

Dynamics of Ethnic Nationalism and Hierarchical Nationhood: *Korean Nation and Its Otherness since the Late 1980s**

Dong-Hoon SEOL and Jungmin SEO

Abstract

Due to an influx of migrants, the multicultural character of South Korean society is gradually deepening. This transformation in the composition of the nation challenges the myth of Korea's social homogeneity. In this article, we examine the emergence of groups of ethnic and social minorities through the dual factors of globalization and the democratization of Koreans' conception of nationalism and nationhood. From the late 1980s, new social minorities have emerged in Korean society through democratization and globalization. Globalization brought about an influx of Joseonjok (ethnic Koreans from China), North Korean refugees, foreign spouses, and migrant workers, while democratization has led to the appearance of hwagyo (ethnic Chinese in Korea), gays and lesbians, persons with disabilities, and honhyeorin (mixed-blood people) as social minority groups. These minorities have become members of the Korean nation-state, establishing themselves as new constituents constructing Korean nationhood. We conclude that the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion of these minorities in Korean society has transformed into a type of hierarchization. We employ the concept of hierarchical nationhood to describe the legal/policy and social dimensions of this hierarchization.

Keywords: globalization, democratization, ethnic nationalism, social minorities, hierarchical nationhood, migrant workers, foreign spouses, ethnic Korean Chinese

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Introduction

This study is a theoretical inquiry into how the tides of globalization and democratization are reshaping the Korean national identity through the sociopolitical dynamics between an exceptionally homogeneous nation-state and emerging social and ethnic minorities in the age of globalization and democratic consolidation. Korean national identity has long been described as an unusually homogenizing and totalizing force that does not allow for the separation between nationhood based on citizenship and ethnicity based on bloodline. Since the late 1980s, “outsiders” have emerged both within and outside South Korean society, rather than being constructed as shown in the process of nation-building across the world. As Zygmunt Bauman (1991) brilliantly diagnosed, the true source of modernity’s fear and anxiety are not enemies that can be conveniently understood through the binary of us and them, but rather strangers who cannot be easily categorized. In this sense, the emergence of ambiguous outsiders poses a fundamental challenge to the ethnically homogeneous Korean nation.

Our approach to the question of nation and emerging strangers is directly related to a broader issue: at the turn of the twenty-first century, how do the tides of globalization and democratization interact with an ethnically homogeneous nation-state, especially on the issue of national identity? Few studies have drawn attention to the fact that both democratization and globalization, by forcing the Korean nation to face a large body of “others,” have placed unprecedented pressure upon that time-honored idea of Korean nationhood, which had until then taken pride in a perceived exceptional ethnic homogeneity, compelling it to review and revise its very concept of “nation”—*gungmin* or *minjok* in Korean.

This study is an attempt to construct a theoretical framework for delineating how globalization and democratization reshape the national identity of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. First, we argue that the forces of globalization and democratization impact upon the core perception of national identity as an *intermediate variable*—rather than an independent variable—by producing collective identities of social and ethnic minorities,

groups of people who used to be scattered and atomized in society, or entirely absent. Secondly, we suggest that the encounter between the Korean nation-state and the emerging social and ethnic minorities in Korean society can best be characterized by two interacting thrusts: (1) the emerging social and ethnic minorities' appeal toward universal (or a global standard of) human rights as a superseding category vis-à-vis the nation-state's sovereignty claims, and (2) the nation-state's attempt to hierarchize its concept of national membership and citizenship in order to overcome the ambiguity of membership.

Dynamics of Ethnic Nationalism: From Dichotomy (Inclusion/Exclusion) to Hierarchization

There has been no shortage of discussions on how globalization is challenging the monopoly of the nation-state over its population and territory (see Held et al. 1999; Sassen 2006). The expansion of global capitalism has created a group of privileged denizens, or transnational capitalists, for whom an individual state's rules and regulations are much less relevant than the universal logic of capital flows and profit-making (Sklair 1995). The rising tide of worldwide labor migration indicates that national borders are defenseless against the global labor market. At the same time, being dependent upon "a broader system of enacting authority and influence from multiple sources," nation-states simply have become "one of many participants of global networks of powers and counter-powers" (Castells 1997, 304-305). In discussions over state sovereignty, however, the nation-state, confronted by the mounting forces of globalization, is often presumed to be the Weberian ideal of the modern state, a legitimate bureaucratic order that monopolizes the use of force and sustains its territorial integrity (Weber 1968, 220-221; Kearney 1995, 548). In other words, by focusing solely on the weakening bureaucratic and administrative authorities of the nation, existing scholarship on globalization has hardly dealt with how globalization alters the nature of national identity in the nation-state. In this sense, current scholarship has neglected globalization's impact on the *nation* by an exclusive

focus on the *state*.

This problematization is particularly relevant for investigating nation-states with well-constructed traditions of homogenous ethnic identity, that is, nations such as Japan, Greece, and Korea. When ethnicized nation is an ideological authority superseding the bureaucratic state, the discussion over state sovereignty is insufficient for measuring the impacts of globalization on the nation-state. This is precisely because membership in the nation-state is frequently compounded with the concept of belonging to an ethnicized nation that frequently does not recognize the absolute authority of modern sovereignty. Similar to the German tradition of nationhood that perceives the nation as “historically rooted, organically developed individualities” (Brubaker 1992, 9), ethnicized nations in these countries posit themselves above the secular state authorities (Shin 2006; Doak 1996; Herzfeld 1996). Hence, the impact of globalization upon the secular state, the guardian of the nation, is one thing while the challenges toward the master of the state, a nation that is essentially an imagined community (Anderson 1991), are another.

In a similar vein, the democratization of a polity and the influence of this process on national identities should be analyzed at different levels. Since the third wave of democratization in the late 1980s, scholars have focused on the processes of democratic consolidation, largely discussing the permanent settlement of democratic institutions, such as free and fair elections, representative party systems and viable constitutions (see Shin, Zoh, and Chey 1994; Samuel S. Kim 2003). However, few have discussed how the notion of Japaneseness, Koreanness, or Greekness has itself been transformed through the processes of democratic consolidation that, on the institutional level, creates entirely different forms of identity politics. Due to democratization, the nation-state rooted in ethnic nationalism cannot punish such social minorities as gays/lesbians or diasporic communities, either legally or ideologically. In this sense, the nation-state should reengineer the very concept of nation.

Due to the duality of political authorities in ethnicized nation-states, we argue that the thrusts of globalization and democratization alter national identity in a distinctive way. Figure 1 shows our conceptualization of

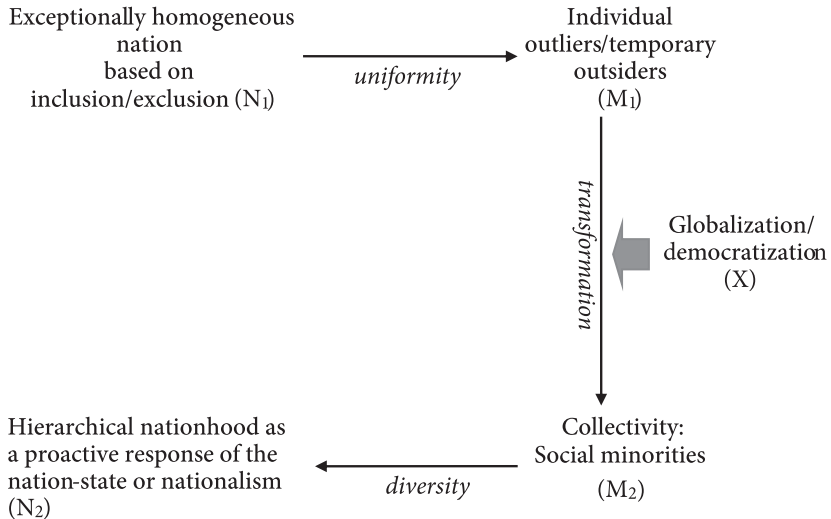


Figure 1. Dynamics of Korean ethnic nationalism.

the interactions between an ethnically homogeneous nation-state and the thrusts of democratization and globalization.

Exceptionally homogeneous nation-states (N_1) categorically refuse social and political minorities as a group. Having the exclusion of the “other” as their basic principle (Balibar 1990), those nation-states categorize the non-stereotype population as individual outliers of society, or simply as outsiders temporarily residing in the sovereign territory (M_1). At this stage, the nation-state’s identity politics are primarily binary—inclusion and exclusion—while asserting the uniformity of the nation-state’s population.

The thrusts of globalization and democratization (X) do not directly impact upon the nation-state’s self-understanding as an ethnic nation. Rather, they function as catalysts for individual outliers and internal outsiders to transform themselves into formal social minorities whose rights and identities are legally and socially recognized (M_2). At this stage, the nation-state does not possess strong measures to deter the emergence of group identities as long as it embraces the thrusts of globalization and democratization.

Eventually, the nation-state has to react to these newly emerged social

identities and to redefine the concept of nation while revising the traditional concept of national and ethnic homogeneity. If the nation-state does not choose to adjust its own ethnic homogeneity-based concept of national identity, it may develop “a predatory identity” that defines itself as a threatened majority and, subsequently, desires the extinction of “the other” (Appadurai 2006, 51; Mann 2004). For post-democratization nation-states such as South Korea, Greece, and Japan, the path toward predatory identity is politically and realistically improbable and impractical (see Seol and Skrentny 2009; H. Park 1996; Weiner 1997; Lie 2001; Yamanaka 2003; Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002). Another option for the nation-state facing increasing minorities might be the transformation of itself into a multicultural society following the American or Canadian model, which largely defines citizenship and rights based on legality, not ethnicity or race (Benhabib 2004; Howard 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to note that it took many years for the United States to fully grant cultural and legal rights to its non-Western European population, even given its origin as an immigration society. Hence, the transformation of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state to a multicultural immigration state is not likely to happen for decades.

The most probable proactive response of the nation-state to the emerging minorities, we argue, is the creation of hierarchical nationhood (N2), which tolerates internal diversity and allows for political and civil rights that are defined by the global human rights regime but establishes a hierarchy of the “nationness” of each group by visible and invisible ordering through legal and social rights or popular perceptions. The concept of hierarchical nationhood proposed here is broader and more comprehensive than the concept proposed by Seol and Skrentny (2009), who delimit the scope of nationhood to the ethnic nation, *minjok* (see Yang 2010; K. Park 2012). While returning to a classical concept of nationhood that implies all the constituents of a nation-state, Korean nationhood here, unlike the conventional definition based on Korean ethnicity, includes all members in the Korean social fabric, such as foreign migrant workers and *hwagyo* 華僑 (ethnic Chinese in Korea; *huaqiao* in Chinese). By also integrating social minorities that are not a result of international migration,

this study expands the usage of “hierarchical nationhood” to illuminate how national identity, which had been based on a masculine/ethnically homogenous perception of the nation, might be re-arrayed in the era of globalization and democratization.

Facing ever-increasing pressures from domestic social movements and international norms and standards, the nation-state continuously negotiates what is to be granted and what is not to those hierarchically positioned groups. In the following sections, our investigations of seven ethnic and social minority groups prove that the changing self-perception and the re-engineering of national identity in South Korea have resulted in a hierarchical nationhood. While analyzing this hierarchization of nationhood, we will consider two aspects: (1) legal, institutional, and policy measures taken by the Korean state, and (2) the social practices of the majority against minority groups.

The Korean Nation-State before Globalization and Democratic Consolidation

Broadly perceived as one of the most homogeneous nation-states in the modern world (Hobsbawm 1992, 66; Kymlicka 1995, 196; 2007, 62; Seol 2010), modern Korea was able to inherit an ancient state, which had already been well-equipped with the key components of the modern nation-state, such as a common language, script, ethnicity, and a coherent linear history. Whether this homogeneity is a myth or not, the belief in it has compelled both domestic and overseas scholars to largely dismiss such issues as immigration, minorities, and subaltern groups from the list of relevant research themes on Korean society. As recent studies on Korean nationalism have illuminated, the consolidation of an ethnic national identity in twentieth-century Korean history excluded other possible forms of collective or categorical identities, such as class and religion, and maintained its patriarchic/masculine nature through the constant militarization of everyday life (Shin 2006; I. Kwon 2000; Moon 2005; Koshy 2004). The fundamentalist belief in common blood and ancestry embed-

ded in Korean nationalism—despite the actual hybridity of Korean ethnicity as a result of countless foreign invasions and cross-border population movements in the premodern era—made Koreans imagine the Korean nation as an extended form of family rather than a political or civil association.¹ Hence, the notion of the Korean nation as a family has certainly been more than rhetoric or political metaphor; it has been a perceived reality among the Korean populace.

An exceptionally strong sense of homogeneity and a unilinear sense of ethnicity is not the only uniqueness of Korean national identity. National identity formation in colonial and postcolonial Korean society has differed from that of many other nation-states due to the very weak presence of an ethnic minority—real or imagined—within the national community (see Miller 2000). Instead of a focus on the notion of “insiders,” the Korean national community constructed its identity through a sharp contrast with the overseas “other,” especially Japan and China, or through a diasporic nationalism that imagines a radically deterritorialized form of ethnic nation (Schmid 2002). The formation of national identity without the construction of an “internal minority,” such as Muslims in China or the Ainu in Japan, therefore, is perhaps the most unique characteristic of modern Korean history. In this sense, it is particularly intriguing to watch the emergence of ethnic minorities through labor migration and international marriage in Korean society, which since the formation of its national identity has had no history of “internal orientalism/colonialism” (Schein 2000; Gladney 2004), or any experience dealing with ethnic and social others in the same living space. In this sense, the question raised in this study is a reverse of what contemporary nationalism studies usually do. Instead of asking how homogeneous national subjects emerge through the construction of an internal minority, we ask how a nation-state that has already produced a highly homogeneous population views emerging internal others who blur the boundary between national insiders and outsiders.

The lack of democracy in South Korea until the late 1980s meant that

1. This understanding of national community is similar to the Chinese notion of “racial nationalism” based on the myth of a unilinear/uniform “Han race” (see Dikotter 1992).

those social minorities who did not belong to the organic nation-state were invisible from the public discourse. In the European and American historical experiences, social minorities went through long periods of discrimination, identity formation, civil rights movements, and the establishment of identity politics (Gleason 1991; Koopmans and Statham 1999). Nevertheless, Korean nationalism and the Korean nation-state effectively created an image of social minorities as unhealthy foreign influences or aberrations, preventing identity formation among social minorities. For example, the modern emergence of gays and lesbians has been seen as the result of the Western contamination of the national and cultural purity of Korea (Seo 2005). Hence, sexual minorities within Korean society were treated as problems and threats from the outside. So-called “mixed-blood kids” between American GIs and Korean women have been derogatorily referred to as *twigi* or *ainoko*, meaning a half-breed or something that cannot be defined (Pak and Jang 2003; Jang 2004; Seol, Pak, and Yi 2004). Though social and political discrimination against those members was evident, the authoritarian regimes efficiently blocked any collective movements by these “less-national” citizens. Hence, the country’s social minorities were unable to achieve any sense of collective identity until the democratic consolidation phase.

Overall, Korean national identity can be characterized by two characteristics: the absence of internal ethnic others and the denial of internal social others as a collectivity. The thrusts of globalization and democratization in the 1990s, however, created unprecedented social changes as described below. Notably, we emphasize the role of the Korean state in the minority policies. The analysis of the Korean political economy has been dominated by the “developmental state” thesis (see Woo-Cumings 1999). What is noticeable is that the development of the human rights regime and progressive minority policies in Korea can be understand in a similar way. Though Korean academia and intellectual circles recently began to criticize the essentialist notion of ethnic nation and warn of its political dangers (H. Kwon 2004; N. Pak 2002; Lim 1999; Yun et al. 2005), it was the Korean state that has played the critical role in enhancing legal and social protection of minority populations and in promoting the notion of

a “multicultural society in the age of globalization” (*segyehwa sidae-ui damunhwa sahoe*) (see C. Lee 2010; Yoon 2010). In the following section, we suggest this unique phenomenon to be a result of a state-led globalization that pursues the protection of minorities as a way of achieving developmentalist goals, such as the improvement of the human rights index (see UNDP 2010; *Guardian* 1999) and multiculturalism index (see Huddleston and Niessen 2011; Queen’s University 2011) measured by many international organizations.

Emerging Minorities in Korean Society

In this section, we will examine how social and ethnic minorities emerged as collectivities in Korean society as the result of democratization and globalization. To facilitate conceptualization, we divide those groups roughly into two: those who emerged in the process of globalization and international migration in the post-Cold War era, such as Joseonjok (ethnic Koreans from China), North Korean refugees, foreign guest workers, and “foreign brides” from China and Southeast Asia; and those who emerge as a consequence of democratic consolidation, such as *hwagyo*, gays and lesbians, and the disabled. Nevertheless, we do not think that these two thrusts, globalization and democratic consolidation, are fundamentally separated. Korean democratization itself was a part of global wave of “People’s Power.” The penetration of globalized human rights norms into the Korean legal and political process cannot be separated from the overall democratic consolidation of Korean society. Hence, the two categories are purported here only for heuristic purposes.

Globalization and “New-Comers” in Korean Society

Initiated by the severe labor shortage from the early 1990s, migrant workers have poured into Korea from Northeast, Southeast, and South Asian countries. Among these have been ethnic Korean citizens from China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine (see MOFAT

2012) as well as hundreds of thousand South and Southeast Asians. In spite of the economic crisis of 1997, the numbers of legal and illegal migrant workers steadily increased until they eventually became a part of the South Korean social fabric. By the end of 2011, the number of migrant workers reached 722,743 from over 100 countries worldwide (KIS 2012).

The end of the Cold War also meant that hundreds of thousands of ethnic Koreans in China were able to access their homeland with a privileged visa. As the Korean populace witnessed the deep cultural differences between themselves and incoming Korean Chinese, the popular myth that equated a common bloodline and a common culture began to break down. The famine and collapse of the public distribution system in North Korea forced thousands of North Koreans to take refuge in Northeast China. Despite the half-century long rhetoric of “our brothers and sisters in the North under the suppression of the devilish Kim Il-Sung Communist regime,” the North Korean refugees quickly became one of the strangest “others” within South Korean society due to their distinguishable accent, behavioral patterns, and inability to adapt smoothly to the South Korean capitalist economy.

Furthermore, due to the patriarchic culture in South Korea that resulted in an unusually high male-to-female sex ratio at birth, about thirty thousand foreign spouses, primarily from China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, and Cambodia, have moved permanently to Korea as the wives of Korean citizens. According to marriage registration statistics, in 2005 about 35.9 percent of these mixed marriages occurred in rural areas, while 13.5 percent of the marriages reported were international marriages. Though the numbers of international marriages in South Korea have reduced since then, 8.7 percent of total marriages registered in 2012 were between Korean and foreigners (see Statistics Korea 2013).

The number of immigrants to Korea can be viewed as great or small depending on how one interprets the numbers. Compared to many other advanced industrial countries, the foreign population of Korea is small, comprising only 2.2 percent of the total population in 2011 (see Seol 2010). In this sense, many might argue that South Korea is still successfully fending off the global migration trend, despite the increasing globalization in-

dexes of its cities, thus sustaining its time-honored tradition of single ethnicity. Nevertheless, the growth rate of the foreign-born population in Korea paints an entirely different picture. According to rough predictions made by the United Nations (2000, 59-64), by 2050 the percentage of foreign workers in the Korean labor market will reach 35 percent while its aging society will accommodate more than ten million immigrants or their descendants (Yu et al. 2005, 158-159). Furthermore, it is important to note that a migrant-receiving society is sensitive not only to the volume of immigration but also to the types of migration flows and kinds of people that would bring their own identities and cultures along with their commodified labor (Rudolph 2003). In other words, no society can import labor without also bringing in other cultures and identities.

In addition to the changing demography of Korean society and the globally integrated labor market, the end of the Cold War is a particularly important subtext of the massive influx of foreign population into South Korea. In spite of the fact that the divided Korean peninsula remains one of the last legacies of the Cold War, the integration of the Chinese, Russian, and the Central Asian states into the global economy had a direct impact on the South Korean immigration system since about 230,000 ethnic Koreans are living in those areas. Though the devastation of the North Korean economy is primarily responsible for the sharp increase in the numbers of North Korean refugees in South Korea, the tighter economic and human interactions between Korea and China have also significantly contributed to this trend, as most North Korean refugees pass through China before finally entering South Korea. Increased economic and human interactions between South Korea and Vietnam unexpectedly created a significant influx of Vietnamese to Korea, primarily in the form of international brides. Therefore, of the three groups we examine in the following sections, Korean Chinese and foreign brides (primarily from China and Vietnam) should be understood in the context of post-Cold War transitions in Korea.

Democratic Consolidation and Social Minorities in Korea

Existing literature on Korean democratization is heavily focused on the legal and institutional changes since the 1980s democratization movement. Summarized by peaceful regime changes through fair elections and constitutional guarantees of free expression, Korean democracy has been broadly praised as a role model of successful transition from an authoritarian to a liberal democratic polity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Korean democratization movement in the 1980s had no interest in the rights of minorities suppressed either by the government or the masses. The discursive framework of the democratization movement, symbolized by the concept of *minjung* (people) (N. Lee 2007; Koo 1993), envisioned the state of injustice incurred by the suppression of an innocent majority (*minjung*) by an oppressive minority (military dictatorship). Further, student activists in the 1980s unhesitatingly revived anticolonial discourses, strengthening and justifying the sanctity of nationalism and the notion of an ethnic nation based on shared blood. Therefore, ousting the military dictatorship was one thing, promoting civil rights for minorities based on the notion of universal human rights was another.

Thanks to ripening social democracy and Korean society's complete exposure to the Western world, social minorities hidden under traditional/nationalist culture began to emerge. For instance, only after 1987 did the movement for the rights of the disabled become a recognizable social movement in Korea. Before democratization groups of disabled were delimited to isolated demands for public assistance and far from any systematic mobilization (J. Kim 2005; S. Yun 2012). Since the early 2000s, it is no longer unusual to see gays and lesbians showing themselves in public for protests or performances. For an ethnic nation deeply rooted in the metaphor of family, the emergence of a sexual minority who cannot or will not reproduce the nation signifies the formation of a very distinct "other" within the nation. *Hwagyo*, the descendants of Chinese immigrants going back to the 1880s, who have been living under the condition of invisibility, even worse than being discriminated against, began to draw public attention for their legal and economic plights. The country's biracial popula-

tion, many of them viewed as the worst form of hybridity, that produced by the American military presence in Korea, are gaining unprecedented confidence, especially following the Hines Ward phenomenon of 2006.²

The status and position of social minorities in the newly democratized Korean society became a significant issue in the democratic consolidation process through both top-down and bottom-up procedures. Unshackled public spheres witnessed the rise of non-governmental organizations with countless agendum, from environmental protection to the abolishment of social discrimination against the disabled, gays and lesbians, and other minorities. At the same time, from 2001 the Korean state played an important role in protecting minorities' human rights through the establishment and continuous strengthening of the national human rights commissions. The active role of the state in the liberalization of minority policy is extremely unique when we recall the 1960s civil rights movement in the West. As shown in the following sections, the minority policy in Korea has mainly been led by policy-involved intellectuals who established the momentum of policy reforms during the two relatively progressive regimes of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun. As a result of the two thrusts from below and from above, Korean social minority movements witnessed a highly condensed growth, comparable to the country's high-speed economic growth of the 1970s and 1980s. Of the various types of social minorities that gained their own political and social spaces, this article introduces four examples: the disabled, gays and lesbians, mixed-race individuals, and the *hwagyo*.³

2. Hines Ward was voted the MVP for Super Bowl XL in 2006. When Korean mass media discovered that he was the son of a Korean mother and an African American father who had been a GI in Korea, South Korean public opinion quickly expressed a collective sentiment of remorse for its longtime discrimination against the "mixed-blood" population in Korean society.

3. As we will discuss later, *hwagyo* can be seen as social minorities emerged from inside. *Hwagyo* population has existed in Korea since the precolonial era and fully assimilated to Korean societies. Nevertheless, their social, political, and economic rights have been consistently denied by the Korean state.

Hierarchical Nationhood of Social and Ethnic Minorities in Korea

How did minority groups acquire their status in Korean society? Though they became parts of the Korean nation-state, each of them faced different legal statuses and varied degrees of social acceptance. Some of them were more welcomed than others by the general Korean populace or by the state. We now turn to investigate the hierarchical nationhood of Korean society across two kinds of dimensions: legal and policy dimensions and social dimensions. The criteria for the former include the right to legally stay in Korea, find a job, vote, receive social welfare, enjoy social services, and/or receive the benefits of affirmative action. The later will be measured by the perceptions of the majority of the Korean population.

Table 1 measures the October 2012 standard hierarchical nationhood

Table 1. Hierarchical Nationhood Scores of Social and Ethnic Minorities in South Korea 2012

Social and ethnic minorities in South Korea	Grand average	Legal/policy dimensions					Social dimensions
		Sub-average	Rights to stay and work	Voting rights	Welfare (public assistance)	Social services and/or affirmative action	Public perceptions
Korean American	2.4	1.8	3	2	1	1	3
Foreign spouses	2.8	2.5	3	2	2	3	3
North Korean refugees	2.5	3.0	3	3	3	3	2
Joseonjok	1.6	1.3	2	1	1	1	2
Migrant workers	1.3	1.0	1	1	1	1	1.5
Disabled	3.0	3.0	3	3	3	3	3
Mixed race	2.8	2.5	3	3	3	1	3
Gays/lesbians	2.3	2.5	3	3	3	1	2
<i>Hwagyo</i>	2.0	2.0	3	3	1	1	2

Note: Each of the indicators has three basic categories: 1 being the least favorable, 2 being of middling favorability, and 3 the most favorable. In cases where an indicator is eligible for multiple categories, we calculated the average of the points the indicator evaluated.

scores for the eight minority groups mentioned above and, for reference, compares them against the scores for Korean-Americans. In this table, the most favorable policies, institutions, attitudes were valued at three points, whereas unfavorable policies, institutions, or attitudes were valued at one point.

Legal/Policy Dimensions

1) Rights to Stay and Work

In the case of Korean Americans applying for themselves, almost all applicants are eligible to receive an overseas Korean (F-4) visa. Renewal of the F-4 visa is unlimited, and holders are free to engage in any kind of employment. Their residence and employment status is the same as that of foreign spouses and *hwagyo*.

For a single visa, not only are less-skilled migrant workers restricted from changing workplaces, but the period of their sojourn is limited to a maximum of four years and ten months. From 2012, it has been possible for some migrant workers to be reemployed; however, for the majority of them, reemployment is not possible. This vividly reveals that both the Korean government and society consider these less-skilled migrant workers only as workers, not as fellow citizens.

Joseonjok receive intermediate treatment somewhere between that given to Korean Americans and that given to migrant workers. The Korean government rarely issues overseas Korean visas to Joseonjok and Goryeoin (ethnic Koreans from the former Soviet Union); in most cases, it issues a working-holiday visa (H-2). With the exception of a handful of industries, such as the entertainment industry, working-holiday visa holders may be employed in most industries, but the visa is not automatically renewed. The Korean government requires that Joseonjok and Goryeoin first return to their home country and then return to Korea in order to renew their visa.

In accordance with the constitution of the Republic of Korea, North Korean refugees are recognized as nationals of the Republic of Korea,

and they have no restrictions on residence or employment. Of course, as nationals of the Republic of Korea, gay and lesbian persons, mixed-race persons and persons with disabilities “legally” face no residence or employment restrictions. However, due to their personal attributes, in reality these persons experience employment discrimination.

2) Voting Rights

Among Korean Americans, those possessing a permanent residency (F-5) visa for a certain period of time may participate in local elections, and on condition that they do not exercise their American citizenship from Korea, those with dual citizenship may participate in all elections. In the case of foreign spouses who acquire citizenship or the right to permanent residence, they have the same voting rights as Korean Americans.

The right of less-skilled migrant workers to obtain permanent residency is institutionally blocked. Unsurprisingly, Joseonjok on working-holiday visas have no suffrage. Only in exceptional cases can they obtain the right of permanent residency through an exemption provision. By contrast, as nationals of the Republic of Korea, North Korean refugees have the right to vote. Gay and lesbian persons, persons of mixed race, and persons with disabilities also have suffrage.

3) Welfare (Public Assistance)

Korean Americans can register for social insurance, but they cannot receive public assistance benefits. *Hwagyo*, migrant workers, and Joseonjok with foreign nationalities cannot receive the public assistance benefits they pay into. In the case of foreign spouses holding foreign nationality, the National Basic Living Security Act only recognizes entitlement to public assistance during pregnancy, while raising minor children or while supporting Korean in-laws. As citizens of the Republic of Korea, North Korean refugees, gay and lesbian persons, persons of mixed race, and persons with disabilities face no institutional discrimination regarding entitlement to public assistance.

4) Social Services and/or Affirmative Action

For Korean Americans residing in Korea, the Korean government has not implemented any special social support policies. By the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans enacted in 1999, the only preferential treatment concerned provisions for the residency and employment of Korean Americans in Korea. There are no policies aimed at Joseon-jok, *hwagyo*, and migrant workers. However, the Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents Escaping from North Korea, which targets North Korean refugees, has been in place since 1997, and the Support for Multicultural Families Act, aimed at foreign spouses, has been in operation since 2008. In order to support smooth adaptation to Korean society, the Korean government provides diverse support for North Korean refugees and foreign spouses.

Although persons of mixed race that fall under the category of multicultural families are supported by the Support for Multicultural Families Act, there are no support policies for children of racial hybridity born in South Korea of a United States Forces Korea service member and a Korean national. On several occasions since 2007, an anti-discrimination bill has been submitted to the National Assembly; however, conservative Christian organizations have opposed such legislation along with anti-discrimination laws aimed at protecting gay and lesbian persons, so that the bill has failed to pass. By contrast, affirmative action has been implemented for persons with disabilities on the basis of several laws. On the basis of the 1991 Act on Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons (an “employment quota system for persons with disabilities”), the College Special Admission Program for Students with Disabilities has been in operation since 1995 in order to promote participation in social activities and the welfare of persons with disabilities. Since 1998, the installment and management of elevators and various other facilities aimed at safe and convenient access to and use of public buildings and facilities by persons with disabilities have been undertaken on the basis of the Act on the Promotion and Guarantee of Access for the Disabled, the Aged, and Pregnant Women to Facilities and Information, and on the basis of the Mobility Enhancement

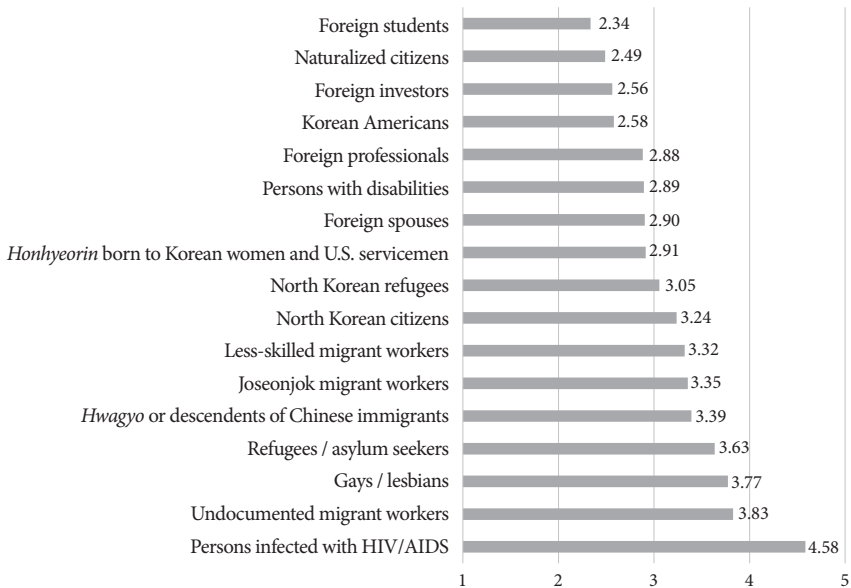
for the Mobility Impaired Act. Since 2006, efforts have been made to ensure the mobility rights of persons with disabilities.

Social Dimensions

Having examined the legal and policy dimensions of hierarchical nationhood in Korea, we now move to analyze how Korean mainstream society accepts those new “others.” In the Korean General Social Survey 2007 (S. Kim et al. 2008), a survey that asked Korean citizens about the social distance between them and other major social groups, “residents who escaped North Korea” came out the highest, with Americans, Joseonjok, Japanese, Southeast Asians, and Chinese following in order. However, three years later in 2010, the survey was repeated using the same measurement tools, and the social groups “residents who escaped North Korea” and Americans narrowly switched places, while the remaining groups remained in the same order (Chung et al. 2011, 78-81). On the other hand, in a survey conducted by Gallup Korea in 2010 that measured the social distance felt by Koreans on the basis of an analysis of other studies, the order came out as ethnic Korean Chinese, Americans, residents who escaped North Korea, Japanese, Southeast Asians, and Chinese (B. Kim et al. 2011, 68-84; Park and Kim 2013). Generally, residents who escaped North Korea, ethnic Korean Chinese, and Americans are groups Koreans feel relatively closer to, while Japanese, Southeast Asians, and Chinese are groups that Koreans feel are comparatively distant.

In order to measure the social distance felt by Koreans regarding minority groups, we conducted a sample survey of 665 people on ten university campuses in May 2010. Using the revised Borgardus social distance scale (see Seol 2013), the survey measured the social distance of the seven social groups we were interested in: Joseonjok, North Korean refugees, foreign spouses, foreign migrant workers, *hwagyo*, gays/lesbians, and *honhyeorin* (mixed-blood people). However, migrant workers were divided into four groups with professionals and less-skilled migrant workers being classified depending on skill level, while, taking nationality into account, ethnic Korean Chinese migrant workers were included in one category,

and taking visa status into account, undocumented migrant workers were made into yet another category. Ethnic Korean Chinese were not established as a distinct group, but ethnic Korean Chinese migrant workers were presented in the category of migrant workers. Additionally, international students, naturalized Korean citizens, foreign investors, Korean Americans, persons with disabilities, North Korean citizens, refugees/asylum seekers, and persons affected with HIV/AIDS were presented as control groups for comparison.



Note: Bogardus's (1925) social distance scale is a measure of people's willingness to participate in social contacts of varying degrees of closeness with members of diverse social groups, such as racial and ethnic groups. The scale asks people the extent to which they would be accepting of each group (a score of 1.00 for a group is taken to indicate no social distance). We used the revised version of the Bogardus social distance scale (see Seol 2013, 213): "As close relatives by marriage" (score 1.00), "As my close personal friends" (2.00), "As co-workers in the same company" (3.00), "As neighbors in the same community" (3.00), "As citizens of my country" (5.00), "Only as visitors to my country" (6.00), and "Would exclude from my country" (7.00).

Figure 2. Korean students' social distance scores toward 17 groups in Korea.

The survey results (Figure 2) show an interesting example of the different degrees of Koreanness confounded by the thrusts of globalization and democratization as reflected in Korean youth's perceptions of minority populations. Here the distance scores felt by the students (distinguished as a minimum score of 3.0 for favorable, a score of over 3.0 to a minimum of 3.5 for intermediate, and a score of over 3.5 for unfavorable) places: (1) "persons infected with HIV/AIDS," "undocumented migrant workers," "gays/lesbians," and "refugees or asylum seekers" in the unfavorable category, (2) "*Hwagyo*," "Joseonjok migrant workers," "less-skilled migrant workers," "North Korean citizens," and "North Korean refugees" in the intermediate category, and (3) "*honhyeorin* born to Korean women and U.S. servicemen," "foreign spouses," "persons with disabilities," "foreign professionals," "Korean Americans," "foreign investors," "naturalized citizens," and "foreign students" in the favorable category. Though we would expect a sort of selection bias due to the limited survey respondents—i.e., "foreign students" being the closest minority group—the survey indicates that the societal perception is well reflective of the sense of hierarchical nationhood that privileges those at the center of the globalizing economy and those proximate to the masculine/heterosexual imagination of the Korean nation.

Of course, we do not assume that this hierarchy is fixed or unchangeable. Rather, as mentioned in a number of places in this article, the respective statuses of these minority groups have been in continuous flux due to changing social, political, and economic environments. What is important here is the sense of hierarchy in terms of nationhood that basically operates according to the binary logic of inclusion/exclusion.

Conclusion

According to our analysis, in Korean society ethnic/social minorities are being ranked hierarchically in the order of: the disabled > foreign spouses = persons of mixed race > North Korean refugees > Korean Americans > gays/lesbians > *hwagyo* > Joseonjok > migrant workers. This hierarchical

national configuration is the result of the dynamics of nationalist politics regarding the situation created through globalization and democratization.

The import of foreign workers and incorporation of immigration and ethnic community are radically different processes (Sassen 1999, 144). French schools have been unable to effectively assimilate or incorporate Muslim immigrants. Germany has long explicitly excluded its Turkish population from the social system. Is it possible to incorporate foreign migration workers and foreign brides into a Korean national identity that is sustained by the endless inculcation of the myths of Dangun and the nation's five thousand years' of unilinear history? It has taken decades or even centuries for the Western liberal nation-states to extend full cultural, social, and political citizenship to social minorities such as gays. Is it possible to accept those historically discriminated populations into the Korean national community that experienced its democratization process just over two decades ago?

Instead of answering these questions that carry heavy moral and political judgments, this article delimits itself to analyzing the immediate response of Korean nationhood in the age of globalization and democratization. The eight minority groups delineated above did not exist as social and political collectives prior to the age of globalization and democratization. They largely existed as individual outliers or temporary outsiders in society who could not be involved in the construction of the modern Korean national identity. Nevertheless, two thrusts of globalization and democratization enabled those outliers to emerge in Korean society as social and political groups whose very existence challenged the time-honored tradition of the homogeneous Korean nation. As we have discussed earlier, modern nationalism has constructed a nation with a binary principle of inclusion/exclusion in its symbolic and discursive structure. Emergence of ambiguous categories in-between insiders and outsiders can be an unprecedented threat to a stable nation-state. We suggest that the immediate response of the Korean national community to this challenge is construction of hierarchical nationhood with various efforts to locate them in the complex index of Koreanness.

A recent Korean movie, *Gajok-ui tansaeng* (The Birth of a Family,

2006), directed by Kim Tae Yong, raises a deeply intriguing question regarding the definition of family in post-industrialization Korean society. Contrasted with other recent Korean box office hits such as the *Goemul* (Host, 2005), *Jip-euro* (The Way Home, 2002), and *Marathon* (2005) that reveal predicaments of contemporary Korean family experiences, *Gajok-ui tansaeng* expresses little sympathy for the endangered traditional family system based on marriage and bloodline, and shows no interest in resuscitating it. By beautifully depicting the process of the emergence of a family among a group of individuals who are not “related” to one another, this film devotes itself to redefining the very concept of family in Korea.⁴ Here, a family is neither planned nor inherited by ancestors but just “happens” to exist among individuals in a shared living space. Once it does happen, a family constructs meanings and affections without relying on legacies and histories. In spite of the covert or overt xenophobic and hostile attitude to immigration among the Korean populace (Seol and Han 2004), it is important to note that traditional concepts of family and nation are beginning to be challenged through various public discourses.⁵

The politics of identity and nationalism acknowledges that many members of minority groups feel marginalized, not just because of their socioeconomic status, but also because of their sociocultural identity—their “difference.” In Europe and America, the common rights of citizenship, originally defined by and for white, heterosexual, able-bodied men, cannot accommodate the needs of other groups (Kymlicka 2002, 329). The differences of identity, therefore, generate a demand for differentiated citizenship (Young 1989). From this view, members of certain groups shall be incorporated into the political community, not only as individuals but also through the group, and their rights shall depend, in part, on their group membership. The issue of minority politics in Korea, howev-

4. In this film, a newly formed family consists of the following members: (1) a middle-aged woman, (2) her kid brother’s wife (but without his presence or a continuing marriage relation), (3) B’s ex-husband’s ex-wife’s daughter, (4) C’s boyfriend, and (5) D’s half-sister.

5. A number of popular books that denounce Korean ethnic nationalism have been published recently. See J. Lim (1999), N. Pak (2002), and H. Kwon (2004).

er, took a different path as shown by a number of minority groups in Korea. By being one of the most ethnically homogeneous nation-states, the Korean nation, national identity and nation-state took central positions, the proximity to which determined a group's level of "nationness," as the thrusts of globalization and democratization vitiates the imaginary unity. In this sense, the outcome that emerged from negotiations between the centrally positioned Korean nation-state and the newly emerging minority groups is what we call "hierarchical nationhood," which is also used to measure the degree of sociopolitical citizenship for each group.

Globalization and democratization, the two major threats to Korean ethnic nationalism, are closely linked, though we cannot with certainty delineate a firm causal relation between the two. Scholars have debated how much globalization generates policy convergence among nations. In the field of human rights studies, a few suggest that the global proliferation of human rights norms indicates that sovereignty over the notion of human rights is declining (Rudra 2005; Lyons and Mastanduno 1995). Others argue that evidence of policy convergence does not exist and globalization does not function in a deterministic way in terms of an individual state's policy making over human and civil rights (Drezner 2001; Porta 2005). Nevertheless, the socioeconomic dynamics around emerging minorities in Korea indicates that those two thrusts are mutually enforcing in the sense that they have allowed individual outliers in Korean society to produce collective identities.

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