

The Changing Nature of the Korean People's Perspective on National Issues, and Fellow Koreans Living Abroad

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This paper intends to examine the relationship between Korean people's perspective upon the national issues today and the problem of ethnic Koreans overseas, especially the "*Joseon-jok*" (people of Korean descent) living in China, with regard to enactment and amendment processes of the Law for Ethnic Koreans. The Law for Ethnic Koreans prior to the recent amendment bears special meaning as it was the law that "officialized" the government's discriminatory treatment upon specific groups among the ethnic Korean society. How could such significantly flawed bill have been enacted? It must have been made possible because of the misunderstanding regarding issues on ethnic Koreans overseas (especially the issue of China-based ethnic Koreans) that the Korean public has been carrying for a long time.

There is a particular perspective within the Korean society of the concept of a single ethnic group, the concept of a single culture, and the concept of a single state to be the same. This kind of specific consciousness regarding the people's own sense of being members of a single ethnic group makes the people more sensitive of the "difference" between "us" and "them." When other factors such as the scale of the state are added to the equation, the people tend to separate even their own overseas brethren from themselves and take them out of the boundary of "us." The ethnic Koreans living in China are being perceived differently and ultimately excluded from the Korean ethnic group because they live in China. Our consciousness and perspectives regarding national issues are essentially based upon the boundaries and perimeters of the Korean peninsula. So we tend to differentiate ourselves who are living in such domain from our brethren who have been living in China or other areas, and our own discriminative intentions and actions perpetrated against the ethnic Koreans in China are justified as such.

What we need to do today is to establish a new type of national sense of identity that is based upon the concept of an equal, free civilian community. So-called Korean Network could be an appropriate alternative. The identity of the

new Korean national community should not be confined to the concept and discourse of “being and composed of a homogeneous ethnic group.” Instead it should be based upon the attitude of acknowledging each other’s differences and the mutual intentions to gather and use all kinds of wisdom obtained in different kinds of historical experiences of various peoples.

Keywords: National issues, nationality, nationalism, ethnic Koreans overseas, Law for Ethnic Koreans, Joseon-jok

Introduction: Three Stories

As of 2003, the number of ethnic Koreans living in regions other than the Korean peninsula is reported to be 6,336,951 (according to a report issued by the Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce). This figure occupies 14% of the entire Korean population. Compared to other countries, Korea is possibly the third or fourth country in line to have so many brothers and sisters living in overseas areas, following only China and Israel.

In 1999, on the verge of the end of the 20th century, several important events occurred reminding us of the importance of properly understanding and perceiving the issue of our ethnic Koreans overseas. Each of the events occurred in an independent fashion in terms of either process or persons involved, but there was a central theme shared by all the events that shall be examined here.

The first one to be noted was the Korean Congress passing a new law called “The Law on Entry into and Departure from Korea of Ethnic Koreans Overseas and Their Legal Status” (this law will hereinafter be referred to as “the Ethnic Korean Law”) in August 1999. On the day the bill passed the congress, there was a party held in Los Angeles celebrating the resolution brought to the long-time wishes and hopes held by the ethnic Korean communities overseas to be able to enter and leave as well as engage in economic activities Korea freely. But a few days later, there was a demonstration arranged at Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul by ethnic Koreans currently living in China.¹ They argued that the law would

1. The ethnic Koreans currently living in China are usually referred to as Joseon-jok (people of Joseon). In this article, in the spirit of addressing all the ethnic Koreans living outside the

divide and bring fission to the overall Ethnic Korean communities overseas and that it should be withdrawn immediately (*Munhwa ilbo*, August 28, 1999).

In the meantime, there was another event that involved a Korean named Mr. Kim (Gweon) Hi Ro. Kim, a Korean living in Japan, was released from Japanese prison and returned to Korea in September 1999. He was a well-known social figure for his murdering of a Japanese mobster out of resentment against discriminative actions based upon national issues. The media actively covered his return to his homeland. Yet in the process, the man who was originally known as Kim Hi Ro came to be perceived as a new person with the name “Gweon Hi Ro,” and became an even more renowned figure in Korea. Ironically, in all the interviews and broadcasts, no one paid appropriate attention to the turmoil he had to endure for such a long time during his incarceration in prison for his crime. And moreover, although he himself had considered his last name to be Kim, the mere fact that his biological father harbored the last name of Gweon led the Korean people to consider him to be Gweon Hi Ro, and no one has ever questioned the validity of such a public perception either (Gweon Suk In 2002).

The last episode to be seen was a debate that occurred between Lee Hwae Seong and Kim Seok Beom, well-known ethnic Korean writers in Japan, over the issue of nationality (Lee Hwae Seong 1999a, 1999b; Kim Seok Beom 1999a, 1999b). The debate was caused by Lee's decision to abandon his supposed “Joseon nationality” (which was in fact a non-nationality) and his recent acquisition of Korean nationality.² Lee argued that the democratization of Korea changed the nature of the nation and such a condition prompted him to make such a decision. Responding to this argument, Kim argued that one should rather remain with a non-nationality because acquiring Korean nationality now would not in any way help resolve the divided situation of the Korean peninsula, much

Korean peninsula on equal terms, these ethnic Koreans inside China will be referred to as ethnic Koreans from China.

2. Many ethnic Koreans living in Japan refer to themselves as “Joseon people” (A person with a “Joseon” nationality) when they registered as foreigners. At the time, Joseon was only a concept, a non-existent nationality. Since 1965, when the Japanese government decided to grant agreed denizenship only to those ethnic Koreans who carried “Korean” nationality based on the Korea-Japan convention, many ethnic Koreans in Japan have changed their nationalities to Korean for practical reasons. Yet a significant portion of the ethnic Korean population in Japan refused to do so, and chose to remain with the “Joseon” nationality arguing that they could not give up their hopes for the unification of the Korean peninsula, and thus became people with no nationality

less bring unification to the country.

These three episodes immensely inspired us to reconsider issues on Korean nationality with renewed perspectives, especially in the 21st century. The nationality issue of the Korean people living outside the Korean peninsula has been left unattended and unresolved for the last half century. However, the issue is no longer dormant anymore, and harbors the potential to cause dissension and conflict among the ethnic Korean communities, or even between the Korean people living inside and outside the peninsula.

This article was prepared with the goal of examining the situation of ethnic Koreans overseas who were forced to face one of the biggest national predicaments on their own without any kind of protective mechanism provided by their own people, and to bring some insight to the matter of how issues on Korean nationality are being perceived today and what kind of conditions are being generated out of such issues. Ethnic Koreans currently living in China who opposed the Korean Brethren Law and caused a certain controversy in the process will be examined in particular. Recently, the over-saturation of the public with national sentiment is developing, and breaking free from such sentiment is being strongly recommended by some people. We shall see whether the era of national sentiment and nationalism is really over, and determine the answer to such a question with help from our own examination of the problem of Koreans living inside China.

Modern History of Korea and Ethnic Koreans Overseas

The 20th century is usually regarded as the era of nations and nationalism. It is especially so in the Koreans' case as well, as they were forced to endure the Japanese colonial occupation and are still suffering the divided status of the Korean peninsula today. The issue of nationalism represents significant meaning to the Korean people, and as a result, national issues and the matter of nationalism have managed to maintain a relatively high appeal to the Korean public until very recently.

As the Western scholars frequently mention and Koreans accept as common sense, Korea is a nation comprised of a homogeneous ethnic group of people with an age-old history and culture.³ To the Korean people, for a very long time,

3. For example, Hobsbawm referred to Korea and Japan as historically exceptional states in that

the nation as a political entity and the ethnic group of Korean people were the same thing (Park Myeong Rim 1996). So, regarding the issue of establishing a modern national country, the concept of "one nation with one people" was only natural to the Korean people. In terms of official ideology, the homogeneity of the Korean people has been believed very strongly by the Korean people for a very long time.

But the separation of the Korean people has been an already established fact in the 20th century, so this kind of perception upon national issues is no longer viable or advisable. The perception simply does not have a scope that is wide enough to properly view and perceive the present situation. We should notice that the concept of "we," of which the homogeneous nature arouses the inherent sympathy in our minds for all the Korean people, for all of "us," especially in conditions of us being victims and the oppressed (Jin Deok Gyu 1995), is a powerful one which formed and empowered the ideology of nationalism in the first place. We have become one, and also one people, and acknowledge ourselves as one ethnic group by going through and sharing the same experiences of being extracted and oppressed by the Japanese imperial authorities, and being forced to leave the country and move to overseas areas, forcibly separated and cut in half by outer forces, and thus by suffering discriminative actions for almost a century (Seo Gyeong Shik 1996). Understanding of the national issues, without basing such understanding upon memories of those kinds of historical experiences, could not help but be a very limited one indeed.

Certain characteristics could be derived from the examined results of the formation process of ethnic Korean communities. First of all, there has been an explosive flow of outgoing population leaving the Korean peninsula that continued throughout the 20th century since the ending days of the 19th century, and especially during the Japanese occupation period. According to survey statistics gathered by the Office of the Governor-General of Joseon, the entire Korean population was counted as 25,120,000 as of 1944, but the population living overseas at the time was counted as nearly 4 million as of 1945 (Lee Jun Sik, 1998). We can see that the Japanese colonial occupation played a big role in forcing a significant portion of the Korean population to leave the Korean peninsula. This is exactly why the issue of ethnic Koreans is important in appropriate-

are each comprised of a population which demonstrated almost full homogeneity in terms of ethnic group (Hobsbawm 1990).

ly understanding the national issues of the Korean people.

The second characteristic is that the ethnic Koreans overseas are currently living in a very concentrated fashion, and are especially found to be living mostly in countries like the U.S. (2,157,498: 34.0%), China (2,144,789: 33.9%), Japan (898,714: 14.2%), and the late U.S.S.R. (557,732: 8.8%) as of 2003. Over 90% of the ethnic Koreans overseas are living inside these four powerful neighboring countries (Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce 2003). These kind of figures remind us of the historical background behind the formation or buildup of ethnic Korean communities outside the peninsula, and also of the fact that they would appear in the future as important features in terms of the Korean people's future.

As mentioned earlier, large-scale outflow of the Korean population began during the Japanese occupation period. When the Korean people failed to establish an independent, self-determining national state of their own, and also by their own, the possibility of some of their own people moving out of the Korean peninsula was already laid out. Around 1937, it was quite usual for the people to have their lives already ruined by the oppression by the Japanese imperial authorities, and then have no other choice but to move to the Manchu area or Japan to search for new methods of living (Lee Jun Sik 2003b). During the latter half of the 1930s when a wartime mobilization policy was implemented by the Japanese, people were also forced to move overseas when they were recruited as laborers or mobilized as infantry soldiers. People who were transferred to the Chinese and Russian regions as well as Japan were forced to face double, or even triple, discrimination and oppression. But they never forgot their identities as members of the Korean ethnic group, and continued to fight for Korean liberation and independence.

In cases of Koreans who moved themselves to China, Japan, and the late U.S.S.R., some managed to return to Korea, but most had already lost all methods of living inside Korea and had little practical choice but to remain where they were, in places which were not their first choice to live. These are the true victims of the national tragedy that the Korean people were forced to face. This tragedy has continued for over 50 years because the brief joy of liberation was immediately followed by the subsequent Cold War and the division between South and North parts of the Korean peninsula. Their very tragedy is the very reason why the issue of ethnic Koreans overseas cannot be ignored in discussing national issues involving the Korean people. Yet up until very recently, the Korean people living in foreign areas were not very visible figures to those who

were living inside the peninsula. It was only 40 years after the liberation when the Korean people started to pay attention to the fate and condition of ethnic Koreans overseas who were forced to remove themselves from the Korean peninsula such a long time ago. And such attention was already mainly based upon the perspectives of the people who were lucky enough to remain inside the homeland. In other words, the Korean people living inside the Korean peninsula continued to bear misunderstanding and demonstrate inaction when it came to the matter of ethnic Koreans living outside the Korean peninsula.

The usage of multiple terms in addressing the ethnic Koreans outside the peninsula effectively represents such misunderstanding and inaction. Ethnic Korean overseas, overseas Koreans, Korean brethren, brethren, etc. are most frequently used terms. The last three terms are basically terms that are used in addressing people who have Korean nationality. On the other hand, people who had already acquired the nationality of the country they are currently living in, such as the Korean people living in China, U.S., or the late U.S.S.R., or the Korean people living in Japan without possessing Korean nationality, or the people who are free from being obliged to certain duties or enjoying certain rights even if they have Korean nationality as they are currently living in Japan should all be addressed as ethnic Koreans overseas because even though they are living in different countries, they are still part of the Korean people. But up until recently, both the government and the Korean people inside the peninsula considered the ethnic Koreans overseas as mere overseas residents. Such kind of consideration vividly revealed that the government and the people were basing their observations of their own ethnic people living outside the peninsula upon a perspective not of the concerned brethren, but merely of their own.

Korean scholars and also the media were only interested in the way these Korean people living outside the Korean peninsula managed to keep their identities and traditional culture intact even though they were the minorities in the regions they were living in. This was the typical example of the people inside the peninsula applying the concept of "Korean people" to the people outside, in a way favored only by themselves, and such kind of deliberation could be another form of hardening the already grim situation of our fellow brethren.

Korean society maintained a position in which they considered their brethren overseas as fellow Koreans when they needed them, but also frequently assumed a very different position as well by perceiving them otherwise if they were not needed. In other words, officially they were the same members of the Korean people, but in fact they were perceived to be merely foreigners, especial-

ly in the cases of ethnic Koreans overseas who were living in regions that showed lesser economic development than that of Korea, such as China and the late U.S.S.R.

The Public's Perception of Ethnic Koreans Living in China

Ethnic Koreans in China bear a double identity as being Joseon (Korean)-Chinese, while also being Chinese Joseon (Korean) people. They have already lived in China for half a century, and have overcome significant levels of oppression and discrimination to become one of the proudest models of minority ethnic groups inside China (Jeong Shin Cheol 1998). So it would only be natural for them to consider China as their homeland. In other words, the ethnic Koreans in China consider themselves as part of the Joseon (Korean) ethnic group, as well as citizens of China, with Chinese nationality (Seol Dong-Hoon 1997). Yet, the people inside the Korean peninsula still consider them as marginal entities living at the edge of the boundaries of the Korean peninsula.

Perspectives on ethnic Koreans in China are comprised of official perceptions and the more dormant public sentiments. First, the ethnic Korean society in China as a whole has been perceived as a useful method in solving many problems that Korea was facing. The main reasoning that shaped that kind of approach to them (who were living in China) was that they could serve as a launch pad for Korea's own efforts aimed at globalization and also unification (Lee Jong Hun 1997). This kind of reasoning first appeared in the process of the Roh Tae Woo regime's preparation for establishing diplomatic relations with China, and eventually became the central idea behind any policies that would involve the ethnic Koreans living inside China during subsequent years. Moreover, some of the civilian organizations also seemed to be considering all those various kinds of exchanges that would be established between the Koreans inside the peninsula and the ethnic Koreans in China as preliminary simulations or even as a drill necessary for the task of familiarizing the Korean people to the concept of reunification, which would prove necessary in the end considering the already alienated South and North Koreans because of the differences between Capitalism and Socialism (*Hangyeorae sinmun*, September 9, 1996; *Hangyeorae* 21, December 14, 1995; October 31, 1996).

Along the same vein of thought, a similar idea was suggested by the people who were involved in domestic capital as well. They figured that the ethnic

Koreans living inside China would be well versed in both Korean and Chinese languages and cultures, and therefore would be perfect candidates to serve as intermediaries in the process of the domestic capital's advance into the Chinese market (Kim Tae Hong, Kim Shi Jung 1994). They also theorized that the ethnic Koreans living in China would be able to serve as a huge pool of workforce which would prove contributory in resolving the workforce shortage problems that the Korean domestic market was currently facing. These kind of approaches to the ethnic Koreans overseas and also perceptions of the people living in China were nothing short of perceiving them as mere tools or methods which would solve the problems of Koreans who were already lucky enough to remain inside the peninsula. In fact, around August 1992 when Korea established diplomatic relations with China, a significant number of ethnic Koreans inside China started to be legally hired or unofficially enlisted by several Korean domestic companies and corporations that were suffering from manpower shortages. The number of ethnic Koreans from China who were hired by Korean companies continued to increase, and as of late 1996 it came to occupy almost 30% of the entire number of foreign workers (which was sixty-thousand at the time) currently working inside Korea (Seol Dong-Hoon 1997), and that kind of occupation rate seems to be still maintaining its percentage, even nowadays.

Unlike this approach of considering the ethnic Koreans in China as tools and methods, there have been other perspectives as well, and while some people who share these other kinds of perspectives do consider the ethnic Koreans overseas as the same members of the Korean ethnic group, they also consider ethnic Koreans as colony residents, second-rate citizens, humble beggars, con-artists, ruthless outlaws, and even "reds" who came to Korea through illegal routes with illegal intentions.⁴ The economic considerations that were embedded inside the policies regarding immigrant workers were also applied to the situations of the ethnic Koreans from China. The ethnic Koreans in China were initially forced to relocate themselves to China because of the extraction and oppression of the

4. In July 1996, the Ministry of Justice announced that the ethnic Koreans from China were suspected to have organized an illegal organization called the "Chinese Laborers Association," and to have engaged in espionage activities (*Daily Human Rights News*, July 20, 1996). The charges were later dropped, but the effects of such an announcement lasted for a while. In fact, arguments suspecting the ethnic Koreans overseas to be spies continued to be uttered by several congress members during congress sessions or national inspections (*Joongang ilbo*, October 10, 1996).

Japanese imperial authorities back in the early days of the 20th century, and now when they finally returned to their motherland, they are being extracted and discriminated again, and this time by their own people. The ethnic Koreans from China were merely temporary workers who immigrated to Korea and served mostly in the so-called 3-D areas of business, as laborers at the lowest level with the lowest wages doing the most simplistic hard labor. The aforementioned kind of prejudice based upon social class differences which perceived the ethnic Koreans from China as laborers at the lowest possible level ultimately served in reinforcing prejudice on a more national level, and led the public to be hesitant in considering them as the same members of the Korean ethnic group. The ethnic Koreans from China, in the eyes of Koreans living inside the peninsula, were poor people with Chinese nationality, low level workers who usually did hard and dirty work, and also members of an under-developed socialist state, so they were not considered as part of the Korean ethnic group and were actually defined as a group of people distinguished from those living inside the peninsula (Lee Hyeon Jeong 2001). If we continue to view the ethnic Koreans in China in this kind of way, discriminative actions and the sentimentality of discrimination will not end.

Since the 1990s, both the government and the Korean people living inside the peninsula have maintained a fairly discriminative perspective in viewing the ethnic Koreans from China, and as a result, the ethnic Korean community in China became another front of the so-called “divided Korea.” Words like “If there were to be another war, I would be the first to grab a weapon, go to Korea and kill the Koreans...” (Kim Jae Guk 1997) effectively represent the frustrations and rages of the ethnic Koreans who are currently living inside China, which is approaching a critical point to say the least. To the eyes of the ethnic Koreans in China, the long awaited exchanges with their motherland that has achieved profound economic development, turned out bringing themselves nothing but unexpected prospects which bordered upon completely losing the pride felt for their own national identity (Jeong Shin Cheol 1998). For some of the ethnic Koreans in China, this kind of unexpected turn of events ironically led them to re-confirm their identities as Chinese citizens. One of the ethnic Koreans in China utters the situation quite vividly:

Why are the ethnic Koreans from the U.S. or Canada warmly greeted, when the *Joseon-jok* are not even considered as fellow Koreans? The only possible explanation I can come up with is that it's because China is

poor...Before China becomes stronger and wealthier, there is no way that the *Joseon-jok* would get fair treatment from Koreans (inside the peninsula). When I return, I shall endeavor to contribute to the development and welfare of China. There is no other way. (Yu Myeong Gi 2003)

What should be noted here is that the Chinese nationalism that can be sensed from the attitudes and remarks of the ethnic Koreans living in China is well reflected in the Chinese government policy regarding nationality issues as well. Chinese policies regarding nationality issues are known to be well supported and also supposedly ensure the plurality of minor nationality groups, but in fact Chinese policy pursues the eventual assimilation of those minorities, annihilating them in the process, and ultimately establishing the Hanzu (漢族) ethnic group as the central core. The theory of “Plural yet Unified Chinese People” suggested by Fei Xiaotong (Fei Xiaotong and others 1989) is an embodiment of the philosophy behind such policies. Fei theorized that even though China originated from various branches of national groups, it went through a process of contacting, communicating, fusing, and dividing, and finally reaches a state in which the parts are completely fused with each other while also retaining their inherent characteristics intact in a fairly plural nature, thus achieving a status of a plural yet unified entity. In this theory, the boundary of the traditional concept of “Chinese culture” is expanded to include not only the Hanzu ethnic group but also all the minor nationalities located at the edges of China. This theory literally provided the theoretical basis for the Chinese government of today’s policies regarding nationality issues. Since the 1980s, when reformative and open-door policies were being adopted and the outer influences upon the minority communities increased, the Chinese government defined the Mongols, the Tibetans, the Huizu (回族) people, and the *Joseon-jok* as four distinguished groups that could potentially threaten the stability of China (Lee Jean-young 2001), and such a definition was also closely reflecting the aforementioned nature of Chinese government policy.

Considering the circumstances, the ethnic Koreans in China could also be absorbed and assimilated into the Zhonghua (中華) nationalism of China in the future, and that would mean the complete dissolution of the China-based ethnic Korean community. In other words, to ignore and turn a blind eye to the issues involving the ethnic Koreans in China would be an unfavorable course of action, not only in terms of the historical experience but also in terms of practical interest.

Korea's Policy on Ethnic Koreans Overseas before the Enactment of the "Law for Ethnic Koreans"

Up until the early half of the 1980s, the Korean government did not bother to pay any noticeable attention to the issue of ethnic Koreans living outside the peninsula. The government was even accused of only considering "abandoning" these ethnic Koreans. The head count of the ethnic Koreans who were living in the U.S.S.R. and China was not even ascertained until recently because they were living in states that were enemies of Korea for a quite a long time (Yun In Jin, 2005). The only notable exception in all this inaction was the case of the ethnic Koreans living in Japan, and even that was a response to North Korea's attempts to recruit them in their efforts to secure operative capabilities in international affairs. In response, the Korean government only tried to support the pro-South Korean organizations.

The single achievement which came from the government up until the mid-1980s was the foundation of the Deliberation Committee designed to discuss policies regarding foreign-based citizens (the head of the committee was the vice minister of the Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce) in June 1985. Then going into the latter half of the 1980s, continued economic development and the 1988 Olympics held in Seoul managed to change the world's perception of Korea. And when the Roh Tae Woo regime decided to promote a series of Northern advance policies, the public's interest in the conditions and situations of the ethnic Koreans also increased. Established diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. and China necessitated securing human resources that could be recruited for tasks which would involve Korea's advance into the realms of the U.S.S.R. and China, and this kind of situation also led the people to expect the ethnic Koreans already in place there to serve as bridgeheads for such Northern advance policies and programs.

Under the Kim Yeong Sam regime, policies regarding ethnic Koreans started to take shape. This was also related to the agenda that became fairly popular during that regime: namely the cause of "globalization" or "cosmopolitanism," a discourse the government propagated in their efforts of upgrading every corner of Korean society to match up to global standards. The catchphrase often used by the Kim Yeong Sam regime, which was "Korea, inside the Global society," mirrored the government's interest in trying to enhance the Korean economy toward the standards of the global capitalist economy. "Establishing competitive capability," a cause which was urged by the Kim Yeong Sam regime, was essen-

tially a concept in economic and capitalist terms, but the regime tried to expand the meaning to cover capability issues in terms of the nation and the Korean people as well, and in the process, the government's interests in the issue of ethnic Koreans living in other countries also became much more active.

The Kim Yeong Sam regime promoted a new policy regarding the ethnic Koreans, under the catchphrase saying "All Korean People Are One," and the core of such new policy was to consider the ethnic Koreans as citizens of the country that they were currently living in (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995), and in other words, to consider them as foreigners. Such an approach to the status of the ethnic Koreans was the core idea behind such policy. So, regarding the ethnic Koreans living inside China, the government established a policy of "supporting the *Joseon-jok* on the basis of perceiving their status as Chinese citizens, and supporting them to maintain a stable and successful community inside China." This kind of idea is still the central theme of any policy regarding the ethnic Koreans living inside China.

Then the Kim Yeong Sam regime announced plans to motivate actual support for the ethnic Korean communities at the end of 1995 (Lee Jong Hun 1996). The notable characteristic of this plan was to establish a committee for policies regarding ethnic Koreans and establish it under the jurisdiction of the prime minister, and to found a foundation of ethnic Koreans and place it under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To name the Prime Minister to have the highest level of responsibility in this matter (instead of the mere vice-minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), or to establish a governmental body to take charge of the issue on ethnic Koreans for the very first time effectively demonstrated the increasing interest in the issue of ethnic Koreans overseas inside the government. Especially, the Law of the Foreign Brethren Foundation enacted in 1997 brought order to the definition issue of the identity of ethnic Koreans, and officially defined ethnic Koreans to be "people who carry the bloodline of the Korean people no matter the nationality, and living in foreign regions." Compared to the earlier situations in which the government did not have any official position or principles regarding the ethnic Korean status, it was not a small feat, in sense that such a position at least established the principle of considering the bloodline to be the primary factor of the definition.

But this kind of definition ultimately accepted a defining attitude which completely turned a blind eye to the real situation of all the ethnic Koreans overseas, as such a definition eventually considered persons who already had Korean nationality, or ethnic Koreans overseas who had already acquired the nationality

of the country they were living in, or ethnic Koreans living in Japan yet with Joseon nationality as same kind of entities in the same kind of situations. Moreover, the world was starting to see a society in which multiple ethnic groups of people were starting to co-exist, so clinging onto the issue of bloodline was a course of action inherently harboring the possibility of resorting to discriminative actions in national issues. So, a new principle overcoming the shortcomings of the bloodline principle had to be developed and established.

The Advent of the Theory of “Universal Cosmopolitanism,” and the Enactment of the Law for Ethnic Koreans Overseas

Korea went through a severe economic crisis in 1997, and since mid-1998 one of the concepts that the public blamed regarding the question of what caused this kind of turmoil for the Korean people was nationalism. During the so-called IMF era, it became an intellectual trend to put negative adjectives such as “exclusive,” “arrogant,” “ego-centric,” “closed,” and “emotional” in front of the word “nationalism” whenever it was being uttered (Gweon Hyeok Beom 2000; Im Ji Hyeon 2001).

In July 1998, President Kim Dae Jung announced “a Transfer from Nationalism to Cosmopolitanism” as one of the six theses established for his suggested theory of “The Second Foundation of the Country” (*Munhwa ilbo*, July 21, 1998). According to his remarks, the Korean people were supposedly in need of breaking free from nationalist ideologies which have been the embodiment of exclusiveness and selfishness, and of embracing universal cosmopolitanism which pursues freedom, human rights, justice, peace, and efficiency (Korea Times, November 4, 1998). With the exception of efficiency, no one would deny the other four concepts as being universal cosmopolitan values. Yet the question is: exactly what are the values for, and by whom will they be pursued, and to whom would such values belong?

In the current capitalist global system, exactly what kind of meaning would the pursuit of freedom, human rights, justice, and freedom have? Since the end of the Cold War period, the U.S., which had continued to establish all these kinds of universal values, was already using military forces in specific situations that would secure American interests, as we have already seen in their invasion upon Iraq or Afghanistan. Considering the circumstances, it would be safe to say that a universal value system or moral code that could be shared by all the peo-

ple in the world simply does not exist. Such only exists in mere empty words. Then, the only universal value that could be shared by everyone is the aforementioned efficiency. And behind the rhetoric decorating the grand words such as universal cosmopolitanism hide harsh economic interests, motivations, and strategies. In the end, we can see that aiming for universal and cosmopolitan values that have in fact been armed with economic logic undoubtedly has been affecting the government's policies regarding ethnic Koreans.

The Kim Dae Jung regime promised the Korean people to establish a Foreign Brethren office and to allow people to have multiple nationalities, and delivered them as their resolution plans to the issue of ethnic Koreans during the presidential campaign. Then, after he was sworn in, he promoted a new policy on ethnic Korean, which culminated in the government's effort to enact a new law entitled "The Special Law on Entry into and Departure from Korea of Ethnic Koreans Overseas and Their Legal Status" (hereinafter referred to as "The Special Law for Ethnic Koreans"). The core idea behind this new special law was to make it much easier for ethnic Koreans to come in and out of the country, or to acquire economic rights in terms of real estate.

It was the Ministry of Justice which proposed the Special Law for Ethnic Koreans. Then, when the Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce rejected it based on the reasoning that such law would cause diplomatic conflicts with nearby countries (especially China), the law was changed and became the "Law for Ethnic Koreans." In defining legal perimeters that would determine someone as a ethnic Koreans overseas or not, nationalities of the past became the primary factor to be decisively considered instead of bloodlines considerations, and as a result, the ethnic Koreans currently living in China and the late U.S.S.R. were excluded from the definition of being official ethnic Koreans overseas. In other words, the definition, which was originally "a person who carries the bloodline of the Korean people no matter what the nationality, and living in foreign regions" to "a person who once had the nationality of the Republic of Korea." According to this new definition, not only the ethnic Koreans currently inside China and the U.S.S.R., who were forced to move overseas before the foundation of the (South) Korean government (in 1948), but also the ethnic Koreans currently living in Japan with "Joseon" (and not Korean) nationality were excluded from being protected by the new law.

What became a major controversy in the process of enacting the Law for Ethnic Koreans was the issue of the ethnic Koreans in China. The Kim Dae Jung administration argued that the ethnic Koreans in China had to be excluded from

the new law's definition because "bloodlines" (which the government considered to be the very idea behind the so-called "exclusive" nationalism) was a concept that was no longer a viable, valid, or appropriate to be considered in defining whether someone was an ethnic Korean overseas or not, considering worldwide trends and standards. It was also because avoiding diplomatic conflicts with China was imperative for the interests of the country. But, an examination of the nationality laws of many countries in the world reveals the fact that the number of countries that adopted the principle of personal privilege for jurisdiction (the principle of bloodline privileges for jurisdiction) is larger than the number of countries that adopted the principle of territorial privilege for jurisdiction (the principle of birthplace privilege for jurisdiction). Choosing one of those principles is a matter of national discretion, and is not an issue whereby a government should consult any international standards. What makes matters worse is that the new standard the government suggested, "the past nationality" standard, is not a proper or correct one in consideration of Korean history or law (No Yeong Don 1996).

According to the Law for Ethnic Koreans, whether a person had obtained Korean nationality after the government's foundation in 1948 or not is addressed as an issue that should be considered prominently in determining whether that person is an ethnic Korean or not, but the Nationality Law of Korea enacted in 1948 lacked any such regulation as to who was the first to obtain Korean nationality. So, there is no legal basis to exclude ethnic Koreans who moved overseas before 1948 from being, and being protected as, ethnic Koreans overseas. Moreover, as clearly established in the Constitution of Korea, the government of the Republic of Korea is an entity that inherited the legacy and legitimacy of the Korean Provisional Government, and the provisional government of Korea considered all ethnic Koreans living either inside or outside the country as Korean citizens. So, according to such consideration, ethnic Koreans currently living in China or the former U.S.S.R. might as well be considered to be carrying the rights and privileges of Korean citizens. And determining whether someone is an Ethnic Korean overseas or not by past nationality, and establishing the year 1948 (when the South Korean government was founded) as a time point for supposedly obtaining such past nationality should be considered as a grand error both in historical and legal terms (Lee Jong Hun 2000).

It is a well known fact that the adjustments made to the bill were caused by the strong objection expressed by the Chinese government in November 1998, shortly before President Kim Dae Jung's planned visit to China. Yet, although

there were several media reports covering such alleged objections being launched from China, there was no confirmed official response from the Chinese government (Lee Jin Yeong 2002).

The bigger problem was that the government failed to consider the inter-linked nature of the relationship between the Chinese government's policy on foreign-based Chinese citizens (the Huaqiao people, 華僑) and the Korean government's policy toward ethnic Koreans in China. China is protecting the Huaqiao people in the boundaries defined by their own constitution and has established a governmental body called the Committee for Huaqiao Affairs (Jo Jeong Nam 2002). The Chinese government also granted the Huaqiao people free visits and departures in and out of China as well as allowing them to stay freely inside China in order to motivate them to invest capital and human resources into the economic development efforts of China. So if the Korean government was determined enough to persuade the Chinese government to cite the principle of "mutual equality" things might have turned out different.

The initial cause of proposing the Law for Ethnic Koreans was to motivate ethnic Koreans overseas to invest more actively in homeland affairs and to encourage them to participate in rebuilding the country's economy. As we can see, it was fairly obvious that the very purpose of the law itself was to establish an administrative and stable device of harnessing the financial power of ethnic Koreans overseas who were currently living in wealthy countries, and channeling them into the domestic economy. From this kind of standpoint, the ethnic Koreans living in China or the U.S.S.R. were people who were in no condition to help their homeland, and merely second-rate ethnic Koreans overseas whom the government of Korea was in no need of. There was no incentive for the Korean government to treat them equally just because they were all the same members of the Korean people. So, in that regard, the Law for Ethnic Koreans bears special meaning as it was the law that "officialized" the government's discriminative treatment upon specific groups among the ethnic Korean community. Instead of supporting ethnic Koreans overseas in their efforts to establish living bases in foreign countries and helping them to maintain their national heritage and identity, the Korean government was fostering the dissolution of the Korean identity they were bearing, and ultimately the dissolution of the national communities overseas.

This Law for Ethnic Koreans, which was constructed out of an abominable idea of harnessing capital in the name of "acknowledging ourselves as Korean" was destined to face extreme criticism of being a mere "Law for Ethnic Koreans

in America,” or scolded as being “An Exclusive Law for Ethnic Koreans,” a “Discriminatory Law against Ethnic Koreans Living Abroad,” a “Limping Law,” and even a “Law Dividing the Korean People” (*Gyeonghyang Shinmun*, September 3, 1999; *Gungmin ilbo*, August 19, 1999; *Daehan maeil*, October 14, 1999; *Munhwa ilbo*, August 28, 1999). Especially, the objection from ethnic Koreans living in China was strong (*Hangyeorae sinmun*, December 9, 1998; *Chosun ilbo*, October 14, 1998). The Headquarters for Koreans Helping Each Other, the Civilian Alliance Pursuing Economic Justice and Actions, and the House of Foreign Labor Workers in Seongnam also joined in as well. And the media also requested that the President veto the bill and the law be amended.

Yet, the government enforced the issue and promoted the Law for Ethnic Koreans, and the congress passed this bill with the approval of 255 congressmen and women out of 265. How could such a significantly flawed bill have been enacted by the support from both the government and the congress? It must have been made possible because of misunderstanding regarding the issue of ethnic Koreans overseas (especially the issue of ethnic Koreans living in China) that the Korean public have been carrying for a long time.

Polls addressing the issue of ethnic Koreans who are currently living in China reveal that the public is generally aware of the necessity of not discriminating against them, mostly because they as well are also members of the Korean ethnic group (KIN 2004). But the real problem is the indifference and discrimination that exists or occur in daily life. There is a sentiment deeply embedded in our minds, considering the ethnic Koreans living in China, as beings who are different from ourselves.

In the end, it was most Koreans who remained not very vocal about the issue and only felt content in considering the ethnic Koreans in China to be not “us” and ultimately “them” that made it possible for the law, dotted with discrimination and division, to be passed and enacted. There is also a sentiment existent among most ordinary Koreans that tends to disparage ethnic Koreans from China currently in Korea yet without any kind of legal authorization. A professor, who was one of the ethnic Koreans from China himself, effectively described his own view upon the process of a relationship evolution that continued between Korea and the Joseon-jok. According to him, it started out as a deeply touching and dramatic encounter, then turned to become a somewhat burdening relationship, and finally became a highly polarized one (Institute of Foreign Brethren Issues 2000). Also, after cosmopolitanism became an enormous appeal for the public and the intellectuals, several elite groups even started

to suggest objection to the government's arranging certain levels of privilege for Ethnic Korean communities. All these voices have been constructing part of the society's perception upon ethnic Koreans overseas.

The Law for Ethnic Koreans, in its appearance, seems like a law that was generated out of good will and conviction to resolve the issue of ethnic Koreans overseas that have been abandoned and ignored for the past century. But in reality, this law was nothing but a part of the government's plan to overcome the so-called IMF crisis. And such kind of approach carried the potential to mishandle and eventually abandon one of the most important issues involving the Korean people.

After the Law for Ethnic Koreans Was Ruled as Being Unconstitutional

From early on, when the bill for the Law for Ethnic Koreans was proposed and voted on in the congress, the civilian organizations and the ethnic Koreans currently living in China suggested a revision and amendment of the law, and in the process, had the ironic opportunity of witnessing and experiencing a situation in which the enactment of such a law considered so outrageous actually served as a catalyst for reinforcing the unity inside the ethnic Korean community. The civilian organizations and the ethnic Korean groups who objected to the Law for Ethnic Koreans organized a Council of Promoting the Improvement of Overseas Ethnic Koreans' Legal Status in August 1999, and then other related entities such as the "Alliance for Peace throughout Northeast Asia" and the "Preparation Committee of Plans to Amend the Law for Ethnic Koreans" were launched in 2001. These civilian bodies officiated their support for the ethnic Koreans who are currently living in China and made their objective very clear, which was to reinforce the unity and alliance among Ethnic Korean communities living in various countries as they were facing danger of being divided and estranged by the Law for Ethnic Koreans.

The ethnic Koreans filed a lawsuit suggesting that the Law for Ethnic Koreans contained elements that could be considered unconstitutional to the Constitutional Court. And the Constitutional Court ruled that the law indeed contained elements that deviated from the spirit of the Constitution, on November 29, 2001. The court recommended that the government prepare an amendment before 2003 as the current version of the Law for Ethnic Koreans, which excluded ethnic Koreans in China from its own legal boundaries, is in

violation of the Constitution.

After the Constitution court ruled the Law for Ethnic Koreans to be partially unconstitutional, the debates and discussions over the law became more heated than ever. Placed at the center of such controversy was the matter of whether this Law should be amended or abolished. The governmental body that argued the abolishment of the law was the Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce. The National Human Rights Committee and other specialists regarding the matter also agreed with that argument. There were two bases for such argument. One was in consideration of the Chinese government's objection and response (*Joongang ilbo*, November 30, 2001). In fact, right after the ruling of the Constitutional court, the Chinese Embassy officially announced that the ethnic Koreans in China were to be considered as Chinese citizens and the Chinese government did and will not allow its citizens to have multiple nationalities (*Joongang ilbo*, December 7 and 8, 2001, *Chosun ilbo*, December 27, 2001). But the Korean government's Law for Ethnic Koreans did not allow Korean citizens to carry multiple nationalities either, so it was not an impossible task to persuade the Chinese government in our favor regarding this matter.

The other basis for arguing for the abolishment of the Law for Ethnic Koreans altogether was the sentiment against perspectives primarily considering bloodlines or racial profiles as important factors in determining nationality (Jeong In Seob 2002). According to the reasoning of the persons supporting this basis, if the Law for Ethnic Koreans were to be amended to reflect the perspectives prioritizing bloodline validity in nationality-determining situations, then such law would result in discriminating every non-Korean foreign worker staying in Korea, which would be a clear violation of the World Human Rights Agreement that bans discriminative actions based upon ethnic group and nationality. So, the position of persons in favor of this basis was that, in order to avoid committing such a violation, the Law for Ethnic Koreans must be abolished, and other individual laws should be developed and enacted in order to cover all the issues involving foreign workers (including the ethnic Koreans from China). Some of the foreign worker groups also argued that the privileges granted to the ethnic Koreans from China could result in discriminative rulings against other foreign workers and they agreed with the position that supported the abolishment of the Law for Ethnic Koreans.

Yet on the contrary, most of the groups comprised of ethnic Koreans from China argued that the Law for Ethnic Koreans should be amended. On December 13th, 2001, the "Preparation Committee of Plans to Amend the Law

for Ethnic Koreans” was launched with representatives of civilian organizations, specialists, and ethnic Koreans all participating. The committee continued their actions and pressed the government to launch efforts to amend the flawed law. This committee was reformed into the “Promotion Committee of the Alliance of Ethnic Koreans Overseas” on February 26th 2003, and finally became the Foreign Brethren Alliance on August 22nd 2003 (No Yeong Don 2002).

Specialists who studied and researched the issue on ethnic Koreans overseas such as No Yeong-don, Lee Jong Hun, and Lee Jin Yeong also joined the activities of the civilian organizations. They continuously argued that the law was an anti-national one as it ignored the history of the Korean people by excluding the ethnic Koreans in China from its protection and argued that the law should be revised by a series of amendments through various occasions that included the “Public Hearing regarding the Amendment issue of the Law for Ethnic Koreans” that was arranged by both the “Preparation Committee of Plans to Amend the Law for Ethnic Koreans” and Congressman Song Seok Chan on February 19th 2002, the “Public Hearing over the matter of Policies regarding Foreign Brethren and Necessary Legal Arrangements” arranged by the Congressional National Security and Unification Forum on March 22, 2002, the “Public Hearing over the Matter of Necessary Legal Arrangements for Laws Involving Ethnic Koreans Overseas” arranged by both the Congressional National Security and Unification Forum and the Promotion Committee of the Alliance of Ethnic Koreans Overseas on March 28, 2003, and the “Workshop of Legal Specialists regarding Law for Ethnic Koreans” arranged by the Promotion Committee of the Alliance of Foreign Brethren on July 19, 2003, etc. (No Yeong Don 2002).

Their bases for argument were the following points: First, the principle of primarily considering bloodlines in these matters is part of International law and the principals that are accepted by international law, which can be seen from the fact that several countries in the world are granting various privileges to their ethnic Koreans overseas based on such principles and are even granting them the nationality of the homeland. Second, foreign-based ethnic Koreans should all be considered as members of the homeland ethnic group, and suggesting otherwise would be a discriminative act in violation of the equality principle included in the World Human Rights Agreement. Third, the persons who argue that the law should be abolished completely because the law is discriminative in terms of racial profiles are at fault in over-interpreting the formality of the law, and considering the ethnic Koreans' immigration to other countries was a result of the Japanese imperial authorities' discriminative actions in the first place, granting

privileges to the ethnic Koreans in China should be perceived as a restoration, remedying the disastrous results of the Japanese authorities' discriminative policies (No Yeong Don 2002; Lee Jong Hun 2002; Lee Jin Yeong 2002).

The demonstrations arranged by the ethnic Koreans from China continued while the newspapers and the media broadcast services also covered their activities. It should be noted that activists of the civilian organizations that supported the China-based ethnic Koreans received several human rights awards, and even the conservative Christian church in Korea decided to assume an active position in this issue, which shows us that after the Constitutional Court ruled the Law for Ethnic Koreans to be unconstitutional, the society was at least approaching an official, society-wide agreement regarding the issue of ethnic Koreans currently living in China. And the most noteworthy event that came out of this atmosphere was president Roh Moo Hyun's visit on November 30th, 2003 to the demonstration site crowded with ethnic Koreans from China who were requesting that their nationality be reinstated (*Hangyeorae sinmun*, December 1, 2003). The fact that the President himself visited the people in the demonstration to address the ever-sensitive issue of nationality and that he promised the government would heartily look into the matter was a historic moment that validated the legitimate nature of the amendment-promoting movements regarding the Law for Ethnic Koreans.

In the end, an amended version of the Law for Ethnic Koreans, which included the ethnic Koreans currently living in China and the former U.S.S.R. in its legal boundaries and perimeters, passed the congress on February 9, 2004, well past the deadline instructed by the Constitutional Court. But the government still remained considerably passive regarding the matter, even after the amendment passed in congress. Some of the ethnic Koreans overseas filed a petition to the National Human Rights Committee appealing that "the enforcement of the ordinance of the Law for Ethnic Koreans is not accordingly amended and as a result seriously discriminative actions and human rights violations are continuing to be committed" (*Gungmin ilbo*, May 31st, 2004). Unless the amended portions of the Law for Ethnic Koreans are reflected in the ordinance, ethnic Koreans from China would still be excluded from the protection of the law.

And one thing that is confirmed by the amendment process of the Law for Ethnic Koreans is that the public's interest and understanding of the issue on China-based ethnic Koreans still remain very low, in spite of the passionate actions of civilian organizations and the media's positive coverage regarding the issue. There are not that many Koreans who really understand how the ethnic

Korean community in China was formed in the first place or what kind of meaning they occupy in the Korean lives today. They usually do not bother to closely examine the issue, even though there are passionate and also fierce discussions and debates going on in the government, civilian organizations, and academic conferences over the matter of either abolishing or amending the Law for Ethnic Koreans. When the media report such issues and debates, the public only perceives such activities as involving only a handful of people who dedicated themselves to the matter.

Toward a New National Community for the Korean People

In this article, this researcher raised the issue of ethnic Koreans overseas who are undoubtedly part of the Korean ethnic group but are treated differently and excluded from being perceived as such by examining the enactment and amendment process of the Law for Ethnic Koreans. The most important thing for ethnic Koreans overseas who lost all living basis inside their homeland was to be able to settle down wherever they were and to try not to lose his or her own national identity while doing so, even if they were a group that occupied only a minor portion inside their chosen region. The government's policies regarding ethnic Koreans overseas must consider those two objectives to be the most primary ones, and embrace them as objectives of their policies as well.

What we need right now is neither abandoning nationalism nor reinforcing it. What we need is to enhance our ways of interpreting it and processing it in every day life. Needless to say, discriminative sentiment in terms of racial profiles, or such sentiment that stemmed from an arrogant sense of exclusiveness developed for decades inside our minds should be abolished and overcome. Exclusive and condescending racism in the guise of nationalism breeds discriminative sentiment and actions that are targeted at lesser developed peoples, ethnic groups, and countries, often in situations where there are wealthy and poor coexisting, or civilized and supposed barbarians coexisting. In the Korean case, this logic resulted in the forming of sentiment supporting the necessity of national expansion or in a condescending attitude and discriminative sentimentality against other under-developed countries and peoples based upon economic interests and developed during the country's economic development process in the 1960s (Chong 1993).

And there are other problems regarding the Law for Ethnic Koreans, other than the issues directly involving the China-based ethnic Koreans. It is more of a

national issue, involving the entire Korean people. Whenever national issues that involve all the Korean people who lived during the modern and contemporary periods in Korean history are discussed, the one issue that is constantly discussed and reminded of no matter what issues are being addressed is the image of Korean people being victims forced to fight back and resist the (Japanese) aggressors after having been oppressed for such a long time. This kind of discourse of resistance and liberation against invasion and extraction has served as the mainframe of discussion regarding a variety of national issues, no matter what kind of background the subjects had in terms of time and place. But, if we look back upon recent years, we can see that somewhere down the road we became the very aggressors we abhorred so much, and that kind of transition was only illuminated by the issue of foreign workers which has become a hot topic since the 1990s.

As of 2004, the number of foreign workers currently staying in Korea is counted roughly at four hundred thousand. Most of them stay here illegally, without any official registration. These foreign workers, including the ethnic Koreans that came from China, are becoming targets of discrimination and oppressive actions by resident Korean people. While we are constantly asking Japan to cease discriminative actions and to apologize for their past criminal deeds, we are becoming the same kind of oppressors as well, discriminating and suppressing other people at the same time.

With regard to the issue of being exclusive and condescending, we should examine the validity of the myth of “being members of an ethnic group that carries an ultimately pure bloodline” which is also very much a prevalent one buried inside the Japanese mind (Lee Jun Sik 2003a). This myth that is embraced and believed in by every Japanese person says that “Japan has an untainted, purely single base of origin, and Japan has only been composed of the Japanese people who shared a common culture and the same bloodline, both in the past and the present” (Oguma 1996). This kind of convenient myth served as the basis for the Japanese people to assume an exclusive, arrogant, and condescending attitude toward other peoples (Creighton 1997; Weiner 1997). The discriminative treatment that is currently being committed against Asian foreigners inside Japan is essentially engineered by such kind of philosophic sentimentality (Onuma 1986). Countries that are supposedly composed of such “homogeneous ethnic group’s” carry the potential to employ discriminative intentions and actions in terms of nationalities or racial profiles (Yoshino 2002) as such countries tend to lack the experience of co-existing with other peoples and other eth-

nic groups.

And other than Japan, Korea is the only country of which the people proudly utter the fact that their ethnic group is composed of a single breed of people and that they all share a pure, single bloodline. We can see that being obsessed with such myths does not belong only to the Japanese people. We are currently exercising such obsession with myths, and furthermore, discriminative actions based upon such obsessions. Sometimes such exercises are perpetrated against the foreign workers (Seol, Skrentny 2004). Behind our pride of being descendants of the legendary Dangun lies our own oppressive and discriminative sentiment regarding people that are perceived to be different from our own. As a result, our own discriminative intentions and actions against foreign people is reported to be much harsher even than those displayed by the Japanese people (Kim Dong Chun 2001; Park Gyeong Tae 1999). Even though we were forced to endure the harsh rule of colonial oppressors for such a long time, apparently we did not learn anything from such experience and instead transformed ourselves into another version of those oppressors who came to suppress and discriminate supposedly lesser beings much more cruelly, and treat our own ethnic Koreans who happened to live overseas in the same way. That kind of discrimination became pretty obvious during the 1990s in the public's disparaging of and discriminating against foreign workers who came from under-developed countries. In such a shameful atmosphere, our own brethren from China had to suffer such discrimination as well.

Inside Korean society, there is a particular perspective that views the concept of a homogeneous ethnic group, the concept of a single culture, and the concept of a single state to be the same, and that kind of perspective has been a very powerful one to say the least. This kind of specific consciousness regarding the people's own sense of being as members of a homogeneous ethnic group makes the people more sensitive to the "difference" between "us" and "them," or "our people" and "other peoples." When other factors such as the scale of the state or the country are added to the equation, the people tend to separate even their own brethren, who are currently not living in the homeland with them, from themselves and to take them out from the boundary of "us." The ethnic Koreans living inside China are being perceived differently and ultimately excluded from the Korean ethnic group because they live in China and therefore should be considered as Chinese people. And they are indeed considered to be such entities in the eyes of the people who are chained to such perspectives. Our consciousness and perspectives regarding national issues are essentially based upon the boundaries and perimeters

of the Korean peninsula, and are confined in the concept of a small country called Korea (Yu Myeong Gi 2003). So we tend to differentiate ourselves living in such domain from other brethren who were born and have been living in China or other areas, and justify our own discriminative intentions and actions perpetrated against the ethnic Koreans in China without any hesitation.

What we desperately need today is to break free from the sense and consciousness of being members of a “homogeneous” ethnic group based upon an untainted, pure bloodline. What we need to do today is to establish a new type of national sense of identity that is based upon the concept of an equal, free civilian community. The Korean Network, or the Common Home of Northeast Asian People as suggested by Wada Haruki or Gang Sang Jung could be appropriate alternatives (Wada 1995; Gang Sang Jung 2002). Or the Multi National Korean Community suggested by Baek Nak Cheong (1998) could be considered as an alternative as well. The title does not matter, yet it has to be an “open” concept. The identity of the new Korean national community should not be confined to the concept and discourse of “being and composed of a homogeneous ethnic group,” and should not be held hostage to vague arguments supporting the restoration of the so-called national homogeneity. Instead, it should be based upon the attitude of acknowledging each other’s differences and the mutual intention to gather and use all kinds of wisdom obtained in the different kinds of historical experience of various peoples (Park Myeong Gyu 2000; Choi Wu Gil 2003). Concepts like the Korean National Network or Network of Korean Merchants suggested and promoted by our own government should not be meaninglessly boycotted either if they show the possibility of breaking free from nationalist traits that have usually been represented by administrative sources. To the situation at hand, the issue of the multiple identities that the China-based ethnic Koreans are forced to carry is an inspiration enough.

The biggest suffering the Korean people was forced to endure as a result of the Japanese occupation and the following Cold War politics was the division of the Korean people and the subsequent separation. In order for us not to indulge ourselves in discriminating or oppressing other people, we should examine and also try to understand what kind of discrimination and oppression our own ethnic Koreans had to face and endure during their stays in overseas regions. We should develop a new model of nationalism that could embrace and engulf all the ethnic Koreans living around the world who were forced to face all the turbulence and crises outside the Korean domain. We should find a new model of nationalism that could lead us to overcome the obsessive myths of being mem-

bers of supposedly homogeneous ethnic group and to learn ways of co-existing with other people. And in order to do so, we should incorporate our own experience of hardship and predicaments that continued for over a century into the molding of that new version of nationalism. That kind of effort would ultimately enable all the suppressed ones to ally themselves together and lead us back to the original ideas of Korean nationalism's early days.

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