korea," *Focaal* 2012, no. 64 (2012): 99–112, <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2012.640109>; Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Framing Multiple Others and International Norms: The Migrant Worker Advocacy Movement and Korean National Identity Reconstruction," *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 4 (October 2009): 678–695, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00390.x>; Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity," in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, eds. Sungmoon Kim and Hsin-Wen Lee (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 143–160.

¹⁰ Hyung Baek Lim, "Hanguk-gwa seogu-ui damunhwa sahoe-ui chai-wa jeongchaeng bigyo" [A study on the difference between Korean and Western multicultural societies and comparison of their policies], *Damunhwa sahoe yeongu* 2, no. 1 (2009): 161–185, <https://doi.org/10.15685/jms.2009.02.2.1.161>; Kim Yung-Myung, "Hanguk-ui damunhwa damnon-e daehan bipanjeong gochal" [Critical considerations for multicultural discourses and policies in Korea], *Journal of Korean Political and Diplomatic History* 35, no. 1 (2013): 141–174, <https://doi.org/10.18206/kapdh.35.1.201308.141>; Eun Mee Kim et al., *South Korea Advances toward a Multicultural Society* (Seoul, South Korea: Nanam, 2012).

with the question of how immigrant-receiving states deal with social pressures presented by racially heterogeneous groups. Drawing on comparative immigration scholarship, governing elites face a political paradox between liberal principles of individual rights on the one hand and protecting national identity defined in racialized terms on the other.¹¹ These accounts further assume convergence determined by international norm diffusion and global discourse on human rights and universal personhood.¹² Western models—allegedly diluted—have slowly gained traction among governing elites but stagnate due to conservative societies that discriminate against autochthonous minority groups and immigrants.¹³

The diffusion thesis might under-analyze the practices and political processes even within the West. Analysts who follow this line of reasoning might overdetermine the outcome of multiculturalism or diversity appreciation or, in an even graver analytical prejudice, view the convergence toward diversity appreciation and tolerance as an abstract ideal, not as one constructed in Western liberal democracies.¹⁴ Even as governing elites actively learn from other cases of multicultural policy, political institutions and domestic traditions of nationhood produce cross-national “variation within convergence” by mediating or moderating the effects of international rights norms.¹⁵ As a result, Korea’s multicultural policy framework differs categorically from countries such as Germany or Canada, where multiculturalism has been lobbied as a bottom-up movement comprised of autochthonous ethnic minorities, settler colonialism, or economic migrants.¹⁶

Understanding how multicultural policies are made requires attention to political processes that are often—though not always—interconnected. This approach interrogates how multicultural policies draw from existing

¹¹ James F. Hollifield, “The Emerging Migration State,” *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 885–912, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00223.x>.

¹² Will Kymlicka, “Liberal Multiculturalism: Western Models, Global Trends, and Asian Debates,” in *Multiculturalism in Asia*, eds. Will Kymlicka and Baogang He (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22–55, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199277621.001.0001>.

¹³ Peng-Er Lam, “At the Margins of a Liberal-Democratic State: Ethnic Minorities in Japan,” in *Multiculturalism in Asia*, eds. Will Kymlicka and Baogang He, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199277621.001.0001>.

¹⁴ For a legal interpretation of these differences, see Hyung Baek Lim, “Hangukgwa Seoguui Damunhwa Sahoeui Chaiwa Jeongchaeng Bigyo” [A study on the difference between Korean and Western multicultural societies and comparison of their policies], *Damunhwasaheoyeongu* 2, no. 1 (28 February 2009): 161–185, <https://doi.org/10.15685/jms.2009.02.1.161>.

¹⁵ Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, *Becoming Multicultural: Immigration and the Politics of Membership in Canada and Germany* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2012); Amy Gurowitz, “International Law, Politics, and Migrant Rights,” in *The Politics of International Law*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131–150.

¹⁶ Juliet Hooker, “Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2005): 285–310, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X05009016>; Sener Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood In Germany, Russia, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ruud Koopmans, “Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Contested Field in Cross-National Comparison,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (30 July 2013): 147–169, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145630>.

citizenship laws and institutions. Citizenship refers to the legal status and membership within a nation-state, conferring certain rights, responsibilities, and privileges upon individuals.¹⁷ However, the contents of citizenship are not acquired as a full set of rights, in linear fashion.¹⁸ Nor are the foundational narratives of national belonging necessarily expanded or challenged by the recognition of minority groups or individuals. As a result, a given nation-state may restrict the rights and political recognition of certain citizens or denizens while also providing rights and protections to others.

Multicultural policy, on the other hand, refers to a set of guidelines, principles, and initiatives that a government or society adopts to manage cultural diversity within its borders. Multicultural policies aim to address the challenges that arise from having various ethnic, cultural, and religious groups within a single nation. These policies can include measures to promote cultural expression, protect minority rights, and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of their background. The relationship between citizenship and multicultural policy becomes evident when considering how societies manage diversity while upholding the principles of equality and inclusion. Multicultural policies can influence how different cultural groups are recognized and integrated into the larger society, impacting their access to citizenship rights. Citizenship, in turn, can shape the effectiveness and implementation of multicultural policies, as the rights and privileges granted to citizens can affect their participation and engagement in society.

Multicultural policies may involve efforts to make citizenship more inclusive, ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds have equal access to citizenship rights and opportunities. These policies might focus on removing barriers to citizenship for marginalized communities or addressing issues of discrimination that might affect citizenship eligibility. Conversely, citizenship requirements and criteria can also impact the implementation of multicultural policies. Some countries might have stricter citizenship requirements that could affect the inclusion of certain cultural or ethnic groups. Additionally, citizenship status can influence the level of protection and support that individuals receive under multicultural policies.

In the case of South Korea, intermarriage with a citizen—specifically male citizens—preceded broader discussions of ethnic, racial, religious, and other minority rights. The framing of Korea's migrant wives as the target of diversity

¹⁷ Maarten P. Vink, "Comparing Citizenship Regimes," in *Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, ed. Ayelet Shachar et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Bryan S. Turner, *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993).

¹⁸ T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). For a systematic unpacking of disaggregated citizenship in democracies, see Elizabeth F. Cohen, *Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

management has “stuck,”¹⁹ and helps explain the legacy of Korea’s familial multicultural policy as a meso-level site that excludes not only the majority of immigrants, but also an underlying diversity vis-à-vis religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation among Korean citizens across history. The fact that recognition of difference in Korea’s multicultural policy is contingent upon familial incorporation has restricted serious policy dialogue concerning the racial homogeneity and monoculturalism that not only form the foundation of national identity but also have significant implications for broader citizen and immigrant rights and duties.

Incorporating Migrant Wives as Privileged Foreigners

Today, we can recognize the MFSA as the first legislation of diversity governance in Korea, as it set two important legal precedents. First, it defined *who* is entitled to expedited pathways to permanent residency and naturalization—a foundational aspect of minority recognition within multicultural policy. While not the first law to govern foreigners coming into Korea—it was preceded by a guestworker program in 1993²⁰ and the Basic Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in 2007—the MFSA emphasized the permanence of migrant wives in Korean society through their family ties. The 1993 guestworker program and the 2007 foreigner bill emphasized temporariness and processes for migrant return or expulsion. In subsequent years, each of these targeted migrant categories instituted pathways for long-term residency and, in limited cases, naturalization. But to this day, foreign workers of all socioeconomic classes and occupations face stringent hurdles and a points-based system that grants access to foundational rights and privileges. The MFSA and follow-on policies presume not only migrant wives’ incorporation into families, but naturalization. The cultural management of foreign wives and their children was direct neither in law nor social expectation, but contingent on framing migrant women as legally and socially situated within a family with a Korean spouse and children with Korean citizenship.

Second, the MFSA and its follow-on programming emphasized the roles of women as family members—as wives and mothers mediating Korean

¹⁹ This phrasing combines ideational approaches with the historical institutionalist tradition in political science. See, for example, Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Daniel Béland, “Ideas and Institutional Change in Social Security: Conversion, Layering, and Policy Drift,” *Social Science Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (March 2007): 20–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2007.00444.x>; Erik Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policymaking since the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615580>.

²⁰ In 2004 the Korean government replaced this lean guestworker framework with the Employment Permit Service, a more robust and protective regulatory program.

culture and global connection. Indeed, nearly 90 percent of marriage migrants are women.²¹ Advocates for migrant women's issues have problematized communication issues, cultural adaptation, and social integration into schools, workplaces, and local communities as special family issues, rather than emphasizing ethnic, racial, or religious diversity issues. A Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) representative asserted the ministry's unique capacity and expertise to coordinate the special needs of migrant wives' families.²² Similarly, the director of the Immigrant Women's Human Rights Alliance echoed that view by highlighting the multiple social roles particular to the migrant wife experience: a combination of their rights as foreign residents, their special position as mothers of Korean children, and their position as a woman in the family.²³

Policy actors categorized migrant wives as victims of patriarchal practices and economic poverty. Feminist scholars, human rights activists, and progressive media outlets in Korea reframed the marriage migrant issue by asking how transnational economic inequality and patriarchal family structures victimized foreign wives. Religious organizations, women's groups, and migrant advocacy NGOs had been silently filling the role of protector, offering social and legal support networks for women with few legal rights.²⁴ Critics contended the government was taking part in the international traffic in women or commodifying foreign female bodies, strategically using migrant wives to meet the economic demands for economic security.²⁵ News stories also raised awareness that not all migrant women experience the Korean Dream of socioeconomic security.

Meanwhile, mass media documented the slow increase in divorce rates for Koreans married to foreign spouses—11 percent in 2009, 12.3 percent in 2010, 12.6 percent in 2011—leading Koreans to view these marriages as inherently unstable due to culture clash, low economic status, or the brides falling short of their familial roles.²⁶ Four out of ten international marriages do break down within the first five years.²⁷ Public fears of social instability were not allayed by uncoordinated international marriage regulations, including deregulation of commercial matchmaking agencies as well as lack

²¹ Korean Statistical Information Service (2021)

²² Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, 9–10.

²³ Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, 6.

²⁴ Denis Kim, "Catalysers in the Promotion of Migrants' Rights: Church-Based NGOs in South Korea," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 10 (2011): 1649–1667, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.613336>; Hae Yeon Choo, *Decentering Citizenship: Gender, Labor, and Migrant Rights in South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Lee, "International Marriage and the State in South Korea."

²⁶ Cheol-jung Kim, "Damunhwa gyeolhon julgo ihon neuleo" [Multicultural marriage going down and divorce going up], *Donga Ilbo*, 22 November 2012, <https://www.donga.com/news/Society/article/all/20121122/51019977/1>.

²⁷ Chung-un Cho, "Divorce Rate Still High among Multicultural Families: Report," *Korea Herald*, 26 February 2013, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130226000829>.

of social supports or cultural integration. Local immigration offices profiled international couples in a socially defined high-risk group: large age gaps, rapid remarriage, or a migrant spouse's previous legal residency status in Korea.²⁸ Corroborated by coverage of divorce rates and stories of conflict between wives and mothers-in-law, reframing migrant wives centred on social risk and disruption to family life, the stalwart building block of socioeconomic life. News media and online discourse latched onto fears of Korean Chinese women in particular as runaway brides who abandon their Korean husbands after getting citizenship. Public opinion in the late 1990s was that many international marriages were illegitimate attempts to enter and work in Korea's more developed economy.²⁹ The narrative cast doubt over whether the foreign wife truly attempted to integrate (or assimilate) into Korean society. The public also suspected many women only wanted personal economic benefit through marrying a Korean man.

While the other issues of migrants that came to national debate focused on economic rights or ethnic diversity, the migrant women's advocacy groups put forward two policy frames. First, and primarily, the advocates focused on issues of domestic violence and economic inequality. As the issue of migrants came to national debate, one scholar-activist recalled that religious organizations and the academic community successfully garnered political attention by putting domestic violence and marital conflict on the national agenda as an issue that concerned *partners* and even in-laws, rather than being the sole responsibility of the wife.³⁰ Women's rights advocates pointed to commercial brokers as a particularly grave concern in the international marriage phenomenon, which they framed as part of a bigger issue of patriarchal structures. Within this political context, migrant women's advocacy groups lobbied MOGEF for funding to help support programming targeted at migrant women. In 2004, MOGEF opened a help hotline for migrant women as well as support projects in cities across the country. Reflecting on the success of their programmatic initiatives, governing elites spoke with pride about the establishment of a multilingual hotline for migrant wives to seek everything from legal help and protection to information about language, educational, and employment programming.³¹ These concerns continue to permeate current debates on multicultural protections. At the 12th Annual National Together Day Celebration and Immigration Policy Forum, held in 2019 at the National Assembly offices, miscommunication

²⁸ Jaeun Kim, *Contested Embrace: Transborder Membership Politics in Twentieth-Century Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 207.

²⁹ Caren Freeman, "Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea," in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 80–100.

³⁰ Draudt, interview with academic activist, Seoul, 29 July 2019.

³¹ Draudt, field notes from interviews with Ministry of Justice officials and Multicultural Family Support Center staff, Seoul and Ansan City, March–June 2019.

and cultural gaps featured prominently in both scholarly presentations and audience questions.³²

A second major narrative among the policy community has focused on the lower socioeconomic status of international families and potential disruptions in broader social stability. Benchmarking the local neighbourhood centres for Korean families, the national government instituted a wide network of support centres to focus on education, health, and social support programming via a top-down multicultural policy. Following the passage of the MFSA in 2008, MOGEF rapidly expanded oversight and planning responsibilities for migrant wives and their families. The cornerstone for MOGEF programs to support and integrate migrant wives and their families has been the Multicultural Family Support Centres. MOGEF established the country's first support centre in 2006; the next year, the number had ballooned to 38.³³ The number of centres has continued to grow, reaching nearly 200 by 2012—a more than 700 percent increase since 2006. In fact, over 90 percent of the budget afforded to migrant wives has been in the form of cultural and employment support programs and social welfare policies.³⁴ This budget is nearly ten times the amount allocated to all other foreigners combined (figure 3). In other words, the Korean government

Figure 3
Policy and program budget by targeted migrant group, 2012
(unit: million won)

	Migrant wives	Migrant workers	Others
Social integration programs	111,1176	8,238	2,380
Law enforcement	233	390	5,698
Human rights protection	5,685	52	5,402
Total budget	121,591	31,327	54,404
Number of migrants	148,498	617,145	679,460
Budget per migrant	0.820	0.051	.078

Source: Anna Kim, “Welfare Policies and Budget Allocation for Migrants in South Korea,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 25, no. 1 (2016): 92 (2012 exchange rate: US\$1 = 1,165 won).

³² Draudt, field notes at the 12th Annual National Together Day Celebration and Immigration Policy Forum (Je 12hoe segye inui nal ginyeom imin jeongchaek poreom), National Assembly Member’s Office Building, Seoul, 24 May 2019.

³³ Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, 9.

³⁴ Anna Kim, “Welfare Policies and Budget Allocation for Migrants in South Korea,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 25, no. 1 (2016): 85–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0117196815621808>.

sees the international marriage couples and their children as a priority investment in the country's present and future.

Siting Diversity Governance within the Family

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was little understanding or consensus among policy communities over what the term multicultural meant for a case like South Korea. The country not only was ethnically and racially homogeneous, but public opinion and state rhetoric promoted a national narrative of millennia-long heritage that unified Koreans against others.³⁵ The term multicultural family had not yet been tagged to migrant wives, and policy actors used various terms such as “international families” or “families with a female marriage migrant.”³⁶ Confronting these unfamiliar, confusing, and contested issues of international marriage, gender roles, and inequality, separate bills pertaining to the support of older generations of mixed-race Koreans, families with two immigrant parents, and the multicultural family entered the National Assembly floor in 2007. Each conceptualization of foreigner and immigrant sewn into the three bills carried different moral weight, fraught with socioeconomic class, gender roles, nationality, and ethnic burdens. Legislative debates on the bills drew from preexisting ideas, institutions, and laws to simultaneously define deserving foreigners entitled to legal protection and social support, ultimately providing an institutional framework through which to incorporate migrant wives as members of the Korean nation.

Representing some of the confusion over what comprised the multicultural family and Korea's diversifying future, the Women and Family Committee of the National Assembly considered an international family-centred bill concurrently with two other bills with the Multicultural Family Support Bill (*Damunhwa gajok jiwon beoban*): the Mixed-Race Family Support Bill (*Honhyeol ingajong jiwon-e gwanhan beomnyuran*) and the Migrant Family Protection and Support Bill (*Ijumin gajok-ui boho mit jiwon deung-e gwanhan beomnyuran*). Legislative debates focused on how to define the families and ethnic diversity in Korea, and whether one of these frameworks should be privileged—or if any were even necessary.

Some committee members and testifying experts expressed concern that a special law aimed at as-yet legally undefined multicultural families or immigrant families would be redundant, considering a law encompassing all foreigners had just been passed. For example, the newly established Korean Immigration Service under the MOJ focused on entry and exit control, monitoring employment status, and preventing human rights abuses such as workplace violence or brutal work conditions. Many policy actors argued that

³⁵ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Draudt, interview with support center manager, Ansan City, 12 July 2017.

marriage migration should be administered under the MOJ as regular immigration under the umbrella Basic Act on the Treatment of Foreigners.³⁷ In June 2007, the Korean Immigration Service Deputy Director Kim Nam-il testified that the recently enacted Basic Act overseen by the Ministry of Justice created the legal architecture to regulate international marriage, and thus a new law limited to international families and foreign spouses would be unnecessary. Through the five-year strategic plans for foreigner policies sanctioned by the Basic Act, he stated that his office could handle the planning for *all* migrants, including migrant wives and their families.³⁸

The interaction between familism, culture, and migration informed the construction of familial multiculturalism. By the early 2000s, Korean activists pushed the issue of marriage migrants' rights to the national agenda through gender- and family-based frameworks for social support. Reflecting on this approach, one feminist scholar-activist said that by the time Korean-style multiculturalism was prominent on the national policy agenda and had gained widespread media attention, it had become a descriptor for a particular type of family unit. Multiculturalism was not a policy paradigm or ideological orientation. It was a type of intercultural family, which included one Korean parent.

State and societal actors applied framing strategies via familialist social policy in relation to migration, culture, and citizenship. Across the globe, industrialized democracies have implemented family-oriented policies encompassing a range of measures, including the provision of childcare centres, financial subsidies, allowances, and tax incentives linked to the number of children in a household.³⁹ Kyung-sup Chang argues that everyday personal life as well as macro-structural changes—ranging from sociopolitical order, social welfare, and demographic structure—in Korea are explained by the cultural characteristics and organizational structures of Korean families.⁴⁰ But the family does not only explain macro-level changes or micro-level behaviours. The family unit serves a political function as intermediary for governance—a meso-level site.⁴¹ For both Korean families, and later,

³⁷ Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, *Republic of Korea National Assembly, 268th Meeting*, 26 June 2007, 14–15.

³⁸ Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, *Republic of Korea National Assembly, 268th Meeting*, 26 June 2007, 14–15.

³⁹ Julia S. O'Connor, "Employment Equality Strategies in Liberal Welfare States," in *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*, ed. Diane Sainsbury (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47–74; Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State: Parties and Policies in Global Markets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Kyung-Sup Chang, "Modernity through the Family: Familial Foundations of Korean Society," *International Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (March 1997): 51–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.1997.9971221>.

⁴¹ Erin Aeran Chung, Darcie Draudt, and Yunchen Tian, "Regulating Membership and Movement at the Meso-Level: Citizen-Making and the Household Registration System in East Asia," *Citizenship Studies* 24, no. 1 (10 December 2019): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1700914>.

international couples, the nuclear family has been framed as the site of both maintaining social stability *and* achieving national and individual development, and so affording rights and duties of citizenship depends on a certain family structure.

Neither state recognition of marriage migrants as diverse nor the international family framework were foregone conclusions; rather, they emerged as the unintended consequences as state and societal actors negotiated competing framing strategies in a nascent immigration policy domain. Amid increasing international marriages due to globalization, a growing group of policymakers, NGOs, researchers, and bureaucrats stimulated a national conversation to create a special immigration policy for migrant wives, distinct from regulations for other foreign residents. This nascent and fragmented discussion led to the separation of migrant wives from legislation aimed at other foreign residents, minority groups, or diverse identities.

While questions of ethnicity, race, patriarchal mores, and foreign policy entered the policy debates, ultimately the policy community problematized marriage migration as a family policy. In other words, the 2000s policy design was viewed as a necessary solution to a problem of gender roles and culture within family stability and growth, not an issue of liberal rights or racial group protection. In the years since, programmatic initiatives and laws formalized a multitier immigration policy that prioritized the long-term incorporation of migrant wives by introducing a new Korean multicultural family concept. This multicultural family drew from existing symbols, narratives, and laws related to the family institution.

The MFSA sought to tackle the ways in which Korean families—husbands and parents-in-law—leveraged gendered power dynamics and migrant precarity to victimize female marriage migrants, both within the home and across borders. Foreign brides, largely from China and Southeast Asia, started to look for marriage partners in more economically developed democracies such as Korea—as well as Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore—in pursuit of upward mobility, including greater economic security.⁴² Many migrants reported extreme poverty at home, having outstanding debt, or working difficult jobs in factories. They identified potential Korean mates, while poor by Korean standards, as being relatively more economically stable and socially established.

In 2003, President Roh Moo-hyun, a progressive, came into office seeking a systematic immigration policy based on tolerance, human rights, and recognition of diversity. Roh tasked a newly formed Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion (PCSI), which comprised 14 agencies plus academic and civil society representatives, with producing recommendations on addressing

⁴² Nicole Constable, ed., *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

the country's socioeconomic inequality and discrimination.⁴³ At the public briefing on the formation of the Presidential Committee, President Roh proclaimed that South Korea had already transitioned to a multiracial, multicultural society—though only 1 percent of the population at the time were immigrants—and committed his administration to incorporating migrants.

Diversity governance was one of the main agenda items. Despite its initially expansive vision for equity and social inclusion, the committee focused on marriage migrants as a politically expedient first step in immigration reform. In 2006 the PCSI revealed its Grand Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Marriage Migrant Women, Biracial People, and Immigrants (hereafter, the Grand Plan). The Grand Plan sorted target populations into two categories: 1) multiracial Koreans and other immigrants, and 2) female marriage migrant families (*yeoseong gyeolhon iminja*).⁴⁴ Though the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) had two years prior instituted workplace protections and streamlined recruitment procedures for guestworkers, one of the PSCI committee members interviewed said policy elites within the PCSI believed that extending long-term residency or welfare to guestworkers would incite popular backlash amid a climate of economic uncertainty and unemployment.⁴⁵ This political concern dominates policy debates over immigration to this day, with governing elites trying to depoliticize the migrant worker movement.⁴⁶ Instead, according to one PSCI advisor, committee members believed focusing on migrant wives and their families would rouse sympathy from the public.⁴⁷

However, a networked group of government and social actors advocated a nuanced, more patchwork approach to govern different groups of foreign residents, immigrant groups, or multiethnic Koreans based on their individual characteristics and the social context. In this sense, the decision to govern and support the children of migrant wives apart from older generations of multiethnic Koreans was the unintended outcome of a political process of negotiation and discursive strategy. Ultimately, those who advocated that the government target migrant wives and their families over other multiracial Koreans and immigrant family groups (that is, families with two immigrant or non-citizen parents) were the only successful group in these debates. The

⁴³ President's Office, "Presidential committee on social inclusion regulations" (Binbu gyeokcha chabyeol sijeong wiwonhoe gyujeong), Presidential Decree No. 18410, 5 June 2004.

⁴⁴ Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion, "Yeoseong gyeolhon iminja gajok-ui sahoe tonghap jiwon daechaek hwakjeong" (Measures to support the social integration of female marriage immigrant families), 26 April 2006.

⁴⁵ Interview with PSCI policy advisor, Seoul, 16 July 2019.

⁴⁶ Draudt, field notes at the 12th Annual National Together Day Celebration and Immigration Policy Forum (Je 12hoe segye inui nal ginyeom imin jeongchaek poreom), National Assembly Member's Office Building, Seoul, 24 May 2019.

⁴⁷ Draudt, interview with PSCI policy advisor, Seoul, 30 July 2019.

Support for Mixed-Race Families Bill and the Migrant Family Bill did not pass the committee after staying in review for almost three years. The Women and Family Committee referred only the MFSA to the National Assembly and retained the family-focused framework. The bill explicitly restricted the multicultural policies' coverage to migrant wives and their children and excluded other migrants and older multiracial Koreans who might otherwise have been included in legislation about multiculturalism. The policy decision to separate marriage migrant governance as distinct from immigration regulation under the MOJ and over the two other bills under consideration suggests key aspects of how the state instituted a plan to recognize and manage cultural diversity: simply, the 2008 multicultural policy elided ethnicity and race and framed cultural difference as a family matter.

Familial Multiculturalism: An Inclusive-Exclusive Institution

The fact that recognition of cultural difference in Korea's multicultural laws is contingent on familial incorporation has had powerful feed-forward effects that restrict policy dialogue concerning the racial homogeneity and monoculturalism that not only form the foundation of national identity but also have significant implications for broader citizenship rights and duties.

Omitting protections against racial discrimination has deep legacies from the historical experience with multiracial Koreans, rooted in geopolitical patterns in international marriage. Until the 1980s, international marriages or partnerships largely occurred between Korean women and American soldiers stationed on the Korean Peninsula. On the one hand, women who married American soldiers were described as "GI brides." In the popular imaginary, the Yankee bride symbolized the "fears and fantasies about U.S. soldiers as both benevolent protectors and monstrous criminals coupled with the material realities of war."⁴⁸ Building on this context, advocates for older multiethnic Koreans, such as the Korean Federation of International Families, expressed concern with being combined with more recent or younger multicultural families. The backgrounds, characteristics, and purposes for being in Korea are different, one NGO advocate argued, and so the core policy outlooks warranted the National Assembly pass separate laws targeting each group.⁴⁹ The sponsor of the bill on multiracial Koreans, Representative Kim Choong-hwan, later expressed the opinion that first-generation multiracial Koreans had a slightly darker image (*eoduun imiji*) stigmatized by the large number of Korean women who married American servicemen or participated in sex work near US military camp towns following

⁴⁸ Katharine Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/sex-among-allies/9780231106436>; Grace M. Cho, "Diaspora of Camptown: The Forgotten War's Monstrous Family," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 309–331.

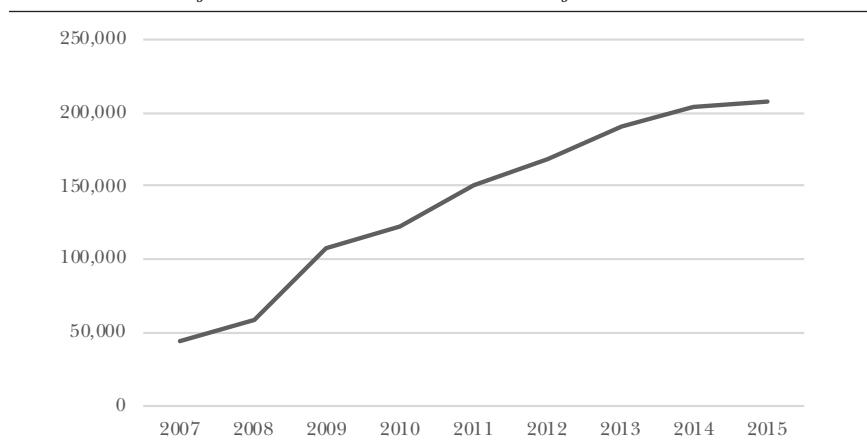
⁴⁹ Women and Family Committee 3rd Hearing, 8.

the Korean War,⁵⁰ going on to say they were passed over in the legislative debates even into the twenty-first century.⁵¹ As the hundreds of thousands of multicultural, multiracial children of international couples (figure 4) come of age, questions about race may yield increasing political and social salience.

Familial multiculturalism also helps explain Korea's continued exclusionary multicultural politics that emphasize temporariness and resist anti-discrimination laws or race-conscious policies. Based on Korea's nearly 40-year experience with small, but growing, numbers of foreigners, we might expect South Korea's growing immigrant population to presage more open borders. While national sentiments have warmed to immigrants in the abstract, many Koreans worry about foreigners moving into their neighbourhood.⁵² According to the 2010 World Values Survey, 34 percent of respondents felt negatively about mixed-race residents living next door and 44 percent of respondents felt negatively about migrant workers living next door.⁵³

Korea's contingent pathway to multiculturalism comes into clearer relief when compared to its neighbour Japan, which has pursued divergent debates

Figure 4
Number of children in Korean multicultural families, 2007–2015



Source: Korean Statistical Information Service (2020).

⁵⁰ For more on this history, see Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/sex-among-allies/9780231106436>.

⁵¹ Yeong-sik Gu, "Wae jeonjaeng-ui jimeul honhyeolin-i da jilmeojyeoya hana?" [Why should mixed-race Koreans bear the burden of the war?], *OhmyNews*, 20 March 2009, http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0001091483.

⁵² Draudt, interview with scholar-activist, Seoul, 16 July 2017.

⁵³ Soo Young Auh, "World Values Survey Wave 6: South Korea," 2010.

on cultural diversity. Ethnically homogeneous and only recently open to significant immigration reforms,⁵⁴ Japan has largely pursued assimilationist policies under the banner of social stability and ethnic homogeneity. Japan's official slogan "multicultural coexistence" (*tabunka kyōsei*) relegates support to local governments and notoriously resists broader immigration reform.⁵⁵ Unlike Korean policies, *tabunka kyōsei* has explicitly racial undertones. Yuko Kawai argues that Japanese people view racism as a foreign issue with little relevance for pluralizing the autochthonous concept of *minzoku* (roughly, ethnicity).⁵⁶ Whereas multicultural family policy in Korea became a top-down effort to promote immigration and integration, Yoko Demelius points out that the absence of population targets in *tabunka kyōsei* "generates obstacles in the attempt to build a multicultural society."⁵⁷

Further, an anti-multicultural policy movement may coincide with a broader anxiety over gender roles and the family crisis.⁵⁸ Anti-multicultural sentiment (*bandamunhwa*) simmers in corners of society, and is particularly pronounced among unmarried men.⁵⁹ This attitude judges the outsized legal and social benefits bestowed upon the multicultural family—and migrant women specifically—as unfair privilege. In fact, discourse on gender, culture, and family has pressing political salience today, particularly in the context of broader gender conflict among younger generations. Anti-feminist activists call to abolish MOGEF and claim gender inequality and gender-based violence have been eradicated in Korean society, and thus policies that target women's advancement should be rescinded. This political movement has met with a sympathetic audience in the current Yoon Seok-yeol administration, whose election in 2022 was arguably clinched by a young male conservative vote.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Erin Aeran Chung, "Workers or Residents? Diverging Patterns of Immigrant Incorporation in Korea and Japan," *Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 4 (2010): 675–696.

⁵⁵ Viktoriya Kim and Philip Streich, "Tabunka Kyōsei without Immigration Policy: The Role of Centers for International Exchange and Their Challenges," *Contemporary Japan* 32, no. 2 (2 July 2020): 174–196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18692729.2020.1770477>; Yoshikazu Shiobara, "Genealogy of Tabunka Kyōsei: A Critical Analysis of the Reformation of the Multicultural Co-living Discourse in Japan," *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 29, no. 1 (March 2020): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijjs.12109>.

⁵⁶ Yuko Kawai, "Deracialised Race, Obscured Racism: Japaneseness, Western and Japanese Concepts of Race, and Modalities of Racism," *Japanese Studies* 35, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 23–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371397.2015.1006598>.

⁵⁷ Yoko Demelius, "Multiculturalism in a 'Homogeneous' Society from the Perspectives of an Intercultural Event in Japan," *Asian Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2019.1710332>.

⁵⁸ Darcie Draudt, "The South Korean Election's Gender Conflict and the Future of Women Voters," Council on Foreign Relations, 8 February 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-korean-elections-gender-conflict-and-future-women-voters>.

⁵⁹ Draudt, interview with researcher on migrant activism, Seoul, 10 July 2017.

⁶⁰ Hannah June Kim and Chungjae Lee, "The 2022 South Korean Presidential Election and the Gender Divide among the Youth," *Pacific Affairs* 95, no. 2 (June 2022): 285–308, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2022952285>.

Finally, comprehensive protection against discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender identity, or sexual orientation have not yet been turned into law. A small group of progressive lawmakers, public interest lawyers, and human rights activists have endeavoured to put omnibus anti-discrimination legislation on the National Assembly floor, but as of 2023, proposals have failed ten times since 2007. The major impasse has been the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights, which have been historically marginalized in society and law.⁶¹ A strong network of conservative evangelical Christian church leaders, politicians, and thought-leaders have mounted enough pressure to strike down the proposals. Though outside the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that the restricted nature of familial multiculturalism, which relies on conventional gender norms, overlooks the presence of alternative family structures.

Conclusion

Korea's policy choices challenge dominant theories of multicultural policy, which presume that liberal norms about ethnic and cultural tolerance flow from the developed Global North or from the cosmopolitan West to the periphery, where states are catching up to an international (i.e., Western) standard. In this view, local or historical national narratives move away from cultural constraint toward a cosmopolitan ideal. This sort of teleological analysis assumes that peripheral states are norm-takers rather than creative agents that reconstruct multiculturalism in their own domestic policy debates.

Today's global climate of identity politics, ethnonationalist populism, and mounting illiberalism might suggest a widespread retreat from multicultural policies. Security concerns and economic uncertainty drive public backlash and anti-immigrant political platforms in Western countries.⁶² It is worth considering in future research—for the sake of both scholarly inquiry and real-world relevance—why three decades of steadily increasing numbers of diverse immigrants in South Korea has not stoked a bona fide political movement either for more inclusive policies or against immigration. Attention to meso-level institutions as a method of policy siting, as presented in this paper, can be extended to analyze the limited but still viable anti-immigrant or anti-diversity movement.

Over a decade ago in this journal, Timothy Lim aptly argued that international marriages in Korea would play a central role in Korea's multicultural debate, particularly as state and society struggle with the challenges that come with embracing growing ethnocultural diversity and

⁶¹ For a systematic overview of the queer rights movement and democratic deepening in South Korea, see Youngshik D. Bong, "The Gay Rights Movement in Democratizing Korea," *Korean Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 86–103, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ks.0.0013>.

⁶² Joppke, "The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State."

eliminating the gendered and racial underpinnings of national citizenship and belonging. Lim concluded that “the public debate on multiculturalism should be viewed as a first but critical step, one that marks the beginning of a profound discursive shift within Korean society.”⁶³ Elsewhere Lim argued that South Korea’s immigrant incorporation path is not exceptional, but “ordinary.” Liberal democratic governance and capitalist imperatives have and will continue to push the state and society toward broader immigrant acceptance, as evidenced by extending labour rights for guest workers in policy that mimics the trajectory of Germany’s *Gastarbeiter* project in the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁴

The findings of this study suggest that Korea is indeed ordinary. However, in contemporary Korea it is not racial or ethnic *groups* that deserve recognition and minority rights, but the mediated relationship between Korean men and migrant wives that receives sustained attention in multicultural policy to this day. Korea is indeed ordinary because its 15 years of multicultural policy creation and implementation exemplifies the historically contingent and context-specific ways in which state and societal actors problematize and site diversity.

Princeton University, Princeton, USA, August 2023

⁶³ Timothy C. Lim, “Rethinking Belongingness in Korea: Transnational Migration, ‘Migrant Marriages’ and the Politics of Multiculturalism,” *Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2010): 53.

⁶⁴ Timothy C. Lim, “South Korea as an ‘Ordinary’ Country: A Comparative Inquiry into the Prospects for ‘Permanent’ Immigration to Korea,” *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 507–528, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.658549>.