

Multiculturalism in Korea?

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Introduction

Multiculturalism has often been criticized because of its tendency to essentialize culture and fixate cultural borders. In addition, it has been accused of overlooking the dynamic nature of the meeting of cultures. As multiculturalism is based on the assumption that all the members of a cultural group share a single culture, it would be extremely difficult to recognize the subjectivity and role of individuals crossing cultural borders.

These criticisms are raised by anthropologists, but it cannot be denied that anthropology as well as anthropological concept of culture is deeply responsible for such problems. More than ten years ago Prof. Nishikawa Nagao problematized the very concept of culture: he pointed out that the idea of culture is the project of the modern nation-state. For Nishikawa, civilization is the ideology of a nation-state called France, an early developer, while Kultur or culture is the ideology of a nation-state called Germany which was a late developer. According to Nishikawa, cultural anthropologists, by removing the state from the concept of culture, ended up blinding our eyes to the ideological dimension deeply rooted in the very idea of culture.

According to the classic definition of culture, a group of people is supposed to have a unique culture; neighboring cultures may share many cultural traits but they are considered to be organized in different ways. Ruth Benedict used "pattern" to express this aspect of culture; differently shaped but made of essentially similar stuff.

But, at the popular level, cultures, usually identified with national cultures, are regarded as standing apart and distinctively different from one another. National culture, in its jealous effort at unifying and homogenizing the people within its national territory into a nation, creates national cultural identity. The formation of identity requires the existence of the Other; so we now know that alterity is but another name for identity.

When identity and alterity were used to justify unequal power relationship and exploitation, national cultures became extremely jealous and paranoid, demanding undivided loyalty and conformity, and not allowing deviance and dual allegiance. One remedy is the emphasis on intercultural understanding and tolerance toward the Other. However, whether you believe in the clash of civilizations or dialogue among cultures, you find yourself stuck in the binary oppositions of "we vs. they" "civilized vs. savage" "Europe vs. the Other" etc.

The idea of "I-Culture (Watakushi bunka)" as proposed by Nishikawa Nagao provides a way out of this straight jacket. By taking one's attention on the process of creating culture, Nishikawa emphasizes the individual as the shaper of his own culture: an individual may be brought up in a culture he is born into; he internalizes the values and world view of its culture, but he does not simply act out the norms of his culture when he deals with the existential problems he faces. He might understand that his own culture is but one way of understanding and organizing the world; his culture is quite an achievement, but inevitably imperfect as well as contradictory and limiting. He may learn the existence of other cultural traditions which suggest alternative ways of understanding and organizing the world. He is born a prisoner of his culture, but he does not have to remain one. Each individual ends up forming his own set of values; this I-Culture of the individual is in constant tension not so much

with other cultures as with the culture into which this individual is born. An individual can go beyond his natal culture and find genuineness in alternative way of doing things.

Cultural diversity is neither an inconvenience that we must tolerate nor a difference that we must understand and respect in order to keep order and live in peace. It is rather a blessing; it is the space and opportunity where we can find alternative means of solving our problems and realizing ourselves otherwise impossible in the imperfect and limiting culture in which we are born into. The presence of other cultures enables us to look at and better understand our culture; it enables us to find ourselves and realize our potential. It is the presence of other cultures that makes it possible to encounter with my true self. Multiculturalism and cultural diversity within the border of the nation-state, therefore pose special challenges and opportunities.

But, all of us know only too well that cultures, as well as nation states and marriages demand undivided loyalty and guard their boundaries so jealously. Those who attempt to cross the borders are stigmatized as 'hikokumin' traitors, adulterers, abnormals and deviants; they are relentlessly punished.

At the same time, all of us understand what the freedom of conscience is about. Not only conscience, but religion, art and science also claim the right to cross cultural as well as national boundaries now. Our bodies are classified as citizens of this nation or that nation, but our minds and spirits can cross cultural and national borders in search for the ways to find and realize ourselves and our potential. Multiculturalism and cultural diversity is not about tolerating and respecting other cultures. It is about finding one's true self and realizing one's potential.

Multiculturalism in Korea

With this in mind, let me begin my discussion on multiculturalism in Korea. As you know well, Korea has been long described as a racially homogenous state with a uniquely homogeneous culture and population. But recently it has become common to declare Korea as rapidly transforming itself into a multiracial and multicultural society, as the number of foreign nationals residing in Korea has reached one million, or more than two percent of the total population. With more than four out of ten single farmers marrying foreign women in 2006, scholars, NGO activists and reporters argue that Koreans must learn how to live with non-Koreans and be tolerant of other cultures.

The year 2006 marked a sudden increase in the media coverage and discussion of the conditions and policies for foreign brides and workers in Korea. The visit of Hines Ward, a biracial Korean who won the Most Valuable Player award in the US Super Bowl, was a sort of a watershed. He was hailed as a proud son of Korea and a symbol of what Korea might achieve if it could cease to be a single-raced nation and promote multiculturalism. The official discourse has taken a positive turn and advocated for multiculturalism, which is a far cry from the official affirmation of a single nation state in the past. From now on, cultural diversity and the presence of immigrants are to be viewed as an important asset in Korea's effort for continued development in an increasingly globalizing world. When President Roh stressed the need to stop teaching ethnic homogeneity and embrace the tenets of multiculturalism, different government agencies came up with various projects to help foreign brides adjust themselves to Korea: NGOs found themselves on the receiving end of sudden increases in government subsidies for their activities, while scholars and research institutions suddenly found research money and support at every turn.

As this sudden enthusiasm for multiculturalism was largely the result of changes in the attitudes of government agencies and the mass media, some critical observers called it "state-sponsored multiculturalism" or "government-led multiculturalism." The flimsy basis of this kind of official multiculturalism was revealed in the recent uproar over the recommendation of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). All the major newspapers in Korea reported that the CERD expressed concern over the Korean emphasis on the ethnic homogeneity of the nation and that CERD had recommended Korea stop using such expressions as *sunhyeol* (pure-blood) and *honhyeol* (mixed-blood) as part of an effort to reduce discrimination. In the report prepared and submitted by the Korean government to CERD in 2006, the government had repeatedly used phrases as "Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country" several times.⁽¹⁾ Although those who wrote this report intended it as an apology for the current state of affairs by invoking what they thought to be "historical facts" or "cultural traditions," to the CERD it appeared to be an effort to justify Korea's ethnic homogeneity. So, it was the accidental phrasing in the report submitted by the Korean government that caused CERD to express its concern that "the emphasis placed on the ethnic homogeneity of Korea may represent an obstacle to the promotion of tolerance and friendship among the different ethnic and national groups living within its territory."

Even though there is a great deal of diversity and difference, not to mention contradiction and competition, among the positions and policy proposals of government agencies, NGOs, and scholars (Kim H. 2006), the current discourses and practices of multiculturalism seem to share three common problems. First, enthusiastically embracing multiculturalism, the boosters for a new multiculturalism tend to regard a Korean nationalism that emphasizes ethnic homogeneity as the single most critical obstacle to

overcome in Korea's transition toward a multicultural society. For many NGO workers and scholars, as well as those government officials who prepared the report to CERD, ethnic nationalism is the cause for prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, discussions are focused on the need to outgrow this "old" idea that no longer fits with a different reality.

Second, current enthusiasm for multiculturalism assumes that the rate of increase in the numbers of immigrants will continue in the future, that foreign workers will continue to enter Korea, and that Korean farmers will continue to marry foreign-born women. Even if the number of foreign workers and spouses entering Korea continues to grow, the composition of incoming migrants might change. What is important is that very few people have seriously asked whether the number of the immigrants or their commitment to cultural assimilation warrants the generalization that Korea has become a multicultural society.

Third, those who promote multiculturalism in Korea have never paid due attention to what a multicultural/multiethnic society is and what kind of future lies ahead if Korea decides to officially adopt it as ethos. This may indicate that many advocates of multiculturalism in Korea are nationalists who view multiculturalism as a survival strategy for the nation-state. Of these three problems, this paper will focus on the first, as the remaining two will be addressed by other articles in this special issue.

Here, I intend to examine the long-forgotten naturalization practices and policies of traditional Korea that existed long before the advent of a single-raced nationalism, one based on the transformation of Dangun from the first king into the biological ancestor of Koreans. I would like to attend to the following three issues. First, the so-called ethnic nationalism that underlines the purity of Korean blood is not an integral part of Korean tradition. In addition, it is erroneous to say that Koreans lack a historical experience of living together with foreigners, as many scholars and

laymen along with the government officials who prepared the report to CERD repeatedly mentioned. Traditional Korea had clear policy principles and practices concerning immigration and naturalization (hyanghwa, 向化). Moreover, traditional Korea did not consider itself to be an ethnically homogeneous state, and did not discriminate against foreigners simply on the basis of their ethnic origins.

Second, ethnic homogeneity in Korean nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Korean nationalism, although superficially focused on the point of ethnic homogeneity, was really based on a profound sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority. Such expressions as "We Koreans, the descendants of Dangun," which is now touted as the proof of the consanguinity of the Korean people, was first introduced not to emphasize the blood relationship of Koreans, but to emphasize the history of Korean political and cultural life as being old as that of China. It was only in the last century that Dangun began to be taken as the biological father of Koreans.

Third, the logic follows that those who identify ethnic homogeneity as the main cause for prejudice and discrimination against foreign workers and brides are actually engaging the wrong enemy, since the real cause of prejudice is this very sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority. Therefore, even if Koreans succeed in doing away with the notion of ethnic homogeneity, this will not automatically make Korean society tolerant of different cultures and values. Naive is the assumption that classifications of people according to their bloodline is outdated and wrong and that differentiation on the basis of culture is modern and good.

If we realize that cultural discrimination based on the sense of being civilized (and therefore superior) may be more persistent and dangerous than the concept of ethnic homogeneity, one is able to understand why multiculturalism can be so easily embraced by nationalists. What is needed

is a serious reexamination of nationalism in Korea.

Many scholars and laymen believe that Korean nationalism is essentially an ethnic nationalism because Koreans not only say that they have a common language, history and set of customs, but also that they are descendants of a common ancestor – Dangun. However, as mentioned above, the idea that Korea is a state made of a single homogeneous ethnic group is an idea that emerged quite recently. The people of Goryeo and Joseon did not believe that they shared a common biological ancestor and welcomed many foreigners to Korea without discriminating against them simply on the basis of ethnic difference.

The people of Goryeo and Joseon declared themselves to be the descendants of Dangun, but their intention stopped far short of any claims to be blood relatives. What they meant was that Goryeo and Joseon were the successors of the ancient kingdom of Joseon (Gojoseon or Old Joseon, distinguished from the Joseon founded by Yi Seong-Gye in 1392), which was founded by Dangun. In fact, the Dangun myth ⁽²⁾ itself asserts that he was the first king of Korea, not the progenitor of the Korean people. However, even scholars fail to critically review this misconception and blame the Dangun myth as the source of ethnic nationalism in Korea.

Indeed, in traditional Korea, Dangun was not perceived as the symbol of the blood ties of the Korean people, but as the founder of the first state formed in Korea: his importance lay only in his having been a political leader, not a biological progenitor. The records of Dangun's foundation of Korea (Gojoseon) during the same year as the ancient Chinese King Yao (堯) indicate that the political history of Korea is as long as that of China. Later, Gija (箕子), a sage of the late Shang (商) dynasty, fled to Gojoseon when the persecution of sages by King Zhou (紂), the last king of the Shang dynasty, occurred. He founded Gija Joseon when the present king, a descendant of Dangun, abdicated his power, and, according to the thesis,

civilized Korea under his rule.

For the Koreans during the Joseon period, the important point was that Goryeo and Joseon were no less splendid than China, as they are the successors of the ancient kingdom of Gojoseon, which was founded by Dangun and civilized by Gija: it did not matter whether they were one big family related through blood or not. Neither the scholars nor the politicians of Joseon argued that all Koreans were blood relatives of Dangun. Dangun's importance lay in his having been the founder of the early Korean state, not in being the progenitor for all people living in Korea.

Traditional Korean Policies and Treatment of Immigrants

Although bloodlines were important, Confucianism put greater emphasis on learning and cultivation of the self. An ancient sage king such as Yao chose to give the throne to a wise person, not to his biological son. If noble birth did not automatically qualify a person for high office, and if diligent study, cultivation of the mind, and moral training defined a man worth, then it followed that a man from a poor family could somehow improve himself and achieve the status of enlightenment. Likewise, it was not so farfetched to suppose that barbarians could achieve civilization through concerted effort.

As Korea prided itself on having achieved the status of civilization through the teachings of Gija, Koreans were ready to agree that birth itself did not condemn a person to uncivilized status. Civilization was attainable to those who chose to change and make the necessary effort, as expressed partly in the government policy towards foreign defectors to Korea. A Jurchen chief or a Japanese pirate could become a civilized Korean by discarding his old ways to adopt a Korean way of life and cultivate himself. It may have taken time, but was not impossible. Therefore, discrimination

was theoretically based on one's intention to assimilate or not, and not on place of birth or ethnic origin. This idea of the possibility of improving human character was one of the principles that directed Joseon's policy toward immigrants and their naturalization. This line of reasoning is always twofold: the barbarians can be civilized; and the barbarians should be assimilated.

Another important principle is found in Confucian political philosophy which supposes that people should admire a good ruler. Ancient Confucian texts are full of records in which people left their country for another ruled by a good king, or loyally followed their good ruler when he was forced into exile. The ideal king in Confucianism was also supposed to be a great civilizer and reformer who could influence subjects in the same way as "the blowing wind makes the grass bend." So foreigners, defecting from their own countries to seek permission to reside in Korea, were not regarded as simple refugees. They were the very proof that a given Korean ruler was a virtuous king admired by people from the outside. It was his reputation as a virtuous ruler that brought these foreigners to Korea. Therefore, they were welcomed by the government, which felt itself obliged to treat them with good manners, justice, and fairness, not to mention compassion.

Both Goryeo and Joseon adopted Tang China's practices and maintained a policy of welcoming and treating well those foreigners who voluntarily came and naturalized themselves. The government of Joseon had the principle of "stopping neither those who wanted to come nor those who wanted to leave" (Han M. 2001). It would exempt Jurchen and Japanese immigrants from taxation to help their settlement in Korea. These settlers were free from paying land taxes for three years and from corvee labor for ten years (Han M. 2001).

During the Joseon period, many Japanese migrated to Korea partly

because of economic distress and hardships in life. The government of Joseon chose to accept these Japanese as part of a countermeasure against the Japanese pirate raiders (waegu 倭寇). When the number of descendants of these Japanese and Jurchen immigrants began to grow, some government officials wanted to put them on the military register and make them pay military taxes. However, some government officials argued against this policy, saying that it is against the rules of treating guests who had come from afar. Others argued that it would make their livelihoods difficult if the government began to require military service from third-generation immigrants. After some deliberation in front of the king, the government decided to start to require military service from the fourth-generation of immigrants.

Besides tax exemptions, Joseon allowed these naturalized immigrants and their descendants opportunities to take state examinations for public office. Sometimes, the government appointed many of these to public offices according to their respective knowledge and skills in serving the national interest. Those who had strong family background, or a large following, or expertise in medicine or shipbuilding were preferred. The Joseon government helped defectors fleeing from economic distress in their own country or prisoners of war to settle in small groups and granted them patches of land in the provinces with the goal of assimilating them into the population (Han M. 2001: 49). It is interesting to note that Joseon also gave some consideration to immigrants in the criminal justice system. Immigrants and their descendants who committed crimes in Joseon were put on trial and punished by the penal codes of Joseon. However, the "rule of leniency" was applied so that they were punished less severely than native Koreans (Han M. 2001: 196). It also seems that many naturalized immigrants were able to marry Korean women and bear children.

Cultural Superiority Rather Than Ethnic Homogeneity Responsible for Discrimination

The policies and treatment of immigrants to Joseon seem far kinder and less discriminating. Immigrants and their descendants enjoyed some government protection and even assumed public office. It reflects the assumption that one could dilute one's ethnicity by cultural assimilation, and that no discrimination should be caused by one's ethnic origin alone.

However, there were negative phenomena as well. Joseon considered itself a civilization distinct from but equal in level to China, and looked down upon the Jurchen and Japanese. This caused the tendency for Joseon to regard Chinese immigrants and their descendants as more civilized, and to give them more favorable treatment in comparison to the Japanese and Manchurians who are, from the modern perspective, ethnically and linguistically far closer to Koreans.

This sense of cultural superiority often translated into contempt, distrust, and ultimately, fear of the namely "uncivilized" peoples. In the Annals, there are many instances of discussions that indicated profound distrust and discrimination towards the Japanese and Jurchen. In one case, these people are presumed to have "a black spot in their hearts because they are not one of our kind". In many parts of the Annals of King Yeonsan, such phrases as "Although it may have been so in the past, how could we trust those who have a human face but a beastly heart?" are frequently found. Such a sense of distrust and contempt, typical of the Orientalist, is again found in a proposal to build a castle wall and drive away the barbarians. These expressions do sound racist, but upon close reading of the text, especially the last part, we find that these government officials were trying to prevent the Jurchen from mixing with Koreans only when the former maintained their "barbarian" way of life.

The government wanted to draw the line between the civilized and the uncivilized, and allowed the Jurchen to cross this when they agreed to be civilized, that is, assimilated to Korean ways.

There was also a consideration of national security. The government did not seem to completely trust the naturalized Japanese. It took the cautious approach of not allowing these defectors and refugees to live in a large group, but divided them into small groups and gave them parcels of land to settle in remote villages. The Joseon government was ready to help foreign immigrants settle in Korea and assimilate themselves to a Korean (namely “civilized”) way of life, but was not tolerant of those who continued to keep their foreign (therefore “uncivilized”) ways. One government official who was a descendant of a naturalized Jurchen was severely criticized for having not discarded his ethnic customs. In several instances, the government was requested and decided to punish those immigrants who practiced their marriage custom of taking the wife of a deceased elder brother. Considering that such marriages had been practiced during the Goguryeo period and many other “barbarian marriage practices” were abolished only recently at the time through a vigorous Confucianization drive in the late Goryeo and early Joseon periods (Deuchler 1995), we can only guess the importance of the sense of cultivating “civilization” at that time.

In this way, discrimination based on a sense of civilization and cultural superiority was far older and persistent than that based on ethnic nationalism developed only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This means that the sense of biological relatedness functioning as a source of discrimination, prejudice, distrust, and fear is a relatively recent trend.

The Production and Reproduction of Ethnic Homogeneity

It is not necessary here to discuss the formation of ethnic nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are some detailed studies (Shin 2006; Schmid 2002) discussing the advent of nationalism emphasizing the ethnic homogeneity of Korean people during this period. Many Korean intellectuals and laymen, such as Shin Chae-ho, who participated in the formation of Korean nationalism, were obviously influenced by European thinkers, especially by Fichte and advocates of German nationalism, among others. The idea of ethnic homogeneity seems to have been borrowed from Fichte, who emphasized common blood as well as a common language and culture. As German nationalism was extremely influential and emulated in Japan, many Koreans may have learned about German nationalism through Japan.

It is an irony that, in their struggle for independence, Korean independence movement leaders turned to Germany for inspiration in the same way the Japanese had done. Shin (2006) points out that the idea of ethnic homogeneity was developed by Koreans during the colonial period as a measure to counter the Japanese propagandist notion of *naisen ittai* (Korea and Japan are one and the same, 内鮮一體), embracing the view of Oguma (2005) and Lie (2001) that the idea of ethnic homogeneity came to be established in Japan only after the Pacific War. However, when closely read, Oguma is found to suggest that the notion of mixed races was not fundamentally different from that of a single race, because the former concept postulated that all the ethnic groups within the Japanese Empire were eventually related to one another. Therefore, it would be correct to say that Korean ethnic nationalism was developed under the influence of Japanese as well as German nationalism. In addition, Korean nationalism might have adopted some elements of *kokugaku* (國學) in the process of its search for a national identity independent of the Chinese view of

civilization. The Japanese version of nationalism was extremely attractive to the extent that even those who were infuriated at the imperialistic aggression of Japan were forced to admit the efficacy and capability of Japan while criticizing and hating the country. They were also impressed with the Japanese efforts at inventing tradition and constructing a national identity and culture. Even with animosity against the Japanese, Koreans were ready to study and learn Japanese institutions and policies, as well as their diligence and work ethic.

For these early leaders of Korean nationalism, Korea had to be a nation of people sharing a language, culture, history, and blood. It was when Korea lost its statehood through annexation to Japan that Dangun was transformed from a political leader into a mythic procreator of the Korean people. At the same time, the idea of "Gija as the Civilizer" became very awkward and inconvenient, since he was a Chinese, a foreigner. Korean intellectuals could not find a rightful place for Gija in the new brand of nationalism that emphasized ethnic homogeneity, and eventually established Dangun as a cultural hero to assume the role of Gija. This is how Dangun became the biological and cultural father of the Korean people. The expression "descendants of Dangun" now came to denote his genealogical descendants as well as the political successor to Dangun Joseon.

Now, let us look at why this brand of nationalism, newly formed to fight Japanese imperialism, continued to exercise such a great influence long after the end of colonial rule in 1945, developed into modern Korean nationalism, and became reinforced through the experiences of economic growth, the democratization movement, and the foreign currency crisis. In Japan, the moral education of shushin (修身) with a focus on the national polity (kokutai, 國體) was abolished in the education reform process by the Occupation Forces. The so-called imperial view of history disappeared

from the official stage. However, curiously enough, in Korea, the influence of Japanese imperialism remained in many ways. The imperialism that praised Japanese people and the Japanese leader was only replaced by the nationalism that praised the Korean people and the Korean leader: the contents were gone, but the forms remained. Especially after the Korean War, the national mobilization system was reestablished in the South as well as in the North. The war was over in Japan, but in Korea, that war continued in a sense. Its nationalistic elements were strengthened as the competition occurred between the North and the South over which side was more nationalistic, and therefore more legitimate. Despite the official effort to liquidate the colonial legacy, not much serious reflection or reexamination was made for the institutions and policy tools adopted and learned through the Japanese during the process of modernization. Therefore, while Japan and the Japanese were the object of hatred and rejection, many Japanese ways remained in Korea, and Japanese-style nationalism was not an exception.

When nationalism was regarded as more important than any other universal values, democratic processes, freedom of speech, and human rights were subject to suspension for the sake of the nation. Park Chung-Hee and Kim Il Sung were champions of nationalism in their own ways, as they both shrewdly manipulated nationalist symbols and values in their efforts to overcome supposed "national crises." Park Chung-Hee competed not only with Kim over who was more nationalistic, but also with his political enemies, as well as student activists. With superpowers looming close by and national reunification ahead, they found Japanese-style German nationalism extremely convenient and attractive political tools. As Koreans recovered national pride and confidence as the result of the rapid economic growth in the 1960's and 1970's, the 1980's witnessed a resurgence of interest in things Korean. When this nostalgia joined hands

with commercialism, the search for and the invention of traditions came to be an important part of Korean cultural life.

Conclusion

As we have examined, it was a sense of cultural superiority that was responsible for discrimination against foreigners in traditional Korea. The idea of ethnic homogeneity came relatively late, and remained to overshadow and characterize Korean nationalism because of the unusual political and cultural circumstances of the Korean War, national division, authoritarian rule, the Cold War, and myriad other factors. Especially important as a historical factor was the loss of confidence and pride in Korean civilization during the early modernization process. When both the West and Japan presented themselves with "superior" technology, scientific knowledge, and industrial power, Korea had to resort to the idea of a "Kultur"-style German nationalism and solidarity in the form of a symbology based on the myths of a common language and blood.

It is no wonder that Koreans had great difficulty overcoming ethnic nationalism if one considers the traumatic experience of war and division, as well as the depressing sense of being a victim in international power politics. Concerns and criticisms have been raised about the nature of Korean nationalism, but thus far, not very successfully. Recent enthusiasm for multiculturalism in Korea should be examined in this context. The discourse of multiculturalism is the terrain upon which advocates for human rights and other universal values pose a challenge to those who regard multiculturalism as a threat to the survival and prosperity of the nation-state. Ironically, it is not Charles Taylor but Siono Nanami who seems to give inspiration to many Koreans. According to her bestselling novel *The Story of the Romans* (roma-in iyagi, romajin monogatari), it was the Romans' flexible attitudes to the absorption of foreign elements

without insisting on old ways that enabled them to build their mighty empire. Multiculturalism is identified with being a successful cultural borrowing or cultural hybrid.

However, multiculturalism may not remain a handy tool of the nation-state. The idea of multiculturalism is inherently subversive to the nation-state. The official endorsement of a multiculturalist policy will inevitably invite questions of human rights and other universal values as well as complaints against reverse discrimination and increasing financial burden, for which few Koreans seem to be prepared at this time. Many essays and policy proposals that employ the expression "multicultural" do not properly address the question of the character and content of multicultural life. Instead, they accept multiculturalism simply as values to guide government policy and educate the general public, and do not show any concrete vision for the realization of multicultural society in Korea. As Oh Gyeong-seok (2007) correctly points out, what is needed is not the introduction or advocacy of multiculturalism, but an in-depth deliberation over what shape a multicultural society should take.

Another crucial problem with the current discourse on multiculturalism lies with the understanding of the concept of culture itself. Still firmly rooted in the idea of national culture, many advocates of multiculturalism in Korea are not prepared to see diversity within a culture, nor are they prepared to recognize an individual except as a member of a clear, distinct, and homogeneous cultural or ethnic group. Without the ability to accept that what is now called Korean culture may simply be an outcome of ongoing compromises, competitions, negotiations, and contradictions between different cultures, one ends up with the rigid notion that cultures always have to be defined according to their respective boundaries and closures.

One problem with multiculturalism is that it tends to make us take

national and cultural boundaries for granted. In the naïve belief that differentiation on the basis of culture is far better than that on the basis of blood, we are misled to overlook the ideology of the nation-state that lies beneath the concept of culture, something that Nishikawa (2006) so eloquently pointed out. It is regretful that some cultural education materials developed under the auspices of government agencies have attempted to teach the essence of different national cultures to Korean husbands and family members of migrant women, believing that such cultural knowledge would promote mutual understanding and peaceful assimilation. I firmly believe that cultural education should be targeted to protect individuals' rights and choices, develop their ability to negotiate and compromise, and help find a solution for existential problems rather than foster understanding and preserving of different cultural traditions as is the case in current multicultural policies in Korea.

Notes

For example, the report said on page one, "4. The Republic of Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country with a total population of 47,254,000 as of November 2005. However, the ethnic composition of the population is not clearly documented since the Republic of Korea does not conduct a census on ethnicity." Also on page ten, "43. As an ethnically homogeneous State, the Republic of Korea has been traditionally unfamiliar with the problems of ethnic minorities. However, the dynamic exchange of human resources between countries and an increase in the number of interracial marriages have recently raised a range of concerns involving ethnic minorities." "44. The principle of the 'pure-blooded', based on the Republic of Korea's pride in the nation's ethnic homogeneity, has incurred various forms of discrimination, largely invisible and not illegal, against so-called 'mixed-bloods' in all areas of life including employment, marriage, housing, education and interpersonal relationships. This is particularly serious since such practices are passed down from one generation to the next."

The earliest records on Dangun are found in Samguk yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, 三國遺事) and Jewang ungi (Songs of Emperors and Kings, 帝王韻紀).

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