

Ushering in new era for Korea

We held the Korea Times Best College Essay Contest last month jointly with the Union of Korean College English Media (UKCEM), an association of English newspapers and magazines published by 22 local colleges and universities. We selected the three best essays from pieces submitted by student reporters. We now publish the pieces written by Rigoberto Banta Jr. of Chonnam National University, Choi Chu-lyn of Kwangwoon University and Chung Yun-jo of Ewha Womans University. The quarterly contest is designed to help students develop better English writing skills and share fresh ideas and thoughts with our readers. — ED.

By Rigoberto Banta Jr.
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It is the feeling of being cornered, being spotted in a crowd for no specific reason. Perhaps it is the color or the different accent that cannot be left unnoticed. However, this segregation to the new members of Korean society in a box called "multicultural" perhaps is the highest form of discrimination. Labeling immigrants, or anyone at that, brands them of their place in the society, placing them just in the outskirts of social circles. With it, they are left to fend for themselves, living as a stranger in a place they now call "home." What are the factors that create the gap between Koreans and immigrants? In what ways can we address the changing demographics of Korean society?

Rapid increase in numbers

The term "multiculturalism" became a buzzword in 2005 with a rapid increase of immigrants to the country. According to the Ministry of Justice, as of June 2013, the number of foreigners living in Korea has surpassed 1.5 million, meaning that three out of every 100 Koreans are foreigners. The number is a significant rise from 700,000 foreigners in 2003.

Creating an inclusive society for immigrants who will stay in Korea temporarily might seem inefficient in the eyes of the public. This perception impairs those who have embraced Korean citizenship in their quest to play an active role in the society.

While the increase of foreigners has been very rapid, the history of migration has been there ever since. The long history between Korea and its neighboring countries in East Asia, particularly China, has formed vibrant migrant communities that have been contributing to the economic and social development of the country.

Currently, 50 percent of the immigrants in Korea are Chinese, including ethnic Koreans from China. They top every classification of foreigners in the country ranging from short-term



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working visas, study visas, marriage migration, among others.

It was only around 1980s that Korea accepted foreign labor, thus diversifying the migrant population. This means that migration has been here already, but it is only in the recent years that it has been discussed in public.

Migrants in Korean perspective

Lee Mi-jeong, research fellow at the Korea Women's Development Institute, explains that various factors affect the seeming detachment of Koreans to the foreigners in the country, one of which is the idea of Korea being a homogenous society.

"Korea wants to emphasize its homogenous characteristic instinctively as a reaction to survive among its strong neighbors," Lee said.

In addition, she said, it has only been in recent years that Korea has enjoyed economic providence, which magnetized foreign migration. "Given the difficult history, accepting foreigners can be a big change to Koreans."

However, we should not discount the fact that Koreans have been migrants to other countries as well. Seeking better lives, many Koreans have left the country and have established their own communities abroad.

The Korean Diaspora shows us that Koreans have experienced the same hardships that migrants to Korea have been experiencing now. Their experience teaches us that aiding the migrant population to become an active part in our society provides a sustainable development option for the future generations.

Unless Korea acts collectively in the near future, the potential that migration to Korea has cannot be utilized to the fullest.

Creating an inclusive society

Korea has developed into an economic powerhouse that has gained the attention of the world. However, the rapid development that the country has experienced has created repercussions including an aging population, low birthrate, and lack of workers among others.

The increase of foreigners in Korea does not only provide cultural diversity but real solutions to the problems that the Korean society has been facing.

Creating an inclusive society that embraces the foreign population can serve for the higher benefit of everyone, a win-win situation that will finally push Korea to a new era.

Rigoberto Banta Jr. is a senior studying economics at Chonnam National University. He works as a student journalist for the Chonnam Tribune, the school's English newspaper.

Hope for young budding flowers

By Chung Yun-jo
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In this era of internationalization, multiculturalism is rapidly developing in various parts of the world, and Korea is no exception. Multiculturalism is now an inseparable aspect of Korean society.

According to a report released by the Ministry of Education in April, the number of multicultural students in primary and secondary schools increased by 19 percent from a year earlier.

However, despite the increasing presence of the multicultural student population, efforts to establish a truly multicultural environment are far from satisfactory in Korea, particularly in the education sector.

A multicultural society is one that embraces various cultures of different races, ethnicities and classes. However, multicultural children in Korea are not respected for their own cultural background and diversity, but are in fact being coaxed to assimilate with Koreans.

The inability to accept diversity can be seen in an advertisement made by Hana Financial Group. The advertisement advises children from multicultural households to eat kimchi, respect King Sejong and serve in the military at the age of 20.

Acceptance of cultural diversity and efforts to develop this diversity to meet international standards is not accomplished even in schools, which are supposed to be the center of multicultural education.

Schools offers after-school programs and special Korean classes for these students, but these forms of "support" are not effective in helping multicultural students break free from linguistic and cultural differences, prejudice and discrimination.

The direction of multicultural education policies focused on schools is bound to reach limitations, mostly due to the deeply rooted concept of homo-

geneous nationalism in Korea. Under the name of the Korean race, Koreans insist on homogeneous ethnicity, regard the idea of a "single-blooded" nation as natural, and impose the sharing of a single culture on its people. Schools only teach the Korean language to multicultural students, putting the other languages of those students to one side.

Students from multicultural families learn about Korean culture, but not about Vietnamese or Chinese culture. It is necessary for us to question the education systems that force biracial students to become "Korean-ized."

We must understand differences and accept cultural diversity. Rather than encouraging those students to become Koreans, we must allow them to maintain their own culture. The school's role is crucial in enabling this environment of acceptance and support.

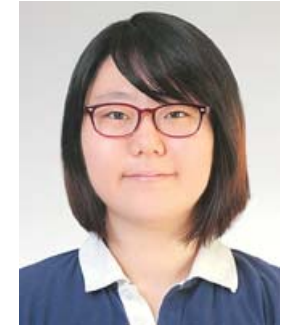
In addition to the after-school activities and special Korean courses, schools must provide education on multiculturalism, foreign language and internationalization to nurture distinctive characteristics.

Furthermore, the country should foster professionals with knowledge of multicultural education to develop professionalism in this field.

How except through multicultural education can children learn about and respect Gandhi, or decide if they prefer rice noodles over kimchi? Biracial students are young budding flowers, waiting enthusiastically to bloom in this Korean society.

A true multicultural society is not one that forces children to become similar to the rest of the crowd; it starts when other cultures are accepted and respected. Government policies and education supporting multicultural education will be of great hope for future international talent.

Chung Yun-jo is a freshman majoring in international studies at Ewha Womans University. She is a reporter for the school's English newspaper, Ewha Voce.



Ewha Voice

Open minds vital to multicultural society

By Choi Chu-lyn
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What is a multicultural society? It refers to the way in which various cultures live together. This term appeared after the 1970s, when interaction and trade with different countries increased thanks to globalization.

This is also when our society respected and acknowledged immigrants in order to promote social heterogeneity.

I will discuss the features of a multicultural society in this article. I would also like to talk about how to pursue an ideal multicultural society.

When anyone asks a Korean "What are some of the positive features of South Korea?" most Koreans will usually answer, "It is Hangeul (the Korean alphabet)" or "Korea is a single-race nation."

From the Korean "historical" point of view, Korea is a single-race nation. But with globalization, there have been inflows of different cultures and interactions with other countries. So Korea

is not a homogenous nation-state anymore.

Despite the ongoing tide of multicultural interaction in Korea, most Koreans still hold prejudices against foreigners, viewing them as being of "low class" and often speak ill of them.

Foreign residents are in Korea in pursuit of bettering their lives here. Most of them are very hard working and engaged, even performing better than Koreans in some ways.

Besides, it is worth stressing that the foreigners here are by no means fleeing our country.

For instance, the children of immigrants are breathing new life into rural schools where enrollment levels are rapidly declining.

These children who tend to be multilingual can become ambassadors for the country.



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Moreover, the labor shortfall in agriculture tremendously benefits from migrant labor.

Migrants also enliven the social atmosphere of rural communities given that most of their current inhabitants are aging.

But multicultural societies do not always affect Korean societies positively. There are issues of Koreans competing with immigrants for jobs. There may be conflicts between Korean and immigrant workers in the workplace as well. There are also problems with violations and abuse of the country's immigration laws.

Clearly, multiculturalism like all types of social issues has its advantages and challenges.

This notwithstanding, I think multiculturalism can improve Korea's industries and economy. The IT and other

high-tech industries, which are the core Korean industries, can also benefit from the expertise of immigrants as well.

It is true that multicultural societies have higher creativity and more diversity because of their open minds. For example, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago are the most creative cities in the world. These cities accept and embrace various cultures and take in foreigners' various ideas, making these cities great and successful.

We should realize that a multicultural society is an inevitable journey the nation needs to embark on. We should respect foreigners' culture, language, and personality. Ultimately, we should live together. We can earn respect from foreigners when we respect them first.

Foreigners come to Korea in pursuit of the "Korean Dream" and a better life. I hope that their dream will come true.

Choi Chu-lyn is a sophomore studying English language and literature at Kwangwoon University. He is a reporter for the campus English newspaper Kwangwoon Annals.

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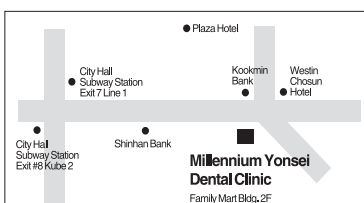
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