

## MARRIAGE MIGRATION OF MONGOLIAN WOMEN TO SOUTH KOREA

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Republic of Korea<sup>1</sup>(will be noted as ‘South Korea’ in this paper) in March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1990, the partnership between the two countries has been continuously developing. In company with political, diplomatic, and economic relations, Mongolia-South Korea partnerships have grown much wider and deeper in diverse socio-cultural spheres. As the two countries have advanced their relations in diverse spheres, the number of Mongolian visitors to South Korea and vice versa, South Koreans to Mongolia, has steadily increased. The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the final total of 61,766 Mongolians and 44,360 Koreans who visited each other in 2012 (MOFA, 2013). More population mobility is expected as political, social and cultural ties of both nations are flourishing. When it comes to the volume of population movement and its growth rate, the two countries display the similar tendency. It is meaningful and desirable in a point that their relations proceed towards bilateral directions, not the unilateral one.

Nevertheless, migration of Mongolian population has shown its own characteristics. First of all, Mongolian visitors are inclined to stay in South Korea relatively for a long time in comparison with South Korean visitors in Mongolia rather shorter. Next, most of Mongolian residents in South Korea (if they are legal laborers) are staying as a foreign worker under the regulation of the *Employment Permit System*<sup>2</sup>, authorized by the South Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor. The rest of Mongolian residents in South Korea are students or female marriage migrants.

Marriage migration of Mongolians to South Korea has increased since the mid-1990s in company with migrant laborers and they have become one of the primary contributors to bi-national population movement. This paper describes unique characteristics of South Korean-Mongolian couples and Mongolian female marriage migrants in South Korea, analyzing relevant statistics and other required researches.

### 1. MIGRATION OF MONGOLIAN POPULATION TO SOUTH KOREA

International migration of Mongolians had started up with its challenging transition from a command economy to a free-market economy during the 1990s. In the midst of being confronted with

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1. South Korea’s official country name at diplomatic arena

2. The Employment Permit System allows employers who have failed to hire native workers to legally hire an adequate number of foreign workers and is a system that the government introduced to manage foreign workers in Korea in an organized manner. (Source: Human Resources Development Service of Korea’s homepage, <http://www.hrdkorea.or.kr/ENG/4/2>)

rampant economic and social dilemmas during the transition period, the surging unemployment rate and low remunerations or wages were the primary contributing factors to Mongolian people's migration to foreign countries. At an initial period, many Mongolians who mastered their study in the west European countries started to settle in their concerned countries to seek for jobs. Also, along with its transition to democracy, control of the past socialism-based government over its citizens had dwindled so that many young generations could travel abroad without any restriction and have opportunities to open their eyes into well-developed countries' polished landscape. Later, some of them persuaded their family members, relatives and friends to join them. Starting from the 2000s, international migration of Mongolians more intensified and assumed far more organized form. Needless to say, the number of people who migrated overseas for a short or a long-term as a foreign labor force drastically increased (Bolormaa, 2008).

According to the first-ever carried-out census on Mongolians with overseas resident experiences, it has more than 107,410 citizens who before used to live abroad or are presently dwelling in other countries for more than six months, as of 2010. According to statistics done by Mongolian National Statistical Office, South Korea is the country in which the greatest proportion of the Mongolian migrant population used to live or now live: it is rather surprising, neither China nor Russia. The [table 1] below indicates the noticeable figure, 29,534 of Mongolians (male 56.1% and female 43.9%) who before shortly stayed with slightly-experienced basics or resided and worked for a long time within South Korea (NSO<sup>3</sup>, 2010).

**[Table 1] Country List Where Mongolian Nationals Reside (2010)**

(Unit: the number of people)

Country	South Korea	USA	Czech Republic	China	Japan	Russian Federation
Citizens	29534	17036	7274	7273	5401	5008

(Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office)

South Korea has been the primary destination country for the unskilled Mongolian labor force since as early as 1987, most of whom were illegal foreign workers. After about a decade, in 1998, the South Korean government started to officially recruit low-skilled foreign workers in alliance with its first introduced immigration policy at that juncture with the winds of change towards economic liberalism throughout the whole society. Since then, Mongolian workers were officially and technically legally entitled to work as an industrial trainee or apprentice in South Korean factories, so the surging population has emigrated from Mongolia to South Korea to work or study under the formal or private contracts.

**[Table 2] Mongolian Migrants in South Korea by Length of Stay (2010)**

(Unit: the average year)

Country	Length of Stay			
	0-1 year	2-5 years	6-10 years	Over 11 years
South Korea	19.6	65.0	12.9	2.4

(Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office)

Amongst such an increasing flow of Mongolian migrants into South Korea, the Government of Mongolia adopted the “Law on receiving overseas laborers and professionals and, vice versa, sending domestic laborers abroad (2001)” to establish the legal background and guarantee its nationals living and working abroad in safety. Before the legislation was initiated, the labor force export was often facilitated through unauthorized agencies or exploitative individuals as well as a few authorized agencies. Since the law was adopted by the Mongolian administration, however, an enlarged volume of work force has been flowing into South Korea under the inter-governmental or inter-organizational intermediary contracts based on the firm legitimacy; nonetheless, the number of Mongolians who have left for South Korea, by means of unauthorized private intermediaries or by their own will, is not declining at all. This is the reason that black labor still remains unresolved, regardless of the favorable legal basis. Of course, the illegal Mongolian migrants<sup>4</sup> are far more likely to encounter the sweatshop evils and suffer from harsh labor exploitation because they are supposed to work at small and medium-sized factories with dangerous and dirty working environments without any employment insurance and benefits like medical care insurance, industrial accident compensation insurance and other safety protection provisions.

Another plain truth is Mongolian migrants’ outstanding education attainment. Most of Mongolian migrants in South Korea are well qualified in terms of educational standards, even if they are now engaging in the low-level work. Despite their completion of higher education in Mongolia, it is never easy for them to find out an appropriate employment that is perfectly matched with their qualifications and personal expectation. As a stranger in a strange place with unfamiliar culture and different language, they are naturally compelled to face difficulties and need time to adapt themselves to the unaccustomed society. As a result, they are obliged to be employed in somewhat low-level positions in South Korea (Solongo, 2013). Categorizing individual Mongolian migrants into the employment type, the majority belongs to industrial and service sector, except for others which could be construed as all sorts of manual or physical manpower, so-called blue-color jobs.

### **[Chart 1] The Engagement of Mongolian Migrants in South Korea by Sector (2010)**

(Unit: percent, %)

(Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office)

The mass of Mongolian migrants into South Korea is a considerable contribution to Mongolian economy. A great deal of remittances that Mongolian migrants monthly send to their family was measured to account for ten percent of Mongolia’s gross domestic product (GDP) in the mid-2000s. The transferred remittance is usually spent to cover fundamental living expenses and diverse welfare costs like health care benefit and educational spending of Mongolian family members, which has henceforward improved their standard of household living. Comparatively, the remittance has been barely invested in real estate or private business in Mongolia (Solongo, 2013).

## **2. BI-NATIONAL MARRIAGE**

Bi-national marriage is not a new phenomenon at all. Tracing up historical records, all can easily remind of the Mongol Yuan dynasty’s governance over the Koryo dynasty, the ancient Korean kingdom, during the 13<sup>rd</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. That period was full of political, social, cultural, and ethnic mix of the two people from the highest level formal contacts to the common people’s personal contacts. In particular, the marital relations had acted as a magnet for the blooming inter-mingling phenomena among patricians as well as plebeians; during the era, among the aristocratic circles in the Mongol

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4. Those people who are illegally employed and are overstaying with 30-day tourist visas on which most Mongolians enter South Korea.

Yuan Empire, there was a growing trend in keeping a young Korean concubine. As for royal marriage, two representative cases were told. One is a Mongolian princess, *Nogukdaejang*, who got married with a Korean king, *Gongmin*. She has been remembered as an admired queen by devotion and commitment to her husband and the Korean people up to date. The other figure is the Empress *Ki*, who was the wife of a Mongolian Emperor. The Empress *Ki* was originally a Korean girl who was taken hostage by the Yuan Empire, but later she was inducted into the First Empress amid factional strife of the Yuan. Such a multi-dimensional mixture must have grown much familiarity with each other until the present.

Marriage migration of Mongolians to South Korea has increased since mid-1990s, in company with the growing migrant laborers. Owing to the political, economic, and social transformation during the transition period, all Mongolians had been suddenly endowed with a great deal of freedom and unprecedented opportunities which were beyond many physical or psychological boundary conceptions under the socialist system and planned economy. While Mongolian people were involved in the abruptly-switching environment, they might anticipate to witness remarkable outputs just within a short term and enjoy a huge benefit in return for the shift period. The reality of Mongolian society was, however, totally different from a rosy future.

As for Mongolian women, especially, it did not bring about any breakthrough in the political, economic, and social status of them, except for education. Notwithstanding the very high level of educational attainment of the female population, they rarely stood on the higher level of prestige than men in Mongolian society. Instead, female labor force participation rate, above all the rate in paid jobs, has rather decreased. Another consequence of the 'reverse' gender gap of the education attainment level was a serious imbalance between males and females in orbit for marriage. The social atmosphere of Mongolia eventually influenced many women to migrate into, mainly, South Korea<sup>5</sup> for the purpose of marriage as a way to improve their standard of living. The General Authority for State Registration of Mongolia regularly publishes data on international marriage of Mongolians. As the [Table 3] shows, among 6158 international marriage cases of Mongolian citizens (2000-2011), Mongolian-South Korean couples account for 69.8 percent of a total.

**[Table 3] International Marriage of Mongolians by a Spouse's Nationality (2000-2011) (List of Top 10 Countries)**

(Unit: the number of people)

No.	Country	Marriages
1.	South Korea	4299
2.	Japan	370
3.	China	296
4.	Germany	255
5.	USA	193
6.	Russia	178
7.	UK	121
8.	Switzerland	76
9.	Australia	55
10.	France	40

(Source: General Authority for State Registration, Mongolia)

5. It could be shown that the bi-national population movement steadily increased and naturally cross-bordered human resources have played an important role to understand each counterpart so that such an atmosphere has boosted change on socio-cultural attitudes between the two countries.

Mongolian woman’s marriages may seem to be made by their own choice; it is surprising that they make a firm decision to travel abroad to find out a foreign husband because people usually prefer getting married with a person who shares the same or similar cultures. Many Mongolian women actually leave for South Korea to dream of a far better socio-economic status through international marriage. The second surprising fact is that a large number of Mongolian-South Korean couples never saw each other before marriage because most of them met their husbands through international marriage agencies (Seol, 2006). Furthermore, the age gap between Mongolian brides and South Korean grooms are found to be over 10 years or so and more than one-fourth South Korean grooms who got married with Mongolian brides had already the previous marital experience(s) while their Mongolian female spouses never had before (Kim, 2010).

**[Chart 2] The Number of Bi-National Marriage (Mongolians-Koreans, 2000-2011)**

(Unit: the number of people)

(Source: General Authority for State Registration, Mongolia)

As the [Chart 2] shows, the number of bi-national marriages registered in the General Authority for State Registration of Mongolian has been steadily decreasing since 2007, from 701 in 2007 to 230 in 2011. It could be translated as a result of Mongolia’s rapid economic growth and improvement of job opportunity and life standard.

**3. MONGOLIAN MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN SOUTH KOREA**

When it comes to South Korea’s multicultural phenomenon, the family combination of Mongolian-South Korean is a popular theme. Taking a look at [Table 4] below, however, the proportion of Mongolian marriage migrant women in South Korea is not that high like that of bi-national marriage amongst international marriages of Mongolians. According to the Ministry of Security and Public Administration of Republic of Korean, as of 2011, the number of Mongolian female marriage migrants in South Korea was 2,858 and the percentage was just 1.3% (MOSPA, 2011). The recently released data by the Ministry of Education indicates that the percentage increased into 2.2% (MOE, 2012). Also, a total of 4120 couples are the combination of a Mongolian woman-South Korean man since 2004 up to 2012 (Statistics Korea, 2012).

**[Table 4] Nationality of Marriage Migrants in Korea (2011)**

(Unit: the number of people, %)

Nationality	China (Korean ethnic)	China	Vietnam	Philippines	Japan	Cambodia	Mongolia
<b>Number</b>	63,110	58,108	41,877	12,132	10,761	4,412	2,858
<b>Percentage</b>	29.8	27.4	19.7	5.7	5.1	2.1	1.3

(Source: Ministry of Security and public Administration, Republic of Korea)

*\* Above-surveyed statistic figures include a total of male and female marriage migrants, but it could be fine that the figure is almost equivalent to Mongolian female marriage migrants. According to the Ministry of Security and public Administration’s 2009 statistics, there is no Mongolian male marriage migrant at all in South Korea.*

In spite of the low percentage, there exists the significance of Mongolian marriage migrants; the reason is more than 40,000 Mongolian expatriates in South Korea. They are not nationalized South Korean citizens but Mongolian citizens even though they have resided and worked in South Korea for

a long time. Among them, many are living together with their children, which is different from other foreign laborers in South Korea, and the youngsters are going to school in South Korea, but are likely to have no idea about applying for nationalization into the South Korean citizen. Exactly speaking, the Mongolian expatriates and their children are not taken into account when counting the total number of Mongolian female marriage migrants or children under the multicultural family background. If not only marriage migrants (nationalized South Korean citizens) but also all non-nationalized expatriates (all residing foreigners) are numbered, the Mongolians will be graded far higher. The Mongol School located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, proves the assumption. The school principal confessed the significance of the school as following; according to statistics by the Korean Ministry of Education (2003), the number of Mongolian students was the first among all foreign students who were registered in Korean schools although Mongolian workers accounted for only 5% out of all foreign laborers in South Korea. At present, the Mongol School is the only foreign school for children whose parents are foreign laborers.

Another noteworthy feature of Mongolian marriage migrant women is their high-level of education attainment in comparison to other female marriage migrants in South Korea. In 2009, the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family announced its survey result that 62% of Mongolian migrant women completed a college education. The figure is worthwhile to be closely paid attention, especially, compared to (both Korean- and Han-) Chinese female marriage migrants who have recorded the highest percentage among all female marriage migrants; the higher education-level of Korean-Chinese were only 13%, and Han-Chinese had just 19% (MOGEF, 2009). The Policy Report of 2010, *Research Studies to Support the Employment of Female Marriage Migrants*, written by researchers of three ministries and one public research institute, compared the employment rate of foreign migrant women in South Korea with the rate in their own countries before coming to South Korea for the purpose of marriage. The research result explained that Mongolian women showed the second largest gap (- 47.7%), following Japanese marriage migrant women (- 63.7%) (Kim et al, 2010). The figure could be probably construed in two directions; the first interpretation is the lack of the women's capability when seeking for jobs in South Korean society and the second possibility is their outstanding educational or vocational quality in their home land. Looking over various data related to the educational level of marriage migrant women, this paper empowers the second possibility. Regardless of their outstanding quality as a career woman in their own motherland, they should adapt themselves to a totally new environment while settling down in South Korean society. It goes without saying that they be confronted with (un)expected hardships due to a language barrier and cultural differences while looking for employment in an unfamiliar foreign country. In short, the huge gap or declination rate between in Mongolia and in South Korea is reversely a strong proof of the high educational standard of Mongolian women.

Realistically, Mongolian marriage migrant women are mostly from the middle class rather than the lower income family, which is another proof that they are comparatively more educated than migrant women with other nationals. The [Table 5] shows that Mongolian women who married South Korean men in 2004 and 2005 were inclined to obtain the higher educational achievement even than their own Korean husbands. Another table below says that South Korean grooms married to Mongolian brides are found to show considerably the low proportion of employment in agricultural sector and over half of them (57.1 %) residing in Seoul metropolitan area, including Seoul city and Gyeonggi Province.

**[Table 5] Education Attainment of Brides and Grooms by Brides' Nationality (2004)**

(Unit: percent, %)

Nationality of Foreign Brides	Education Level of Foreign Brides			Education Level of Korean Grooms		
	Middle School	High School	College	Middle School	High School	College
China	48.0	45.3	6.7	29.9	59.3	10.8
Vietnam	50.1	45.3	4.6	27.9	60.2	11.9
Philippines	6.7	49.8	43.5	30.3	53.3	16.4
<b>Mongolia</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>58.2</b>	27.4	58.8	13.9

(Source: Kim, Doo-sub, 2010<sup>6</sup>)**[Table 6] Occupation of Korean Husbands by Brides' Nationality (2004)****{Mongolian Case Only}**

(Unit: percent, %)

Nationality of Foreign Brides	Occupation of Korean Husbands				
	Professor or, Manager or Clerical	Service or Sales	Technical or Manufacture	Agriculture or Simple Laborer	Others
Mongolia	23.0	25.7	31.1	17.1	3.1

(Source: Kim, Doo-sub, 2010)

**[Table 7] Residence after marriage by country of origin of foreign spouse, 2004 {Mongolian Case Only}**

(Unit: percent, %)

Country of origin of Foreign bride	Residence after marriage				
	Seoul	Seoul metropolitan	Five large cities <sup>1)</sup>	Other regions	Foreign country
<b>Mongolia</b>	22.2	34.9	10.9	31.9	0.0

(Source: Doo-Sub Kim, 2010)

In the midst of such demographic features shown, the role of Mongolian female marriage migrants is gradually coming to the fore in South Korean multicultural society. Above all, the well-educated migrated Mongolian women could act as an excellent mediator between the two nationals at this time that South Korea is being faced with nation-wide multi-dimensional demands by the surging multicultural phenomenon. Also, the prospect toward the Mongolian women resources holds great promise for future in terms of their strong desires for economic activities as well as their high intellectual level (Kim et al, 2010). Mongolian women's hope to enter the South Korean labor market and their willingness to receive vocational education and training (VET) is the highest among all marriage migrant women residing in South Korea. The [Table 8] indicates Mongolian female migrants' willingness or eagerness to participate in diverse VET programs. The enthusiastic attitude increases the suitability of the Mongolian female migrants to play a bridge role between the two cultures. Even though not the satisfactory level, many Mongolian women have been developing their career in diverse sectors like a bilingual teacher, cultural education lecturer, and hospital coordinator.

6. Table 5, 6, 7 / Micro data from the marriage and divorce registration for 1990-2005 are utilized in Doo-sub Kim's study

**[Table 8] Marriage Migrants' Willingness to Receive VET**  
**(Survey subject: 20~44 year-old women)**

(Unit: percent, %)

<b>Nationals</b>	<b>Willingness to Receive VET</b>
Mongolia	87.7
Philippines	86.9
Cambodia	82.5
Han Chinese	81.8
Vietnam	81.6
Thailand	79.2
Korean Chinese	72.0
Japan	68.2
North America, Australia, West- ern Europe	26.8
Others	75.3

Source: Kim et al. 2010)

Women resources development is extremely multi-dimensional. Various factors and surrounding circumstances must be properly integrated into a series of organized processes. Thinking of HRD for 'Mongolian,' 'marriage migrant', and 'women', more specific factors ought to be considered. Also, within the Mongolian female community, individual age group, educational attainments and intelligence, local features of their residence and personal expectations are some of significant considerations to build up suitable strategies for women resources development. Particularly, the development of Mongolian women's resources is to be faced with South Korea's already-existing social dilemmas such as inactive female labor market, women wage disparity, and women's career break, so their challenges ought to be sophisticatedly considered.

Recently, the Korean society is getting to pay more attention to marriage migrant women's human rights such as language and cultural barriers, domestic violence, and their social adaptation, but the issues are likely to touch a surface lightly. In the near future, more sophisticated and in-depth spheres must be definitely dealt with. The fundamental matters like a true equality within their own household and relations with a husband and his family should be handled as a critical issue that is a prerequisite of a radical change from the roots.



## CONCLUSION

This paper briefly dealt with migration of Mongolian population to South Korea and bi-national marriage status between the two people. Since the launch of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Republic of Korea, the bi-national partnership has been continuously stronger and more constructive as time goes on. As primary destination country of Mongolian migrants for the last two decades, South Korea has become the place where over forty thousand Mongolian population including Mongolian marriage migrant women are leading their life. While bi-national influences are very reciprocally intertwined, the Mongolian cross-bordered population need be reviewed in terms of wise human resources development because the population will be sure to continuously increase. In particular, thinking of Mongolian marriage migrant women's high education attainment, the prospect toward the Mongolian women resources holds great promise for future, and they may play a bridge role between the two countries as an excellent mediator. More profound and elaborate studies are needed for migrant women well-being and promising bi-national marriage.

## БНСУ-ЫГ ЗОРИХ МОНГОЛ ЭМЭГТЭЙЧҮҮДИЙН ГЭРЛЭЛТИЙН ШИЛЖИЛТ ХӨДӨЛГӨӨН

1990-ээд оны эхэн үед Монгол оронд өрнөсөн улс төр, нийгэм, эдийн засгийн өөрчлөлт болон зах зээлийн харилцаанд шилжих шилжилтийн үеийн хүндрэл бэрхшээл зэрэг хүчин зүйл Монгол улсын иргэдийн гадаад шилжих хөдөлгөөн идэвхижихэд нөлөөлсөн.

Өнөөгийн байдлаар нийт гадаадад оршин суугчдын дунд БНСУ-д оршин суугчид зонхилж байгаа бөгөөд тэдний шилжин суурьшсан шалтгааныг тодруулбал албан ба албан бусаар хөдөлмөр эрхлэх, суралцах, гэрлэлт болон бусад хэмээн ангилж болохуйц байна.

Энэхүү өгүүлэлд БНСУ-руу шилжих хөдөлгөөний тойм болон төдийлөн судлагдаагүй гэрлэлийн шилжилт, ялангуяа нийт гадаадын иргэдтэй гэрлэгсдийн зонхилох хувийг эзэлдэг солонгос иргэдтэй гэрлэсэн эмэгтэйчүүдийн талаар өгүүлсэн болно

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