

INTERNAL EXCLUSION VIA MULTICULTURAL POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA: BEYOND THE MULTICULTURALISM

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Abstract: *The concept of homogeneous nation has been for a long time deeply rooted in Korea. With the new current of time, however, Korea has entered into multiethnic society. Multiculturalism has been universalized in Korean society. It is also considered as severely discriminative and includes the concept of internal exclusion. This paper will reflect on the Korean society and seek a direction for improving Korean perceptions by discussing the internal perceptions towards foreign immigrants.*

Keywords: *multiculturalism; internal exclusion; discrimination; single ethnic; transformation*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to critically look into the agenda, ‘multicultural society’ that has been used in South Korea since 2000s, as the transformation of neoliberalism. In addition, it raises the question on how the concepts of ‘immigration’, ‘foreigner’ and ‘multicultural family’, as the new phenomena of exploitation in the era of neoliberalism, distinguish aliens from our people and involve psychological, social and collective discrimination.

This paper consists of 4 chapters. The phenomenological meaning of Gap (topdog) - Eul (underdog) relationship that is called “I” or “people” in South Korea is discussed in Chapter 2. Internal exclusion embedded in the Korean multicultural policy is looked into in Chapter 3. Agenda necessary to go beyond multiculturalism is considered as democracy of underdog in Chapter 4.

2. HOW TO CHARACTERIZE SOUTH KOREA? UNDERDOGS AS THE SECOND CLASS PEOPLE

Discourse of Gap-Eul relationship widely used in Korean society has been on everyone’s lips as an interesting research topic or phenomenon in recent years. Even several years ago, Gap-Eul relationship was a very common term (Jin, 2017:4). It is not more or less than to refer both faces in contract. However, as suggested by common expressions appeared in the press such as Gapjil (overuse of one’s power) and ‘tears of Eul’, these terms no longer refer to neutral relationship between both

parties but to the relation between domination and obedience, superiority and inferiority, insult and repulsion, and repression and exclusion. In other words, ‘Eul’ refers to people subject to unfair repression-violence, discrimination-bullying and insult-exclusion. Here are some examples: franchise owners suffering from unfair arrogance of the franchise headquarter and their part time workers suffering from arrogance of the franchise owners; non-regular workers suffering from not only repression and violence by capital, but also discrimination and Gapjil by regular workers; subcontractors and their employees as the victim of unfair demand and abused authority by prime contractors; postgraduates required to absolutely obey their professors; women and minors subject to indiscriminate repulsion, and young students suffering from harsh competition. According to Jacques Ranciere, a French philosopher, Eul is not different from a ‘person without head’ (Jin, 2015: 210). As suggested by expressions such as ‘10:90’ and ‘1:99’, the majority of members of Korean society are in the position of Eul as the person without head.

In this sense, the following question might be inevitably raised. Why discourse of Gap-Eul relationship has been widely spread in our society in recent years? A number of economists and sociologists might agree that IMF Financial crisis in 1997 became to be one of the inflection points. The Korean society has been rapidly reorganized in order of neoliberalism since the financial crisis, which caused the deepening of polarization as well as the expansion of Euls as second class people.

In 2014, the rate of non-regular workers was 32% per government statistics or 45% per labor world statistics. The problem was that the salary level of non-regular workers was only half of that of regular workers and the similar trend was found in salary gap between large corporations and small and medium sized businesses. As of 2014, 81% of total labors were hired by small and medium sized businesses and 19% by large corporations. This suggests that the majority of labors, except for the regular workers working in large corporations, face severe income and employment inequality. In fact, the proportion of low-income labors in South Korea is the second highest among the OECD countries; “labors with less than KRW 1,000,000 (approx. 800 euro) monthly salary take 1/3 of 18,740,000 of waged workers” in South Korea (Jang, 2014:310). Eventually, it was demonstrated by a number of statistical figures that increase in low income labors and non-regular workers starting from the financial crisis when neoliberalism reorganization of Korean society was regularized has deepened the income and employment inequality (Kim, 2015:170).

Another instance of ‘Euls as the second class people’ is the ferry Sewolho disaster in 2014. The disaster served as a momentum for the public to be aware of the hierarchical Korean society once again. The public experienced from the disaster that the nation ‘Korea’ was the black hole (Jin, 2017:109). It is because people generally used to consider the nation as the most solid reality. However, the government seen by the public in the disaster was shockingly “vain” and “big blank” (Jin, 2017:110).

The government was not only incompetent to rescue the students stuck in the sinking ferry but also did not seem to have a will to rescue them. People said ‘How does the country do something like this?’ and came to be conscious of the fact that ‘there is no nation for poor us’ and ‘no nation exists for poor me’ (Jin, 2017:110). The question of ‘How would the government respond if the students stuck in the ferry were from the prestigious school located in Gangnam, instead of Danwon high school in Ansan?’ has been raised by the public. The order ‘Stay still’ was considered as a metonymic expression to force obedience, stirring up anger of people. The ‘nation’ was on ‘their side’ (Jin, 2017:110).

South Korea can be characterized as ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism can be characterized as consistency between ethnicity as racial/cultural identity and people as political identity (Shin, 2006:12). Korea is the country where people who can quickly recognize where they come

from are considered citizens and are also considered eligible as citizens.

In countries like Korea, where national identity is equated with ethnic identity and where such identity is highlighted, it is difficult for minorities and individuals to be properly protected or to have their rights respected. This is why the hierarchical order of Gap-Eul relationship and the discriminatory structure highly influence the society. Therefore, discourse of Gap-Eul relation might be considered as one of the critical phenomena in modern Korean history 70 years after liberation. It is related to the question about the national or political community, South Korea.

3. INTERNAL EXCULSION EMBODED IN MULTICULTURAL POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA

The Keeping Korea as a single race country with 5000-year history has been highlighted in the educational system of the country. South Korea got over the Japanese colonial rule and made economic progress/ developed economically after the Korean War. As a result, it joined the rank of developed countries in 2000s, showing the international society its social and economic dynamic. With such achievements, it is reaching forward to multicultural society by continuing a number of supportive policies (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

In this circumstance, however, Koreans still have prejudices and negative perceptions towards foreign immigrants and multicultural societies. As such, the Korean society is undergoing a period of transition where the perception does not meet the reality. Before reviewing the Korean policy of foreign immigrants, this paper will discuss three types of negative perception towards multiculturalism (Jang, 2015:8).

3.1 Double-faced Anti-multiculturalism. This means showing a double-faced attitude towards multiculturalism. Although Koreans appear to accept and understand the foreign culture, people with this perception feel an antipathy against the government’s support and commitment for multicultural people. This concept is also associated with the *Chemyeon* (social face) culture of Korean society. Koreans who are reluctant to openly show their negative perceptions cannot frankly express their views. Rather, they only express their antipathies to multiculturalism either anonymously or as a form of the majority.

3.2 Anti-multiculturalism. Anti-multiculturalism means that people perceive multiculturalism to be a cause of social problems or to go against their interests. People with this perception and attitude actively express their opinions and negative feelings against multiculturalism with their own logical reasons. However, these reasons tend to be self-centric or precausal reasoning, leading to many distorted interpretations of the issue often different from the fact. Nevertheless, people are still fleshing out the distorted interpretation to justify their opinions.

3.3. Multiculture-phobia (Hatred against Multiculture). Multiculture-phobia is both a subset of Xenophobia and an umbrella term for Islamophobia and Chao-phobia. In Korea, most multicultural people come from the socially and economically less developed countries. Moreover, the meaning of “multiculture” does not cover all the foreigners and their cultures, but is often limited to the culture of the socially vulnerable community, including foreign workers, marriage migrant women and their children, and others. In other words, it is not discrimination and exclusion against all foreigners, but discrimination and hatred against multicultural people from developing countries occurring based on “superiority” rather than discrimination and exclusion against all foreigners (Min, 2015:31-32).

Establishing various supportive policies and enhancing relative laws, the government has made statistics of the multicultural Korean society since 2000, when the number of multicultural families increased as a result of the increase in/of international marriages in rural local labors. For instance, statistics of in-and-out-bound foreigners per month, multicultural members per nationality, education status of immigrant adolescences per school and adaptation of North Korean defectors are reported on a regular basis, and administrative and financial support are provided (Kim *et al.* 2014). The problem is that adaptation to Korean society is highly influenced by their age, social activities, and their familiarity with the Korean language, culture, food, and custom and etiquette by gender/region. All these are provided as the means of assimilation and regulation. Distinctive competence shown in the provided program is an essential factor for them to be recognized as ‘Korean’. According to the criteria defined by ‘Gap’ to become a Korean citizen, multicultural members are considered as ‘Eul’. In other words, multicultural members are subject to internal exclusion despite that they are living in South Korea.

Etienne Balibar (2010) defines internal exclusion as the following:

Symbolic characteristics of internal exclusion are that the person excluded 1) can be neither truly integrated nor actually removed; 2) cannot be even directly expelled from the community” (La proposition de l'égaliberté, 2010: 212).

In this sense, the people forced to be internally excluded are represented by heretics or religious minorities in the past, women or proletarians in 19th century, black people in early 20th century and immigrants from late 20th century to early 21th century. In this study, internal exclusion is the comprehensive meaning of the concept that includes social exclusion, newly used to supplement the criterion of internal exclusion as poverty as defined by European scholars in the past, as well as symbolic exclusion including discrimination and exclusion by race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual identity.

However, not only people from such particular groups are included in the category of internal exclusion (Jin, 2017: 414). People who are at the bottom of competitive social order, who are forced to be in the position of ‘Eul’, and who inevitably came to be the second class citizens or people, are also subject to internal exclusion. Internal exclusion is the condition away from the proper level of life/living as a decent person, which prevents people from being happy (Jin, 2017:414). The problems of exclusion from happiness and outsider of happiness have not disappeared, but have systemically reproduced and extended.

In addition, one of the main phenomena caused by neoliberal globalization is that minorities/underdogs have become numerous. Neoliberal socialization weakens or disbands social solidarity organizations, including working class groups, and furthermore destabilizes the sense of belonging in individuals (e.g., non-regular work, early retirement, freelance, and self-employment), the outcome being that most of individuals become singularized/lonely? And established. ‘Euls’ become the majority in terms of number; however, they are in fact singularized and destabilized minorities/underdogs who failed to be connected to each other via their own unique organization and network.

Entities grouped by a single name, nation, are not the homogeneous group but the conflicting group represented by the numbers such as ‘1:99’, ‘10:90’ and ‘20:80’, which are in multilayered, hierarchical power relationships, for example, Gap, Eul, Byeong and Jeong. Therefore, what Euls’ democracy questions is how democracy based on

minorities/underdogs/(politically) minors who are at the bottom of national sovereignty would be possible. In other words, it is the question about how the concept of people can be reorganized from the viewpoint of minorities/underdogs/(political) minors who are at the bottom of society, called 'people without head'. It might be necessary to think within the frame of 'Euls' democracy' to solve the problem of multicultural and refugees in Korean society.

4. BEYOND MULTICULTURALISM: GO FORWARD TO EUL'S DEMOCRACY

Multiculturalism has been quite universalized in the Korean society. It is also considered severely discriminative and includes the concept of internal exclusion. Meanwhile, every society that is participating in globalization can be defined as a multicultural society. Foreigners became no longer strangers in the Korean society in past 20 years. There might be two different premises if 'multiculturalism' becomes index of discrimination and exclusion in this situation.

Firstly, multiculturalism implies a very static norm of culture. In other words, culture is the unique lifestyle, convention, thoughts and behaviors of a group; therefore, is not considered to be changed in definition. Korean culture is the expression of the Koreans' (ethnicity) unique lifestyle, conventions, thoughts and behaviors. It assumes invariability of culture; for example, Chinese culture is the Chinese own, Japanese culture is the Japanese own, and etc.

Secondly and accordingly, it rules out internal diversity or hybridity of other culture from the beginning. It is such that the Korean culture is considered to have invariable identity for thousands of years since Dangun Era; Kimchi has been consumed by Korean since Dangun era; memorial service has been continued without change since Joseon era, and Korean language has existed in the current form for about 550 years. However, the history of the Kimchi consumed today is not that long and memorial services practiced nowadays are the hybrid transformed after the liberation from Japan.

According to these two premises, multiculturalism has come to be the means of administration and public order to preserve and enhance Korean culture whose identity is invariable and singularized. Given that the current level of Korean awareness towards multiculturalism, the government should be first deeply concerned about whether to actively accept multicultural policy that ensures coexistence of various cultures. Moreover,

the government should all the more actively take the lead in fostering tolerance of Koreans towards diversity. This is to ensure that Koreans would not resist, but accept the society of various cultures as well as new members joining Korean society. It is because the most important task for Korean government to prepare for the upcoming multiethnic society is to come up with multi-level active policy to create a better understanding of the public of multiculturalism.

Therefore, multiculturalism in the Korean society is a modified form of nationalism. Under this condition, it is not surprising that multiculturalism is used as the means to hierarchically include or exclude heterogeneous things against Korean culture. Accordingly, new ideas, practice and institutionalization about culture itself are required to overcome the logic of nationalism and its involving violence. The two premises that pre-existing multiculturalism (no matter whether it is called interculturalism or poly-culturalism) is based on should be broken up. Interculturalism or poly-culturalism might be impossible if the Korean language could function as the only one universal language in Korean society. It is important to establish the base to learn and use well the Korean language. However, effort to use other languages as the common language is also significant.

Furthermore, it is critical to establish the passage for more citizens and people regardless of their nationality to participate in public discussions. There are a number of TV programs in which foreigners make their appearance, but this is limited to variety shows. People who are not 'special foreigners' exist in the Korean society, living like non-existing ghosts. It is an important issue to make the passage for them to reproduce/represent themselves.

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