



Nationalizing the Global:
The Public Discourse on Migrant Workers in South Korea

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1. Introduction

According to the report of *the Dong-A Ilbo*, one of the major newspapers in South Korea, it was in 1987 that foreign workers came into Korean society for the first time as domestic helpers in the wealthiest area of Seoul. After that, the numbers of migrant workers have sharply increased.¹ Although the number decreased temporarily in 1998 due to the Asian Financial Crisis, the flow of migrant workers increased again since the fall of 1999. According to a 2002 report published by the Office of the Prime Minister, there were an estimated 337,000 foreign workers in South Korea.² Those migrant workers filled the empty holes of so-called 3 D jobs (difficult, dangerous or dirty jobs) such as small factories, construction sites, heat-treat, fishery, dyeing, restaurants, farms and so on. Thus, they are essential parts of the Korean economy, especially, unskilled production, at which native Koreans no longer want to work. (*Need to illustrate where these workers came from*)

Besides the economic dimension, the increase of migrant workers is challenging the Koreans' belief in national identity as a homogeneous people because they are expected to stay permanently and the problem of labor shortage is expected to continue due to the low rate of birth. According to a UN report, Korea will need to import 100,000 workers every year and a total of 1.5 million migrant workers between 2030 and 2050 to maintain the similar economic structure and support senior populations.³ It means that the population of migrant workers will increase more whether they are legal or illegal, and the matter of migrant workers will have a huge impact on Korean society not only economically, but also culturally. Therefore, some scholars argue that Korea is inevitably moving from a ethnically homogeneous society to a multi-cultural one.⁴

This paper examines generally how public discourse on migrant workers in South Korea is constructed in this transitional period. Even though the issues of migrant workers in South Korea have become socially significant, diverse research has not been conducted on migrants and related topics. Especially little research has been done on how publics perceive them. Therefore I would like to examine how public discourse of migration has been constructed in South Korea through the content analysis of media coverage. My hypothesis is that the public discourse on the migrant workers is strongly affected by nationalism despite the emergence of the migrant workers in South Korea definitely was the result of globalization. Thus, my final goal is to demonstrate a dialectical relationship between globalization and nationalism through the case of migrant workers in South Korea.

The first session of this paper will briefly review the historical background of migrant workers in South Korea, especially focusing on types of migrant workers, and the

¹ Dong-Hoon Seol, "Past and Present of Foreign Workers in Korea 1987-2000" *Asia Solidarity Quarterly* Vol 2, No 6, 2000, p. 1

² Wang-Bae Kim, "Migration of Foreign Workers into South Korea: From Periphery to Semi-Periphery in the Global Labor Market" *Asian Survey*, Vol 44, No. 2, 2004, p. 321

³ Dong-Hoon Seol and Geon-Soo Han, "Foreign Migrant Workers and Social Discrimination in Korea." *Harvard Asia Quarterly* Vol VIII, No. 1, 20004, p. 46

⁴ Hwa-Seo Park, "Da Mun Hwa Sa-Hoe, Yunchkryukeuro Kaneun Kil (Multi-Cultural Society, the road to soft-landing)", *Shindonga*, Vol 545, 2005

incongruence between necessity of migrant workers and restrictive policies. The second part will argue that the global is invented through nationalistic narratives to build up the theoretical schemes for the public discourses on migrant workers in South Korea. In the third part I will attempt to illustrate how the migrant workers are represented within nationalistic frames.

2. Background

1) Types of Migrant Workers

Generally foreign workers can be divided into three categories. The first group consists of professionals holding a legal working visa. They are professors, artists, engineers or teachers. The second type is industrial trainees, who are recruited to fill in labor shortages in small-sized firms under the Industrial Technical Training Program (ITTP). The third group is illegal workers, who have no valid working permits. According to Wang-Bae Kim, they are the majority of foreign workers in Korea. (78.9%)⁵ Even though the first type of foreign workers increases due to the boom of English-learning, they are working under fairly good conditions. Most problems are encountered by industrial trainees and illegal, undocumented workers because almost 60% of industrial trainees have become illegal workers and illegal workers are working under poor conditions without workers' basic rights. Due to their illegal status, they do not have any legal protections from delayed wage payments, long working hours, little job security, no health insurance for industrial accidents.

2) Labor Shortage

The labor shortages in economic structure and restrictive immigration policies mainly generate the problems of migrant workers.⁶ To solve the labor shortages in small and mid-sized firms the government had to import limited number of foreign labor forces in the name of trainees, yet at the same time the government attempted to control numbers of foreign workers on a short-term basis. According to Hwa-seo Park, one of the principles for the migrant workers in South Korea is to prevent them from settling down in a long term, and to force them to work only within a restricted period.⁷

The major role of migrant workers in South Korea is to fill in vacancies of 3D sectors which suffer from labor shortage. During the 1970s Korean government successfully switched the industrial structure from light-manufacturing to heavy industries by implementing policies that encouraged economic concentration to a few large companies, so-called *Chaebol*. As a result, automobile, ship-building, chemistry, electronics, and LCD become Korea's main engines for economic growth. However, small-sized manufacturing began to lose the comparative advantage in the world market, and this tendency was accelerated by wage hike as a consequence of political democratization after 1987. Won-

⁵ Wang-Bae Kim, *op. cit.*, p. 322

⁶ Katherine H.S Moon, "Migrant Workers' Movements in Japan and South Korea." In *Egalitarian Politics in the Age of Globalization*, edited by Craig N. Murphy, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 174.

⁷ Hwa-seo Park, *op. cit.*

Woo Park examined “Since 1987, Korea’s wage level increased rapidly due to a high rise in the number of labor disputes...in the manufacturing sector, where the labor shortage was most severe, the wage increased 20.7% annually.”⁸ To maintain profits and reduce labor costs small-sized enterprises were forced to close or moved abroad to countries where cheap labor existed, such as China, Vietnam, Indonesia, or Philippines. The small-sized enterprises, which could not shift the facilities abroad still suffered from labor shortage. Especially, construction and fisheries are impossible to go overseas because they are geographically dependent and immobile. Time-constrained business like cleaning, maid service and printing cannot move abroad.⁹ (Park, 2002, p. 67) Timothy C. Lim’s study shows how the importation of foreign workers was helpful to figure out the labor shortage in Korea. Lim illustrates that “Beginning in the mid-1980s, the labor shortage rate for small firms (10-20 employees) grew steadily from 1.5% in 1985 to 7.78% by 1990. For “unskilled” labor, the shortage rate was even more severe, growing from 4.9% to 20.13% during the same period. Moreover, in certain industrial sectors such as plastics, electrical machinery, and commercial fishing, the vacancy rate was even higher, reaching upward of 30% and even 40%.”¹⁰ After Korea received foreign labor forces from 1991, the vacancy rates in these sectors promptly declined.

3) Restrictive Policies

Korean government began the Industrial and Technical Training Program for Foreigners(ITTP) from 1991 as a response to the Korea Federation of Small and Medium Business (KFSB) and other organizations’ demand for labor. According to this program, the government did not give foreign workers a work permit. They would go to Korea as trainees, not workers. However, they in fact worked in factories without any training. Since their visa status is trainee, they could not have any basic workers’ rights such as unionizing, collective bargaining, and collective action. Further, the foreign workers paid for brokerage fees, usually from US \$2,000 TO US \$8,000 to work in Korea. In many cases the migrant workers borrow these brokerage fees before they depart from their countries. The agencies in their countries deducted the payment from the trainees’ monthly wages. Yet, the monthly wages were quite lower than they expected. As a result, large number of trainees escaped the companies, and became illegal workers to get more reasonable wages or to pay off their debts. In conclusion, the Korean government tried to achieve two goals through ITTP. The one was a solution to labor shortage, and the other was a restriction of foreign workers’ long-term stay for employment. Therefore, ITTP actually functioned not as a training program, but as a program for employing foreign workers on a short-term basis.

After the ITTP was criticized for its dysfunctional results, Korean government implemented the new program, the Work-After-Training Program (WATP), which allows

⁸ Won-Woo Park, “The Unwilling Hosts: State, Society and the Control of Guest Workers in South Korea.” *Asia Pacific Business Review*. Vol 8. Issue 4, 2002, p. 72.

⁹ Won-woo Park, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 67

¹⁰ Timothy C. Lim, “Racing From the Bottom in South Korea?: The Nexus between Civil Society and Transnational Migrants.” *Asian Survey*, Vol 43, No. 3, 2003, p. 427.

trainees to obtain legal status as workers after the two-year training period. However, activists for migrant workers argued that WATP was just an extended version of ITTP because during the training period, the trainees cannot be protected by legal guarantees for workers. In 2004, a new legislation, the Act on Foreign Workers' Employment went into effect. This is the first act that allows unskilled migrant workers to have legal status in Korea. However, it is applied only to illegal workers who have been in Korea less than four years, and at the same time, the government declared that illegal workers who have stayed in more than four years would be expelled. Although the new legislation might correct the former institutional problems, it premised a severe crackdown on illegal workers. As a result, "with the crackdown intensifying, some hopeless workers take refuge with ill-willed local employers, who might enslave them and pay them nothing but food and a place to sleep."¹¹

Even though migrant workers have contributed to solving the problem of labor shortage in manufacturing sectors of South Korea, too strict policies caused enormous amount of illegal migrant workers, and they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by employers. They are suffering from unpaid wages, withholding travel documents, physical and verbal abuses, sexual harassment toward female workers, and inability to gain insurance in the case of industrial accidents. According to the survey conducted by Seol, Choi and Han on behalf of National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 51% of migrant workers had experienced verbal abuse, and 68% of them responded that they had been abused by Korean colleagues and 49% answered that they had been abused by supervisors. In terms of wages, 32% of migrant workers said that they are discriminated in the workplace.¹² According to Seol and Han, many migrant workers did not receive their wages in the case of bankruptcy of their companies. In some cases employers intentionally avoided paying the workers. The survey that I mentioned above illustrates that 41% of migrant workers did not get wages despite Korean co-workers were paid. This discrimination against migrant workers can be mostly attributed to their illegal status caused by restrictive policies.

3. The national and the global

Since the early 1990s, migrant workers who mostly come from China and Southeast Asia have been visible in the workplaces. After their poor working conditions were reported by media, and their legal status and civil rights as foreigners have been debated, the migrant workers finally turned into a main social issue. Even though it is positive that publics started to be interested in the existence of migrant workers, the public discourse on migrant workers is rapidly moving from sympathetic(?) perspective to nationalistic feeling, which means viewing the migrant workers from a nationalist perspective. To explain this phenomenon, I would like to examine the relationship between the national and the global briefly.

In recent years, some scholars on globalization have sought to explain the limits and

¹¹ Dong-Hoon Seol and Geon-Soo Han, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹² Dong-Hoon Seol, Hong-Yop Choi and Geon-Soo Han, *Foreign Workers' Human Rights in Korea*, (Seoul: National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 2002)

decline of the nation-state in terms of losing controls on domestic economic policies. Some scholars have argued that globalization is moving through processes of deterritorialization which transcend the territorial boundaries of nation-state.¹³ One like Eric Hobsbawm predicts that the tide of nationalism will not last long. He wrote, “The Owl of Minerva, which brings wisdom, says Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling round nations and nationalism.”¹⁴ However, Anthony Smith does not agree with Hobsbawm. He argues, “It would be folly to predict an early succession of nationalism and an imminent transcendence of the nation. Both remain indispensable elements of an interdependent world and a mass-communications culture.” But, is the relationship between nationalism and globalization zero-sum game? Or can nationalism and globalization come together?

In this sense, survey data show us interesting results. According to 2003 the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Korean people are not only pro-globalization, but also nationalistic. 90% of Koreans say that Korean culture is superior to others, while 90% of Koreans are positive toward globalization. Despite of its strong nationalistic sentiment, only 7% answer that they “completely agree” on more restrictions to migration.¹⁵ (Pew, 2003) How can we explain such a contradictory attitudes toward globalization and nationalism?

Regarding this question, Leela Fernandes raises an important argument. She claims, “The invention of conceptions of globality occurs within the context of both the economic and cultural particularities of specific national contexts as nation-states interpret, respond to and manage the transnational movement of capital, people, and cultural forms. This process of producing a form of globality in conjunction with nationalism in fact can be traced to older historical processes.”¹⁶ In other words, the conceptions of globality have historically developed in conjunction with nationalism. Globality is produced through appropriation of nationalist narratives. The imagined form of the global is itself invented through cultural signs and symbols that rest on the deployment of nationalist narratives. Such an interaction between nationalism and globalization as a form of hybridity offers “a means for a reworking of the national imagination in response to movements of economic and cultural capital.”¹⁷

Following Leela Fernandes’s claims, I would like to argue that despite globalization is inducing new labor forces from different countries, the ideas toward globalization is not affected by the paradigm of globalization, which focuses on the limits and decline of

¹³ Mary Kaldor, “Nationalism and Globalization”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol 10, 2004

¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 181

¹⁵ The Pew Global Attitude Project, *Views of a Changing World*, (Washington D.C.: The Pew Research Center for The People & Press, 2003), p. 85-95

¹⁶ Leela Fernandes, “Rethinking Globalization: Gender and the Nation in India,” in Marianne de Kovan edited, *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 148

¹⁷ Leela Fernandes, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

nation-state, but constructed within older historical processes such as nationalism. When the poor working conditions and human rights abuse against migrant workers have been debated, media and public reaction states that Korean government has to guarantee their rights as workers because the migrant workers are contributing to Korean economy without much rewards or we should embrace the migrant workers in order to lift up the image of Korea within international society and even further to become the leader of Asian region. The case of migrant workers in South Korea clearly shows us ‘outside-in’ nationalism, which nationalizes the global.

4. Migrant workers in public discourses: Media representation

The former literatures on migrant workers in South Korea generally focus on policy issues and political economy of international labor mobility. There are few studies on the media image or public discourse on migrant workers in South Korea. However, the role of the media in shaping national identity has been studied since Benedict Anderson’s works on nationalism, especially his interpretation on how print capitalism collapsed old authority, and how newspaper and novels contributed to generating an idea of “homogenous, empty time,” which made people imagine the nation even though they have never met each other.¹⁸

The media propagates and reinforces ideas to a larger population. Therefore, it could be argued that the media plays an important role in shaping national identities. Several studies clearly imply the relationship between media and national identities. By focusing on how opinions about immigrants, Anna Triandafyllidou argues that in Italy, cultural differences between immigrants and the native population are emphasized, while in Greece, the civic culture of immigrants is described as being so different as to prevent immigrants from adapting to their Greek environment. These strategies of distinction fortify the boundary between the host society and its immigrant population, and in this way, thwart the successful integration of immigrants’ languages, cultures and religions on the host state’s national identity.¹⁹ Lucy Healey also searches for how national identities are reframed in Malaysia by focusing on newspapers. She attempts to illustrate how Malaysia’s national identities are refashioned in response to migrant workers, who are deemed the new “undesirable aliens,” and she finally argues that this new national imaginary is ethno-nationalistic, class-based, and gendered.²⁰

The discourse on migration and the image of the migrants which are represented by the media can affect policy on migration. If the migrant is projected as a poor victim, the bar raised by the government can be lowered; if the migrant is presented as a criminal or dangerous being who will contaminate national identities or cultures, the borders will be closed. However, the discourse on migration can vary according to the development of migration or every historical moment.²¹ It is not easy to conclude how the discourse on

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 24-26

¹⁹ Anna Triandafyllidou, *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe*, (London: Routledge, 2001)

²⁰ Lucy Healey, “Gender, “Aliens”, and the National Imaginary in Contemporary Malaysia,” *Sojourn*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2000, p. 222.

²¹ Giovanna Campani, “Migrants and Media: The Italian Case,” in *Media and Migration:*

migration in South Korea will change. Yet, in my opinion, it is nationalism that affects currently the discourse on migration and the migrant workers.

My main argument is while globalization is inducing new labor forces from different countries, the perspectives toward migrant workers is not affected by the paradigm of globalization, which argues the limits and decline of the nation-state, but constructed within older historical processes such as nationalism. As Hyun Ok Park defines *seggyehwa* as a “new forms of nationalism,” which demands leadership in the international community, the public discourse on migrant workers in South Korea goes along the same line.²² Recently, the media attitude toward migrant workers in South Korea shifted dramatically from reports on employers’ abuse in factories or criminalizing migrant workers to humanitarian approach, which means emphasizing human rights of migrant workers. However, the discourses on human rights of migrant workers are closely related to the nationalistic ideas in South Korea.

In 2003 the success of one TV show contributed to such a sharp change. “Asia, Asia” was the first TV show that focused on the issues of migrant workers regularly in the format of a comedy(comic show?). Generally this show covered how poorly the migrant workers were treated, and visited NGO activists who helped the migrant workers before, and heard from them what kind of institutional improvement they need. Two comedians as show hosts mitigated the seriousness of migrant issues, and turned the topics into quite touching ones. Around the climax scenes, the show “Asia, Asia” delivered some messages toward publics deliberately.²³ However, the messages in the “Asia, Asia” clearly contained the nationalistic discourse on the migrant workers in Korean society. It is true that the show ‘Asia, Asia’ approached to the migrant workers by means of nationalistic filter.

At this point, we need to look at a motto of TV show, “Asia, Asia.”

“Korean power that surprised the whole world through the success of 2002 World Cup! Korea within the world! For mature Korea, it is TV show “Asia! Asia!” Migrant workers are our neighbors. However, they are not granted as legal workers. We want to be mature Korea by reflecting our discriminative attitudes toward migrant workers, approaching them with humanitarian views that they also have their own families. Center of Asia! Korea! Let’s start.”

This motto implies a lot of messages toward publics at the same time. First, Korea

Constructions of mobility and difference, edited by Russel King and Nancy Wood, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 42.

²² Hyun Ok Park, “Seggyehwa: Globalization and Nationalism in Korea,” *The Journal of the International Institute. Vol. 4, No. 1*, 1996

²³ Like Japanese TV show, the TV shows in South Korea are frequently putting the subtitles or messages composed of big size characters at the bottom side of TV screen. In my opinion, these subtitles have hugely impacts on the viewers.

needs to be more mature because Korea is no longer isolated, and Korea belongs to the world, especially to Asian regions. Beyond just belonging to Asia, Korea is a center of Asia as we could see the success of 2002 World Cup Soccer games. This message clearly appeals to the publics like this; “To be a center of Asia, to lift up our position in Asia, we should be more mature. We must embrace the migrant workers.” Second, this message asks the publics to realize that the migrant workers are neighbors and human beings because they also have their own families. Nationalism stands at the job which tries to find some common grounds between Korean and migrant workers. The human rights of migrant workers are dealt when they have the same grounds as Koreans have. In the eye of nationalism, the migrant workers do not turn into independent human beings with their own culture, but modified semi-Koreans who shared some common grounds or some pitiful beings who are not be able to meet their families. In this part I will describe such nationalistic discourses on migrant workers based on the analysis of TV show, “Asia, Asia” as well as newspaper coverage.

1) National Image and Migrant Workers

When the legal status of the migrant workers has been debated or human rights abuses have been reported, media and public reaction states that Korean government has to guarantee their civil rights and improve the institutional problems because those “bad” behaviors downgrades the images of Korea within international community. Let us briefly look at how the media approaches to this human rights matter.

“As of the end of October, unpaid wages of foreign workers in Korea totaled 3.1 billion won (\$2.6 million)... This is a *national disgrace*. Korea has experienced sending nurses and mine workers to Germany to earn higher wages in the past and the bitter taste such as experience can leave...It is clear what the foreign workers will tell their families at home if they are deported without the pay they are due to their “three-D jobs.” This will further *damage the image of Korean labor relations abroad*.”²⁴

“We advise our lawmakers and immigration authorities to pay more attention to the problems of migrant workers and produce a solution that will help maintain our economy and *prevent harm to Korea’s image abroad*. The countries of the foreign laborers are, after all, our markets.”²⁵

“The fundamental solution to the problem of migrant workers is that the Ministry of Labor will grant working permits to migrant

²⁴ *Korea Times*, 12 November, 2003

²⁵ *Korea Herald*, 30 December, 2003

workers. The government should reconsider their temporary solution, which will *damage the lifted image of Korea* caused by the success of World Cup.”²⁶

“We need to build up the fundamental policies *to prevent us from gaining “notorious reputation”*, which means we are country that exploit foreign workers and disdain their human rights.”²⁷

As shown in the newspaper editorials above, the media demanded a solution to the problems of migrant workers such as delaying wages or abuses by employers. However, the media took more considerations of national images in the era of globalization, rather than of migrant worker as one of individual being. TV show ‘Asia, Asia’ is not exceptional. It claimed, “Treating the migrant workers well is necessary to improve our national image”²⁸ or “Our mature consideration of migrant workers hugely affects the lift-up of Korean images.”²⁹ The discourse interlocking between human rights issues and national images are not only confined to the media coverage. Even NGO activist for migrant workers expresses this feeling. For example, Reverend Hae-Sung Kim, one of activists for migrant workers warned in an interview with Hankyoreh newspaper that if the government does not stop the crackdowns on illegal migrant workers, we will have “notorious names” such as underdeveloped countries in terms of labor relations and human rights. He says, “legalizing the illegal migrant workers is a good opportunity for us to be reborn as “new human rights country.””³⁰

The discourses on migrant workers in terms of national image have requested better treatment of migrant workers in order to prevent the image of Korea as one of the developed countries within Asia from downgrading in international society. Sometimes the media warned the possibility of retaliation from migrant workers’ countries. “If we mistreat the migrant workers in the era of globalization, we cannot avoid the retaliation from their countries. Our Korean people might have such a revenge someday in international society.”³¹ According to Katherine Moon, however, the concerns over Korea’s reputation were not limited to mere discourses, and have actually affected the government’s policies. She says, “In the fall of 1994 Seoul... requested that the governments of the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh and other Asian nations compile complaints from their nationals who were exploited by South Korean employers... (the government said) these steps will curtail criticism from developing countries about worker exploitation.”³²

²⁶ Hankyoreh, 18 July, 2002

²⁷ Hankyoreh, 10 May, 2002

²⁸ Asia Asia, 21 June, 2003

²⁹ Asia Asia, 2 August, 2003

³⁰ Hankyoreh, 21 November, 2003

³¹ Chosun Ilbo, 19 December, 2000

³² Katherine H.S. Moon, “Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism.” In *Korea’ Globalization*, edited by Samuel S. Kim, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 162

2) National Interests and Migrant Workers

Another type of the discourses on migrant workers are linked with emphasis on national interests. According to these discourses, the migrant workers are contributing to Korean economy without much reward, hence we should embrace the migrant workers for Korea's future. Let us briefly look at some messages from TV show, 'Asia, Asia.'

“Treating the migrant workers well is a genuine dipolomacy.”³³

“Improving their conditions are favorable for our national interests.”³⁴

“To protect the migrant workers in 3 D jobs is for the future of our industries.”³⁵

As shown above the subtitles in the TV show, the matter of migrant workers is not dealt with on the level of individuals or from migrant workers' point of view, but treated in the name of nation, or from Koreans' point of view (from “us” point of view). Further, *Chosun Ilbo*, one of major conservative newspaper in Korea, strongly argues that we need to consider the existence of migrant workers as our resources in the era of globalization, and take advantage of them. “Migrant workers can contribute to commercial activities of our cities in the era of globalization because diverse culture and living styles catalyze the businesses of tourism and restaurants. Through them we are expected to have vibrant trades with their countries... From this point of view, we need to approach the problem of migrant workers as our resources which are favorable to our national interests.”³⁶

These media discourses approach the human rights issues of migrant workers from the perspective of nationalism. In this sense, globalization, which is cause of human migration, is regarded as the expansion of nationalism, and big opportunity of national interests. Such discourses seem to be strongly affected by “globalization campaign” led by the government since 1993. Since president Kim Young-sam declared that his policy goal was “the pursuit of internationalization” at the Seattle summit conference of APEC in November 1993, state-led globalization campaign kept going on until the Asian Financial Crisis. The state-led globalization discourse tried to portray South Korea as “a central nation in the world management” or “a superpower.” Under the control of “Boards of ‘Planning & Practice of Globalization’”, the discourses of globalization were “transmitted to the whole society through columns of major newspapers and special feature broadcasts.”³⁷

³³ Asia Asia, 26 April, 2003

³⁴ Asia Asia, 7 June, 2003

³⁵ Asia Asia, 28, June, 2003

³⁶ *Chosun Ilbo*, 30 September, 2004

³⁷ Myung Koo Kang, “Discourse politics toward neo-liberal globalization,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol 1, No 3, 2000, p. 450

Even though more studies on the linkage between the state-led globalization campaign and the nationalistic discourse on migrant workers should be conducted, my hypothesis is that the discourse of globalization produced by the state was transmitted to societal levels and became the dominant frames on migrant workers. The one difference between the former globalization discourse and recent one is that the latter began to specify the object of globalization based on Korean nationalism, the region of Asia. This tendency reinforces now because current Roh Moo-Hyun administration's main motto is "a central state of East Asia." For example, Ki-Seop Kwon, the official who in charge of the institutions for migrant workers, claims, "we as a central state of East Asia, cannot delay a solution to illegal migrant workers."³⁸ Definitely TV show 'Asia, Asia' claims, "Migrant workers are the foundation of 3 D sectors, and they are Asians who are developing our countries with us. Now Korea should develop with Asia. For more mature society without any discriminations, it is time to prepare for co-prosperous society with 3.2 billion Asians."³⁹

3) Finding Families

As I mentioned above, nationalism stands at the job which tries to find some common grounds between Korean and migrant workers. The nationalistic discourses on migrant workers keep putting migrant workers into Korean landscape. In this passage, landscape generally means "the way of seeing." George Henderson identifies four discourses on landscape. The landscape can be divided into expression of rural lifestyle, manifestation of everyday social space, material reflection of social relations, and ideology (way of seeing).⁴⁰ First of all, these discourses find the rationale for why Korean needs to embrace the Other migrant workers at "the family." The highlight of the show, "Asia, Asia" was that one show-host visits the migrant worker's country, and meets with his/her families, and brings one of family members to South Korea.⁴¹ In the climax, viewers become curious about whether they can meet with each other or not.⁴² And then the show delivers the message like this, "They are human being as we are because they have family."⁴³ The word, "family" is a significant keyword to bridge between the Other migrant workers and Koreans. The show clearly emphasized that the migrant workers work at

³⁸ Hankyoreh, 24 April, 2003

³⁹ Asia Asia, 2 August, 2003

⁴⁰ Harald Bauder, "Landscape and scale in media representation: the construction of offshore farm labor in Ontario, Canada," *Cultural Geographies*, Vol 12, 2005

⁴¹ In many cases, the migrant workers in this show were not able to meet their families over 5 years because they do not pay off their debts yet or they are worried about the penalties imposed by Korean government. Except for certain grace periods, illegal workers have to pay penalties when they depart Korea. Thus, this show chose the "family-meeting project" as main contents.

⁴² In some countries, getting a passport or visa is really difficult. Therefore, during the show, the host keeps saying, "we don't know if they can meet" to increase the viewer's curiosity.

⁴³ Asia Asia, 21 June, 2003

Korea because they have to feed their families under the poor living conditions at their countries as if Korean mining workers and nurses in 1970s Germany did. This show illuminated the role of migrant workers in Korean economy, and compared them with the Korean mining workers and nurses in 1970s Germany in order to conjure nationalistic feeling. These discourses imply like this “we can understand the conditions of migrant workers because we had the same experiences. They have to save the wages and send it to their countries to feed their families as we did thirty years ago.” However, “they have families” and “they are our family” is totally different. As far as Koreans regard the migrant workers as human beings who have family or as far as Koreans put them into their national landscape, the migrant workers never can be member of Korean family.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I tried to find how nationalism penetrates the construction of discourses on the migrant workers in South Korea. Even though more systematic coding works on newspaper coverage or TV coverage is necessary for better paper, my tentative conclusion is that despite globalization is inducing new labor forces from different countries, the perspectives toward migrant workers is not affected by the paradigm of globalization, which argues the limits and decline of nation-state, but constructed within nationalism. The nationalistic discourses on migrant workers appropriate the migrant workers in the name of national image and for national interests. In addition, by fining common grounds between migrant workers and Koreans, the discourse tries to link between migrants’ experiences and Koreans’ past ones. Through these discursive strategies the migrant workers as global beings are regarded as national resources to survive in the era of globalization.

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