

Nouveau-riche racism and 'pure blood' nationalism at grassroots level in the Korean internet space: a media narrative analysis

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Abstract

South Korea has become a multicultural society as a consequence of actively engaging in global capitalism in the past two decades. The traditionally mono-ethnic Korean society has experienced trials and tribulations, adopting and coping with multiculturalism. Despite inevitable needs to live with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, there is a significant proportion of people struggling to cope with the changes profoundly affecting their lives. The Internet is one of the common avenues where dissident voices are expressed against multiculturalism. This paper analyses 96 comments posted at a petition against proposed anti-discrimination legislation and the analysis is supplemented by 60 relevant media reportages published in 2011. Nationalistic sentiment and 'nouveau-riche racist' attitudes are prevalent at grassroots level. Korean society is in its infant stage of promoting multicultural society and there are many complex tasks, such as educating Koreans about the benefit of welcoming foreigners, if the nation intends to remain engaged in the global capitalist economy.

A proactively open economic policy by South Korea has set the way for an unprecedented economic success story in the past few decades. South Korea (hereafter Korea) continues its open political and cultural engagement in the global world, maximising chances for financial benefits and influences. Korean effort to engage in any international adventure is strategic, supported by globally trained brain power as well as imported labourers to power Korean industries. As of September 2011, there were 1.418 million foreign-born residents in Korea, making up 3 per cent of the Korean population. That figure has been increasing by 11 per cent every year in recent years. Foreign labourers provide cheap labour for jobs shunned by Koreans. Additionally, many foreign brides have married Korean men in rural areas who could not find Korean women. A large number of English speakers teach English to Koreans who are eager to learn from native speakers (S.-H. Choe, 2009; J.-H. Lee, 2011).

Yet, how Koreans ethically and adequately treat immigrants and foreign labourers has turned out to be a dark element of the Korean prosperity in the past couple of decades. According to a survey of 3547 people of foreign origins living in Korea, 67 per cent of the foreigners who have taken up Korean citizenship noted Koreans were discriminatory against 'foreigners' in Korea (S.-W. Park, 2009). Koreans' double standards against whites and nonwhites are conspicuous. Some of those cited include: A Korean woman who married a Pakistani says she feels as if she is a deviant and avoids using public transport when travelling with her husband; a South-east Asian man who fell asleep in a bus and travelled to the bus terminal says he was woken by the bus driver kicking him in the thigh; on the other hand, an American bachelor teaching English in a private academy brought home every evening many kinds of presents such as tie, wallet, underwear and ginseng (Kim, 2009).

Studies have provided persuasive descriptions of racial discrimination in Korea, mostly on the basis of literature-based research. Although this study does not directly engage in the public through depth interviews, it attempts to understand public opinions opposing multiculturalism by examining media representations, expressed through diverse outlets. The analysis aims particularly to reveal concerns over multiculturalism, from a group of the disadvantaged or those feeling distressed about the progress of multiculturalism in the light of the proposed anti-racial discrimination legislation. As Korean society progresses towards multiculturalism, there is an increasing resistance expressed through civil activist movements and internet discussion forums, including *Oegukin Nodongja Daechaek Simin Yeondae* (Civil Association for Policies on Foreign Labourers) and *Damunhwa Jeongchaek Bandoe* (Against Multicultural Policies) with 30,000 members (Y.-R. Park, 2011). The internet has proved a valuable way for these groups to voice their opinions irrespective of their legitimacy.

The aims of this paper are:

1. To analyse dissident voices against legislating for an anti-discrimination act.
2. To provide socio-economic contextual backgrounds of those sections of Korean society which produce dissident voices.

It is worth noting the notion of multiculturalism or *damunhwa juui* in Korea. Multiculturalism is meant to be an ideology to embrace racial and cultural differences, rather than assimilating them into a 'mainstream' culture, thus sharing political and economic opportunities. *Damunhwa* literally means many cultures. Just as multiculturalism has a degree of negative connotation in parts of the west, *damunhwa juui* is poorly and often negatively understood in Korea. This may be because *damunhwa* is in an early stage of development in Korea. Moreover, of the three different models of managing immigrants, the Korean government has adopted a 'differential exclusionary model,' in which immigrants have access to selected areas such as the employment market, but do not have access to others such as welfare and citizenship (the other two models are assimilationist and multiculturalist) (Castles & Miller, 2003, pp.249-52).

Literature

The history of ethnic studies in Korea is as short as the history of the major flow of foreign labourers since the 1990s, although there were a few earlier studies about foreigners like missionaries. However, there are some insightful studies which tend to be critical of government policies and prevalent cultures of discriminating against foreign labourers in particular. This paper will discuss a few significant studies in this section, then utilise their insights to illustrate a critical realist perspective on the study of racial discrimination.

There have been a few empirical studies investigating Koreans' attitudes towards minorities by measuring what, Koreans think, is required to have 'Korean identity'. A common thread of the findings was that more people responded that political belonging or citizenship, the use of Korean language, feeling Korean and acculturation were as important as the birth from Korean parents (H. Choe, 2007, p.165; Kang, 2006; Yoon & Song, 2011; Yoon, Song, Kim, & Song, 2010). Choe (2007) and Yoon et al. (2010) also report that the element of ethnic genealogy of Korean identity was found generally no stronger than that of Japanese, Filipino, Polish, Irish and South African identities. Yet, Choe (2007) notes there is no definite evidence that political belonging or citizenship, rather than Korean genealogy, is what makes up Korean identity. This is interpreted as meaning Koreans' level of willingness to accept 'others' is relatively high, but this is not

completely convincing. These studies are of high value, revealing correlations between variables, ('accepting multiculturalism' and 'the level of pride of national homogeneity'). Hwang (2010, p.180) presents an advanced finding and contends that those Koreans who advocate granting 'citizenship and inclusion' to foreigners are unlikely to be concerned about potential negatives resulting from the increased number of foreigners, but they don't necessarily display their support for affirmative action to incorporate the foreigners into the equal opportunities enjoyed by native Koreans (H. Choe, 2007, p.165). Yet, the majority of Koreans support the idea that those members of ethnic minorities who are born in Korea should be given Korean citizenship. Choe (2007, p.159) also notes Koreans are willing to accept Europeans, but reluctant to accept people from developing countries.

However, a central tenet of the current literature is that Koreans think that 'feeling Korean' and 'holding Korean citizenship' are what is required 'to be recognised as a Korean' rather than having Korean parents, birth in Korea and speaking Korean, which is then interpreted as meaning that Koreans are relatively well prepared to embrace multiculturalism (H. Choe, 2007). This empirical suggestion is in stark contrast to the findings of Park (1999) and Lee Hee-Eun et al, (2007) and are rather surprising when considering mono-culturalism and ethnic homogeneity characterised Korean people for a long time (see Endnote 1) (Hwang, 2010, pp.160-61).

The survey question, 'to be recognised as a Korean,' does not have a subject, but the context indicates the subjects are foreigners, not Koreans. Native Koreans cannot be the subject of the question because they have Korean parents, so the question means: 'What does a foreigner require to be recognised as a Korean?' A foreigner can seek political citizenship or acculturation to Korea. The study participants (Koreans) are left with voluntaristic choices such as political citizenship or acculturation rather than acquiring Korean genealogy. It is possible social desirability bias has played an important role in the ways in which the survey participants have responded. This type of discourse analysis has little room to incorporate underpinning socioeconomic structures. In other words, positivist empiricism looks for causal relationships with reference to events, whereas a realist approach looks for them within the generative mechanism. Third, there could be a possible discrepancy between what respondents think is the right thing to do and what they actually do, highlighting a potential limit of the survey research, asking the subjects hypothetical questions rather than questions about their actual experiences, underpinned by their given social structure. An analysis of media representations of the experiences of foreigners as well as native Koreans can be a way to verify different perspectives on Korean attitudes to foreigners.

Nouveau-riche racism

A common discourse about race in Korea is about Korean heterogeneity and pure-blood nationalism. These long-held claims argue for their cultural and ideological superiority rather than 'natural' or biological differences on the basis of genetics (McLelland, 2008). The Korean 'blood-based' superiority appears to have much in common with the notion of Japaneseness which can be conferred by blood, not by naturalisation, place of birth or acculturation (Lie, 2001; Yoshino, 1998). Historically, Korean xenophobia seems to consist of jealousy and hatred against past colonial countries around Japan, China and the United States. For example, a widespread discourse in Korea over the past few decades is that Korea is about 30 years behind Japan, which stems from a sense of competition and jealousy. The 'racial' inferiority seems to remain deep down in the minds of Koreans, which is inherited from generation to generation (N.-J. Park,

2002). Koreans' economic status has significantly improved and they not only use their capitalist production systems to exploit foreigners, they may feel they have the right to discriminate against others economically and beyond. This may be named 'nouveau-riche racism'.

This concept of 'nouveau-riche racism' is commonly observed in the rapidly developed economies such as South Korea. However, practice of the phenomenon is broadly found in historical contexts. One close to the concept is Japanese racial superiority as expressed to discriminate against non-whites, especially Asians in general and Koreans in particular. Channel 2, the extremely popular Japanese Internet bulletin board, attracts netizens' comments on Japanese superiority (McLelland, 2008). Although comments on the bulletin board indicate Japanese display racial prejudice against non-whites (except themselves), they show respect to the whites. During the turn of the 20th century, Japanese imperialism was the key vehicle through which Japanese expressed racial prejudice. Earlier, the development of modern capitalism and colonial imperialism from the mid-to-late 18th century witnessed the practice of racial discrimination by Americans and Europeans, (for example, colonisation of India (N.-J. Park, 2002, p.162). The US and European countries took a few centuries to 'accomplish' their modernisation, which involved appropriating the resources of other continents as well as practising racial discrimination against the people of colonies. Japan opened up its economic and diplomatic relations with the west well ahead of the hermit kingdom of Chosun. Japan achieved an effective westernisation, adopting modern scientific and educational institutions, taking a relatively shorter period of time in comparison with the west. Japan joined the colonial powers in the 19th century, soon exerting racially discriminatory behaviours towards non-whites.

As noted by Park N. (2002), the hierarchical treatment of race became apparent in the 19th century. The liberal pragmatist John S. Mill promoted and provided the 'scientific' base of the hierarchy. Korean intellectuals such as Yun Chi-Ho and Seo Jae-Pil suffered from racial prejudice and uncritically introduced it to the Korean public. Korea also shortened the time required for westernisation, achieving condensed capitalist development since the 1980s, then giving birth to nouveau-riche racism. The long-awaited change which was subdued and which had remained in the Korean culture ever since the start of the modernisation process in 1876, started to emerge in an explicit manner during the 1990s. The import of foreign labourers since the early 1990s and Korean membership of the OECD in December 1996 worked as a formal trigger of nouveau-riche racism. The poorer the nation a foreign worker comes from, the more s/he suffers from Korean xenophobia (Kim, 2009). Also those who are less well educated (labourers, lower income earners and the unemployed) may be more resistant to foreign labourers (as is found in European countries (EUMC, 2005)). Material inequality or disadvantaging foreign labourers tends to be rationalised on the basis of negative connotations of 'blackness', different origins of blood or culture, or economic standards of the countries of origin. Consequently, 'race' appears to cause the inequality in the labour market (Miles, 1982, p.172; Shin, 2009, 101).

One of the unresolved issues in the discourse of Koreans' attitude towards foreigners' naturalisation is their favourable attitudes towards Americans and unfavourable attitudes towards Chinese, Korean-Chinese, Japanese, South-east Asians and Mongolians (H. Choe, 2007, p.159). Historically and genealogically, Koreans may have close ethnic affiliations with the latter group, but they are the group of people against whom Koreans may exert discriminatory attitudes mainly because of relatively poor economic performance by their countries of origin (from the viewpoints of Koreans).

Methods

Korea's two most popular internet portals, DAUM and NAVER provide comprehensive online services such as news, stock information, sports, art, and education. They also offer online forum space, which can be established with basic templates, and charge negligible maintenance cost. NAVER, for example, maintains close to 7 million online forums, which Koreans call internet cafés. Although the membership of each internet café requires a real name and identification number at the time of registration, the members use nicknames which are unidentifiable. This near anonymity encourages frank expression of views and aggressive vilification of others. The online forums against foreigners display the characteristics of hate sites in terms of aggression and vilification.

This paper analyses 96 comments on a Korean online petition against anti-racial discrimination legislation. The petition was initiated by one of the online forums against foreigners and was publicly available through the search words, 'anti-racial discrimination law' or through the links provided in major online newspapers. The petition opened on 18 October 2011 and hoped to collect the signatures of 10,000 before the general election in Korea in April 2012. The petition attracted 1841 signatures as of 15 March 2012. A goal of the analysis is to understand and interpret the comments from their viewpoints. That is, why do people feel the legislation will disadvantage many Koreans and damage the Korean economy and national identity? Such interpretation should consider personal experiences, particular life conditions and changes that occur in the broader Korean society.

There are some methodological difficulties in investigating the level of racial discrimination by analysing the comments written by a group of dissident voices. That is, they are not meant to be representative of Korean people. Nonetheless, the comments are likely to illuminate what the major concerns are. The analysis of the comments on the petition are supplemented and triangulated by a further analysis of more than 60 media reportages downloaded, using the phrase, 'anti-racial discrimination law' (*injong chabyeol keumjibeop*), from KINDS (*Korean Integrated Newspapers Database System*), provided by the Korea Press Foundation as of 16 December 2011. The dissident voices have used unidentifiable nicknames such as 'goldmp'. This paper has changed their nicknames again to something else.

Findings

The petition has an emblem on its front page. According to the emblem, the anti-racial discrimination bill is designed to promote multiculturalism and consequently to legitimise the oppression of native Koreans; and it is to pre-empt people's frustration about multiculturalism and foreigners, hoping to 'zip up' the complaining mouths of the Korean people (see endnote 3). The analysis of the comments on the petition shows four major themes of concern: (1) Supporting foreign labourers but destroying Koreans; (2) Ignorant of the defects of *damunhwa* (multiculturalism); (3) Ethnic homogeneity and superiority of Koreans; (4) Criminalisation of foreign labourers. In the following sections, this paper will provide and illustrate research findings with reference to the four common themes from the viewpoints of the dissident people. In each section, it will provide related backgrounds and annotations, on the basis of the analysis of media representations on multiculturalism published for five years ending on 16 December 2011.

(1) Supporting foreign labourers but destroying Koreans

An analysis of common media representations such as those in newspapers and on television confirms the words of Jung Hye-Sil, co-director of *Damunhwa* Family Association: 'The word *damunhwa* is frequently used, but its meaning is poorly understood by the public. There is clear lack of respect to the people from different backgrounds. There is a belief that they respect white people, but they do not think non-whites deserve respect' (K.-T. Lee, 2009b). This state of mind of the Korean public has potential to create a range of often misinformed perceptions of *damunhwa*.

The dissident voices, those who are against *damunhwa* in Korea and signed the petition, argue that *damunhwa* and the proposed anti-discrimination legislation are designed to support foreigners, but not Koreans. They think a small proportion of Koreans who may benefit from *damunhwa* are 'the haves' and the owners of industries. As a consequence, they argue, ordinary people are suffering.

According to the dissident netizens, reverse discrimination is common. They also argue that the anti-discrimination bill is totally for the benefit of foreigners, and thus has to accompany a counter legislation which will protect the rights of Koreans from reverse discrimination. A dissident voice is worried that if a Korean is accused of discriminating against a foreigner, the Korean should prove that s/he is not guilty (10rm), which is not an easy task. In this socio-political environment, 'foreigners are having a free ride, joining a feast without toil at all' (edol). For example, 'foreigners strive towards forming a family with a Korean woman, which may facilitate their naturalisation in the far better off nation' (ohrevlis). Therefore, 'Koreans should boycott national conscription which ends up providing security for foreigners' (dsa).

Damunhwa families are envied as they have access to lowest interest rates, which encourages international marriage. Foreign labourers are blamed for receiving free water and meals, which all come from the tax from our (the dissidents) hard work (ykiw).

A foreign worker is offered up to \$30,000 a year for medical care, which causes the loss of \$0.9 billion a year, which causes an 8 per cent increase in healthcare insurance premiums every year (ki).

In the context of a continuing increase in the number of foreign labourers, 'Koreans in general have developed a perception that foreigners are gradually taking over Koreans' employment opportunities and that there is a large social cost to support foreign labourers' (K.-T. Lee, 2009c). As a way to overcome the 1997 Asian economic crisis, the Korean government swiftly implemented policies to reduce the subsidy for foreign labourers' food and accommodation, extend the exemption period of the minimum wage and reduce the number of the undocumented foreign labourers. These were designed to support the small and medium-sized companies and reduce the social cost. However, Jung Yeong-Seop, secretary general of the Foreign Labourers' Association, noted the argument that reducing the number of foreign labourers creates jobs for Koreans was groundless. Jung added that Koreans did not even want the 3D jobs for which the majority of foreign labourers are employed (K.-T. Lee, 2009c). An unintended consequence of these government policies is that they create a public perception that foreign labourers take away job opportunities from Koreans, which encourages Korean prejudice against foreigners.

According to a survey of 533 foreigners, undertaken by the Foreign Labourers' Association in August 2009, they were under-paid (37.5per cent) because they were foreigners; verbally

assaulted (29.7per cent); and physically assaulted (10.8per cent). They seemed prepared to undertake the work with a relatively low wage, which Koreans did not want (Byeon, 2007).

The dissidents argue that *damunhwa* is simply against Korean people. The Korean government is blamed for scrapping a vocational training opportunity that was offered to Koreans 10 years ago, but offering such opportunity to foreign labourers: 'Once they complete the training, they are encouraged to settle in Korea' (ki). It was suggested that 'as soon as the proposed anti-discrimination legislation is complete, Lee Myong-Bak, President of South Korea, should be assaulted by the black person who recently beat a senior citizen' (nuj). A dissident complains that the 'Korean government is unable to protect its own people, but talks about legislating anti-discrimination law; I have trouble understanding members of Korean Parliament and wish to relinquish my Korean citizenship' (tdkrks). *Damunhwa* is blamed for financially benefiting only the haves and business owners as it 'helps to maintain low wage for the poor in general' (ihc).

It is ironic that, as the petitioners argue, the employers make up one of the groups that benefit from the work of foreign labourers. This would have been so especially when the employers were 'easily' able to keep the workers under control. However, once the debate has commenced as to how to protect foreigners' working conditions and their human rights, the employers have started complaining of 'reverse discrimination', which has been raising an alarm with the Korean public. At the time of restructuring a company, some workers make a false report to the police that undocumented foreign labourers are working there (K.-T. Lee, 2009c). Park Wan-Seok, a civil activist against foreign labourers, notes that labourers at building construction sites are often Chinese workers and that the availability of cheap labourer sustains the low-paid jobs. Park and Areum (manager of an internet discussion forum) suggest that a government subsidy to equip the industries with technologically advanced facilities would attract Korean workers (M.-J. Lee, 2009). Whether technological equipment of a company is the government's responsibility or not is a different question.

As a result of pursuing *damunhwa* policy, argue the dissidents, 'ordinary people are suffering'. A petitioner notes, 'foreign labourers are imported to Korea and Koreans are sent overseas for coal mining,' citing a news report about the government plan to secure a large amount of coal from Indonesia (ldkvfpg). Another contends that 'some foreign labourers say that Korea is the best place for foreign labourers and that government could not care less about the needs of ordinary people' (fldhx).

The government's plan to dispatch Koreans to Indonesia involves establishing 10 professional consulting teams, each of which consists of a man in his 60s and two men in their 20s or 30s. The older person is to train the younger men to a required standard (see Endnote 4). The title of the media report is written as if the dispatching is forceful whereas it is completely voluntary. The report itself has attracted 793 comments as of 6 March 2012, debating and correcting the comments of each other.

(2) Ignorant of the problems of damunhwa

The petition contends that 'the Korean nation has to be protected and that is what so many Koreans have sacrificed their lives and wealth against foreign invaders, Japanese imperialism and recent Asian economic crisis' (orez). 'This is the time for members of parliament, professors, journalists, intellectuals and leaders to fight against undocumented foreign labourers and criminals, but they have hidden themselves. Instead, the powerless grassroots are the only worriers and it is a struggle to protect the Korean land from foreign labourers and criminals'

(hj8). A dissident argues that those who advocate *damunhwa* should be 'killed by automatic guns' (rladnij).

Data analysis shows that accepting *damunhwa* is regarded as abandoning the concept of the nation of Korea and ruining the Korean identity (hsj). The petitioners lament that 'politicians and intellectuals are ignorant and that most ordinary people are also frustratingly ignorant of the pitfalls of *damunhwa*' (801hffpaltka); 'Unless the petitioners are actively participating in numerous debates through current affairs media outlets there is little hope to stop the progress of *damunhwa* in Korea' (kin).

Violent language and attitude is one of the characteristics of the ways in which the members of hate sites express their views, assisted by anonymity. As they suggest, the dissidents' active but constructive participation in the public debate could contribute to the progress of multiculturalism in Korea. However, their goal of dismantling *damunhwa* in Korea may prove to be in vain.

(3) Ethnic homogeneity and superiority of Koreans

An important reason to be against *damunhwa* is because the blood of Koreans is pure and the superiority of Koreans cannot be tampered with, argue the petitioners. They are worried *damunhwa* will produce a nation full of 'dark skinned mixed race people and a fusion of many thoughts, which then leads to the loss of the pure Korean culture' (ldkvfpg). In that context, 'pure Koreans will be discriminated against' (keatevolk). It is argued that 'a 5,000 years' history of Korea is full of close and caring networks, and a proper tradition in each Korean family' (hs). 'Korea now enjoys wealth and observes human rights, which is an object of envy to foreign labourers' (ohrevlis). Others express their frustration having to live together with 'inferior race' and do not want to see 'foreigners in a restaurant as they may rarely take bath, which is a health risk to others' (cegnaj).

There is so far poor understanding of gender equality in Korean society in that some Korean men accept their foreign wives mainly for the roles of homemakers and satisfying sexual desire. In these cases, men and their kin tend to object to the birth of children between Koreans and foreigners. That is, international marriage may be acceptable, but not mixed race children (K.-T. Lee, 2009b). There is a widespread belief that *damunhwa* family is not normal and there are actual disadvantages for the Korean men who are ridiculed at work (Jung Hye-Sil, cited in K.-T. Lee, 2009b). The government introduced a policy to support the needs (Korean language) of foreign *brides* of *damunhwa* families (see Endnote 5) in particular in 2008, excluding foreign labourers' families or naturalised citizens. Dr Park Kyeong-Tae argues that such exclusive nature makes the policy completely out of norm and the policy is not multicultural at all (cited in K.-T. Lee, 2009b).

The petitioners seem to argue that Koreans were once caring and loving towards others, but once they are economically better off and able to observe human rights they have changed and are unable to continue their past positive cultures in the cosmopolitan environment. Dr Seol Dong-Hoon points out that 'Korean people's racial discrimination is closely related to the hierarchical culture under a strong influence of Confucianism and that there is need to educate Koreans that their racial superiority complex is simply wrong' (cited in D.-G. Yu & Oh, 2009). Racial superiority is deeply embedded in the Korean society and many Koreans are possibly unprepared to accept racial equality. Dr Seol calls this 'pure blood' nationalism. Yet, there is little

effort towards educating Koreans in general, argues Jung Hye-Sil, Co-director of *Damunhwa* Family Association (cited in J.-I. Yu, Hwang, & Kim, 2009).

Bae Ki-Cheol, president of the Korean International Family Association, says the word '*twigi*' means a new species out of animal hybrids and it is insulting to use the word to refer to humans born between different ethnic backgrounds. Bae mentions an incident in a police office where a man who had a Korean mother and African father was referred to as a *twigi*, and his mother was called a slag. The man has physically assaulted the police officer. Bae asks: 'Who can bear when his mother is assaulted like that' (K.-T. Lee, 2009a)?

(4) Criminalisation of foreign labourers

Strongly frustrated with Korean government, politicians, intellectuals and the haves, the petitioners tend to criminalise foreign labourers, often without substantiation. A dissident suggests that 'people undertake an internet search using the words "foreigners' crime" in Korean and they will realise the degree of the problem'. The person notes that 'the number of foreign gangsters outnumbers Korean gangsters, which is a consequence of advocating foreigners' human rights in Korea' (sss). Another dissident contends that 'there is a large number of foreign labourers in Ansan Train station around 7pm and too many of them become criminals, getting involved in rape, burglary and murder, and forming gangsters and fighting against each other' (ykiw). According to another dissident, *damunhwa* policy tends to sweep these problems under the carpet (yip).

According to Korea's Justice Ministry statistics in 2010, police charged 1.8 million Koreans (3.8per cent of 48 million Koreans) and 33,586 foreigners (2.7per cent of 1.26 million foreigners) (cited in Ramstad, 2010). As the petitioners point out, there are certain areas where significant numbers of foreigners reside, so the incidents of crime are likely to be relatively high. Frequent media reports of crimes from particular areas could alert and lead the public to think that overall numbers of 'foreigner crimes' are in a heightened state. It is possible that 'foreigner crime' is still unacceptable to many Koreans, considering that a large number of foreigners have settled in Korea in less than the last couple of decades.

Police officers seem to take it for granted that they can easily approach foreigners and ask them to present their passports. Foreigners say this 'puts foreigners under psychological pressure as they are regarded as potential criminals' (D.-G. Yu & Oh, 2009). A murder case of a schoolgirl by a foreign worker is frequently mentioned by those who are against legislating for anti-discrimination act. Yet, this does not legitimise discriminating against foreign labourers or the ethnic background of the accused (J.-A. Yu, 2009). Dissident voices against *damunhwa* and some online discussion forums, express their concerns about crimes committed by foreigners. However, there is also a concern that crimes against 'foreigners' are as serious as crimes committed by them (Son, 2011).

Conclusion

Dissident voices have been numerous in other countries where multiculturalism has been promoted. There are many similarities between the voices of dissidents across national boundaries. However, the media representations demonstrate the Korean culture and social climate tend to tolerate blind misbehaviour against non-Koreans, especially non-Europeans/Americans. Thus, 'dissidents' seem to represent a large proportion of the Korean public in terms of their attitudes towards foreign labourers. Successful adjustment of foreign

residents to Korean society is in the best interest of Korea -- Korea is a fast ageing society and its fertility rate is as low as 1.15 births per woman in 2009, one of the lowest in the world (World Bank 2011).

Dissident voices are strongly centred on nationalistic sentiments which are justified by and primarily based on the recent economic prosperity of South Korea. Unfortunately, this economic prosperity has not equally benefitted the lives of all Koreans. The impoverished Koreans or those who are affected by rampant capitalism irrespective of their levels of education are likely to express their frustrations about those who recently arrived or settled in Korea. Those who are under any kind of government welfare support make a particular target to blame. Any policy, political leaders or intellectuals who promote *damunhwa* are labelled ignorant. Ethnic or 'pure blood' nationalism seems to be an empty slogan to stand against *damunhwa*. Korea's recent economic prosperity provides dissidents with every justification for discriminating against any non-Koreans but Anglo-Celtics. This nouveau-riche racism goes against non-Koreans to the extent that they are easily criminalised with no clear justifications.

The legislation of an anti-discrimination act is not going to remove all the discriminatory behaviours. The significance of the legislation is that it will clearly set out what is acceptable or not in people's words and deeds when dealing with people from different ethnic backgrounds. When the Indian academic was abused on a bus, the accused was charged with 'contempt of a person'. Current Korean laws are not able to prosecute the person in other ways. The current social climate is that it is somewhat okay for Koreans to discriminate against people from different ethnic backgrounds. The new legislation will start creating a different social climate in which racial discrimination is not acceptable. This is an attempt to transform what was a 'rigid' and deeply rooted culture to a culture of respect and tolerance, in which employers and government officers are also expected to deal with 'others' appropriately.

Despite relatively widespread discrimination, it is also true there is widespread concern and agreement that the culture of discrimination cannot continue. Foreign brides are regarded as invaluable human capital who have injected new hope into the rural community. Foreign labourers have been a revitalising group of workers in Korean industry, willing to undertake difficult, dirty and dangerous jobs (Son, 2011). Politicians' proactive initiatives to establish relevant government departments to support immigrants and foreigners will be an important step to take. Legislating for an anti-discrimination act to create a harmonious social environment is required.

Endnotes:

1. Whether or not Koreans have actually maintained ethnic homogeneity is a separate question and requires further research.
2. 망국적인 "인종차별금지법"을 타도하자.
<http://bbs3.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/agora/petition/read?bbsId=P001&articleId=113508>
3. <http://agora.media.daum.net/petition/view?id=113508>
4. <http://news.nate.com/view/20111031n17285>
5. They make up about 10per cent of foreign born residents in Korea.

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