

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

South Korea, a country that is known for its massive cultural diplomacy, is experiencing an issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. According to the press release by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, a survey conducted in 2020 about racial discrimination reported that 68.4% of migrants and 89.9% of government officials and teachers acknowledged that racism did exist in the South Korean society¹. The survey was to identify causes, specific forms and perpetrators of racial discrimination and explore ways to tackle this problem including awareness training, distribution of information, hate speech regulations and law against racial discrimination.

Cultural diplomacy highlights the diversity and multiculturalism². Due to its massive promotion of diversity for decades, South Korea has seen a sharp rise in foreign tourists and residents, with a 64% increase from 7,506,804 to 12,312,871 in 2006 and a 135% increase in foreign inhabitants from 386,972 in 1997 to 910,149 in 2006. In August 2007, there were 1 million foreign residents in South Korea, or 2% of the country's total

¹ National Human Rights Commission of Korea, *Accepting Racial Hierarchy without Question Is Racial Discrimination*, 2020

<<https://www.humanrights.go.kr/site/program/board/basicboard/view?&boardtypeid=7003&menuid=002002001&pagesize=10&boardid=7605350>>.

² Kim, J., & Ni, S. (2011). The Nexus between Hallyu and soft power: Cultural public diplomacy in the era of sociological globalism. In D. Kim, & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond* (pp.132-154). Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

population³. Nonetheless, the reality tells that South Korea is having a crisis in racism, xenophobia, and discrimination towards immigrants and foreigners despite its promotion of multiculturalism. The absence of awareness of multicultural values and practices among South Koreans, which results in racial prejudice against non-Koreans, has been widely reported⁴. Due to the growing numbers of foreign entry and international marriage, the South Korean society has never been more racially and ethnically diverse than it is now. However, this increase of multiethnic and multicultural people has eventually become a big challenge for South Korean society as they are known for their strong nationalism.

In the contemporary world, nationalism is a pervasive ideological force that supports the nation-building processes of newly sovereign nations. Nationalism is made up of two core ideals which are the concern that citizens have for their national identity and the measures that they do to try to establish or maintain some semblance of political sovereignty⁵. The bold feeling of nationalism held by South Koreans started after experiencing the 35 years of Japanese colonialism and the three-year Korean War that led them to become one of the poorest countries in the world at that time. In order to survive from the economic fall, South Korean felt the urgency to reconstruct their nation. Since then, South Koreans have been putting their

³ In-jin Yoon, Young-Ho Song, and Young-Joon Bae, 'South Koreans ' Attitudes toward Foreigners , Minorities and Multiculturalism', *Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association*, 2008, 324–41.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Miscevic, N 2010, *Nationalism*, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on November 21st 2022, available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/nationalism/>.

nation in the first priority. The result of pursuing nationalism manifests in South Korea's economic position as one of the most influential states in the world.

Nevertheless, the strong nationalism within South Korean society does not only bring good, but also harm. Many South Koreans have become ignorant towards the presence of differences especially when it comes to nationality and ethnicity. This, unfortunately, leads to the occurrence of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination issue. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea reported that, the racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory attitudes that the migrants experienced were due of their Korean language skills, their nationality, or their race⁶.

The majority of victims of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination issue in South Korea are filled with Southeast Asians, South Asians, Japanese, Chinese, and many more. The gap in different life quality between South Koreans and Southeast Asian or South Asians and others takes part in worsening the issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination in the country that is also known as Republic of Korea. Also, another reason that comes up is the beauty standard that is deified by the South Koreans since most of Southeast Asians and South Asians' skin colors are tan which do not fit South Korean definition of beauty⁷. The noticeable physical

⁶ Hyun-ju Ock, '7 in 10 Foreign Residents Say "Racism Exists" in S. Korea', *The Korea Herald* <<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200320000695>>.

⁷ Hyein Amber Kim, 'Understanding "Koreanness": Racial Stratification and Colorism in Korea and Implications for Korean Multicultural Education', *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 22.1 (2020), 76–97 <<https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v22i1.1834>>.

appearance differences between South Koreans and non-east Asians make them easier to discriminate.

This has become a struggle of South Korea as many have shown their concern towards this and have questioned how the issue is being resolved by the government. Due to the unstoppable Korean Wave, the government should not let the issue keep going as it will affect how the world perceive South Korea. Therefore, the underlying reason why the research is conducted is to know how the South Korean government deals with the unending issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within its society.

B. Research Question

Based on the background and the identification of the problem, the research question is formulated as follows: ***“How Does the South Korean Government Deal with Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination within the Country?”***

C. Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question and analyze the case study of this research, the author will use two key concepts which are *Nationalism* and *Multiculturalism*.

a. Nationalism

Nationalism is an ideology that was invested in and used as power in the modern state based on the constructionist approach, searching for alternative sources of legitimacy to replace claims to divine right or

colonial mandate, placing loyalty to the nation above all other forms of political and social loyalties⁸. According to Anderson (1983), many kinds of nationalism aim to establish new countries where none previously existed, and some of the current nations are recent creations. In addition, nationalism is a belief held by a group of people that they ought to constitute a nation, or that they already are one⁹. It is a doctrine of social solidarity based on the characteristics and symbols of nationhood, an entity opposed to other important modern collectivities like the 'sect', 'state', 'race', or 'class', according to Smith in *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*¹⁰. Strong ties to one's own country, local customs, and established regional authority can be found at any age, but nationalism in the strict sense assumes the existence of a nation as well as a steadfast desire for modernization to ensure that nation's autonomy.

South Korea is one of the countries that is recognized for its nationalism. The sense of nationalism among South Koreans is bold as they emphasize the importance of the nation and national identity. The term that is usually used to refer the nationalism in South Korea is Korean nationalism. The bold nationalism in South Korea rooted in the country's struggle for independence from Japanese colonial rule in the

⁸ Harrison, Kevin and Boyd, Tony. *Understanding Political Ideas and Movements*. Manchester University Press, 2003.

⁹ Ernst B. Haas, *What Is Nationalism and Why Should We Study It?*, *International Organization*, 1986, xl <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027326>>.

¹⁰ Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1979.

early 20th century and during rapid economic growth and political liberalization in 1980s and 1990s¹¹. The South Korean government considered Korean nationalism as a way to unify the country and promote its development¹².

Nevertheless, the bold nationalism in South Korea has become increasingly controversial in recent years. The motive of nationalism in South Korea has now brought the country to a whole new issue which is the issue of racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory attitudes toward minorities, non-Koreans, and those who look different from them. According to Shin (2010), Korean Nationalism has been characterized by a discourse of homogeneity and has been used to justify racism, xenophobia, and discrimination against foreigners and immigrants¹³. The nationalism within the country is argued as promoting a narrow and exclusionary view of national identity. Hence, concept of nationalism will be used to elaborate the emergence of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within South Korea.

b. Multiculturalism

The term ‘multiculturalism’, also referred to ‘multicultural society’ and ‘policy of multiculturalism’, is defined as a multiplicity of different

¹¹ K. M. Wells, ‘The Rationale of Korean Economic Nationalism Under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1922–1932: The Case of Cho Man-Sik’s Products Promotion Society’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 19.4 (1985), 823–59 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00015481>>.

¹² Lee, C. (1963). *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520323155>

¹³ Gi-Wook Shin, “Korean Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Belonging”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 33, Issue 3, 2010.

cultural actors struggling to protect and to forge identities in an enlarged political space. Multiculturalism is used as a descriptive term to characterize the fact of diversity in society. Contemporary multiculturalism concerns on immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities, minority nations and indigenous peoples. Rainbow, a semi-autonomous NGO, multiculturalism is defined as accommodating and assimilating those of different cultural backgrounds.

Rosado (1997) defines multiculturalism as a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their sociocultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society. According to a particular meaning, multiculturalism is presented as ideology, discourse, sphere of policies and practices. The concept of multiculturalism assumes special logics and emerges as an instrument of inter-group cooperation aimed at maintaining specific culture and providing individuals and groups with capability to take equal part in all spheres of social life, from politics to culture.

In Korean, multiculturalism is known as *damunhwa*. The South Korean government has promoted the idea of multiculturalism to raise awareness into its society and to boost numbers of international marriages. The idea of multiculturalism is implemented to a policy

called *Multicultural Policy*. Multiculturalism intends to remove unfair treatments toward any race, ethnicity, culture, country origin, and other protected characteristics. Particular groups of individuals may receive different treatment as a result of prejudice, which may have adverse effects on their life. In the past, dominant groups have treated minority groups unfairly. The concept is designed to promote diversity among society.

Literature relating to diversity has become more widely available as a result of transnational alliances and shifting global realities. Even if the necessity to be sensitive to other communities is becoming more widely acknowledged, struggle is frequently a practical issue, encouraging instructors and students to establish frameworks for sensitive practice, reflect on their own biases, and understand their own race and culture. Along with a knowledge of history and present realities, issues relating to power and success are stressed¹⁴. Hence, the conception of multiculturalism does click with the current issue that South Korea is facing in its society as it addresses the South Korean government's effort in dealing with the issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

¹⁴ Euy Ryung Jun, "Voices of Ordinary Citizens": Ban Damunhwa and Its Neoliberal Affect of Anti-Immigration in South Korea', *Critical Asian Studies*, 51.3 (2019), 386–402 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2019.1619466>>.

D. Research Methodology

The author used a descriptive qualitative research method to examine, analyze, and elaborate the action of South Korean government in dealing with racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within the country. The data and information were from secondary data obtained through library research. The materials were found from the textbooks, journals, and scientific writings also various data from online sources such as articles, e-news, e-book, and other relevant sources to this research.

E. Hypothesis

In dealing with the concerning issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination that is living within its society, the author argues that the South Korean government has been promoting multiculturalism policy (*damunhwa*), which is an effort to promote a more inclusive form of nationalism that recognizes the country's diverse cultural ethnic makeup, and has published the Cases of Recommendation for the Rights of Migrants which is the compilation of initiatives for the promotion of migrants' rights.

F. Scope of Research

In order to avoid the topic being expanded and out of context, limitations of the research regarding how South Korean government deals with racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within the country are needed. The limitation of time period of this research is 2017-2022 which is the five years period when South Korea is at its peak in terms of cultural diplomacy.

G. Thesis Structure

CHAPTER I, examining the information that contains research background, research question, theoretical framework, research methodology, hypothesis, scope of research, and thesis structure.

CHAPTER II, containing the further elaboration of the background of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within South Korea which starts with the definitions then followed by how the issues emerged.

CHAPTER III, containing the explanation of the action that has been taken by South Korean government in tackling down the issue of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within the country, as well as addressing the future policy that South Korean government can take in order to avoid similar issues arise.

CHAPTER IV, presenting the conclusion of the entire thesis.