

Marriage Migration of Mongolian Women to South Korea

Tsetsegjargal Tseden^a

Abstract

Underpinning most of the Korean-Mongolian relationship is the shared view that these two nations have racial, linguistic, historical, and religious connections. Both peoples cite the famous Mongolian blue spot, as well as the Mongolian Empire's close relations with the Koryo dynasty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, it is undeniable that in recent years, Mongolia's relations with South Korea have grown much wider and deeper in scope. When it comes to multiculturalism, a South Korea's overarching social phenomenon, tens of thousands of Mongolian expatriates are one of primary contributors to the first-ever trend throughout Korean history. Marriage migration of Mongolians to South Korea has increased since mid-1990s, in company with immigrant laborers, and became one of the primary contributors to the binational population movement. This paper deals with intertwining migration of Mongolian population to South Korea and describes characteristic of Korean-Mongolian binational marriage, using statistical data and other relevant researches.

Keywords

Bi-national relation, marriage migration, gender, women

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Republic of Korea¹ on March 26, 1990, the partnership between the two countries has been developing. In company with political, diplomatic, and economic relations, Mongolia-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 Korea and *vice versa*, Koreans to Mongolia, has steadily increased. The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced the final total of 61,766 Mongolians and 44,360 Koreans who visited each other in 2012 (MOFA of Republic of Korea 2013). More population mobility is expected as political, social, and cultural ties of both nations are flourishing.

The volume of population movement and the growth rate display the similar tendency. It is

meaningful and desirable in a point that the relations proceed in bilateral directions, not the unilateral one. 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. Next, most of Mongolian residents in South Korea (if they are legal laborers) are staying and working under the regulation of the Employment Permit System² for foreign workers, authorized by the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL). The rest population is Mongolian students and female marriage immigrants.

^aNational University of Mongolia, Mongolia

Correspondent Author:

Tsetsegjargal Tseden, National University of Mongolia, Mongolia
E-mail: tgl@num.edu.mn

Marriage migration of Mongolians to South Korea has increased since mid-1990s, in company with immigrant laborers, and became one of the primary contributors to the binational population movement. This paper describes characteristic of Korean-Mongolian binational marriage and Mongolian marriage immigrants in South Korea, using statistical data and other relevant researches.

MIGRATION OF MONGOLIAN POPULATION TO SOUTH KOREA

International migration of Mongolians started up with its challenging transition from a command economy to a free-market economy in 1990s. In the midst of being confronted with many attendant dilemmas during the transition, the rising unemployment rate and low remunerations or wages were the primary factors that contributed to Mongolian people's migration to foreign countries. At the initial period, many Mongolians who mastered their study in the West European countries started to settle in their destination countries by seeking for job opportunity. Also, in alliance with its transition to democracy, the socialism-based governmental control over the people dwindled, and many young generations became to travel abroad in freedom. Later, some of them persuaded their family members, relatives, and friends to join them. Starting from the 2000s, international migration of Mongolians has more intensified and assumed a more organized form. The number of people who migrated for short- or long-term overseas labor drastically increased (Tsogtsaikhan 2008). According to the firstly carried-out census in *Mongolians Living Abroad*, it has more than 107,410 citizens who used to live or are dwelling abroad for more than six months, as of 2010.

According to statistics, South Korea is the country in which the greatest proportion of the Mongolian population used to live or now live: neither China nor Russia. The noticeable figure of Table 1 below is

29,534 of Mongolians (male 56.1% and female 43.9%) who have experienced the basics or more than that of life in South Korea (Mongolian National Statistical Office 2011).

South Korea has been the primary destination country for the unskilled Mongolian labor force as early as 1987, most of whom were illegal immigrants. However, not until 1998 did the South Korean Government start to officially recruit low-skilled foreign workers, because the administration introduced South Korea's first-ever immigration policies at that juncture with economic liberalism throughout the society. Since then, Mongolian workers were officially entitled to work as factory trainees in South Korea, so the surging population has emigrated to work or study under the formal or private contracts (see Table 2).

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 guarantee the legal background for its nationals abroad to live and work in safety. The labor export was facilitated through many unauthorized individuals and related organizations as well as some authorized agencies.

Since the law was adopted by the Mongolian administration, however, an enlarged work force has been flowing into South Korea under the inter-governmental or inter-organizational intermediary contracts with legitimacy; simultaneously, the number of Mongolians who are leaving for South Korea by means of unauthorized private intermediaries or by their own will is, nevertheless, not declining. The illegal Mongolian migrants³ are likely to encounter the sweatshop evils and labor exploitation by working at the dangerous and dirty working places of small and medium-sized factories without any employee benefits like medical care and insurance protection.

Another plain truth is that most of the Mongolian

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	29,534	17,036	7,274	7,273	5,401	5,008

Note: Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office (2011).

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

Note: Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office (2011).

migrants are well-qualified (even if they engage in the low-level of works). Although most of them pursued higher education in Mongolia, they are compelled to face difficulties to find out an appropriate employment that is matched with their qualification and personal expectation. They are employed somewhat in the low status professions within South Korea (Alгаа 2013). Categorizing the migrants into individual employment fields, the majority belongs to industrial and service sector, except for others which could construe all sorts of manual or physical labors, so-called blue-color jobs (see Figure 1).

The mass of Mongolian migrants into South Korea is a considerable contribution to the economy of Mongolia. A great deal of remittances that Mongolian migrants monthly send to their family accounted for 10% of Mongolia's gross domestic product (GDP) in the mid-2000s. The transferred remittance is usually spent to cover fundamental living expenses, health, welfare, and education costs of Mongolian family members, which has henceforward improved their household living standards. Comparatively, the remittance has been barely invested in housing or private business in Mongolia (Alгаа 2013).

BINATIONAL MARRIAGE

Binational marriage is not a new phenomenon. The

Mongol Yuan dynasty's governance over the Koryo dynasty of Korea during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. That period was full of political, social, cultural, and ethnic mix 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 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 immigrant laborers. Owing to the political, economic, and social transformation of the transition period, all Mongolians had been suddenly endowed with a great

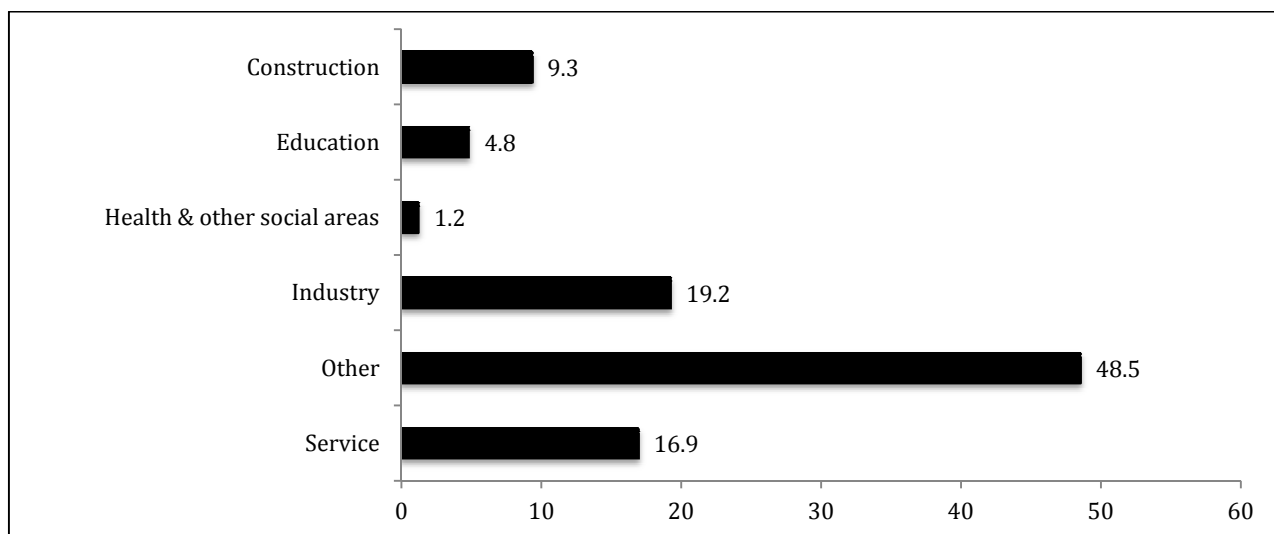


Figure 1. The Engagement of Mongolian Migrants in South Korea by Sector (2010) [Unit: Percent (%)]. Source: Mongolian National Statistical Office (2011).

deal of freedom and personal opportunities which were beyond the boundary conception under the socialism and planned economy. While Mongolian people were involved in the abruptly-switching environments, they might anticipate witnessing the short-term outputs and enjoying a huge benefit from the shift term. The reality of the Mongolian society was, however, somewhat different from their expectation. Especially, it has not brought any breakthrough in the political, economic, and social status of Mongolian women, except for education. Notwithstanding the high level of educational qualifications of the women, they were barely standing on more competitive prestige than men in Mongolian society. Instead, Mongolian women's participation rate in paid jobs has rather decreased. Another consequence of the "reverse" gender gap of the education attainment level created a serious imbalance between males and females in orbit for marriage. This social mood of Mongolia naturally influenced many women to migrate into, mainly, South Korea⁴ for the purpose of marriage as a way to improve the standard of living for themselves and

their family. The General Authority for State Registration of Mongolia regularly publishes data on international marriage of Mongolians. As Table 3 shows, among 6,158 international marriage cases of Mongolian citizens (2000-2011), Mongolian-South Korean couples account for 69.8% of a total. However, a Mongolian woman's marriage may seem to be made by her own choice, actually there operates a wider power of socio-economic influences on their decision to travel abroad for marriage.

Most Mongolian marriage immigrant women met their husbands through international marriage agencies and, surprisingly, a large number of couples reported that they had never seen each other before marriage (Seol 2006). Furthermore, the age gap between Mongolian brides and South Korean grooms is found to be over 10 years or so and more than one fourth South Korean grooms who got married with Mongolian brides have already had the previous marital experience while their Mongolian female spouses did not at all (Kim 2010).

As Figure 2 shows, number of binational marriages registered in Mongolia has been steadily

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	4,299
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

Note: Source: General Authority for State Registration, Mongolia (2011).

decreasing since 2007, from 701 in 2007 to 230 in 2011. It could be result of the Mongolia's rapid economic growth and the changes of Korean visa regulations and visa process.

MONGOLIAN MARRIAGE IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTH KOREA

The percentage of Mongolian marriage immigrant women in South Korea is not that high like percentage of binational marriage among international marriages in Mongolia. According to the Ministry of Security and Public Administration of Republic of Korea, the number of Mongolian female marriage immigrants in Korea was 2,858 and the percentage was just 1.3% (Ministry of Security and Public Administration [MOSPA] 2011). The recently released data by the Ministry of Education (MOE) indicate that the percentage increased into 2.2% (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2012). Also, a total of 4,120 couples are the combination of a Mongolian woman-South Korean man since 2004 up to 2012 (Statistics Korea 2012) (see Table 4).

About 40,000 Mongolian expatriates and their children are not nationalized South Korean citizens but Mongolian citizens even though they have resided

and worked in South Korea for a long time. And, most of the Mongolian workers' children are living together with them and going to school in South Korea, and being 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 immigrants or children under the multicultural family background. If not only marriage immigrants (nationalized South Korean citizens) but also all non-nationalized expatriates (all residing foreigners) are numbered, Mongolians will be graded far higher. The Mongol School located in Seoul proves the assumption. The school principal confessed the reason of her school foundation as following: According to 2003 statistics by the MOE, 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 and marriage immigrants.

The noticeable feature of Mongolian marriage immigrant women is their high-level education attainment in comparison to other female marriage

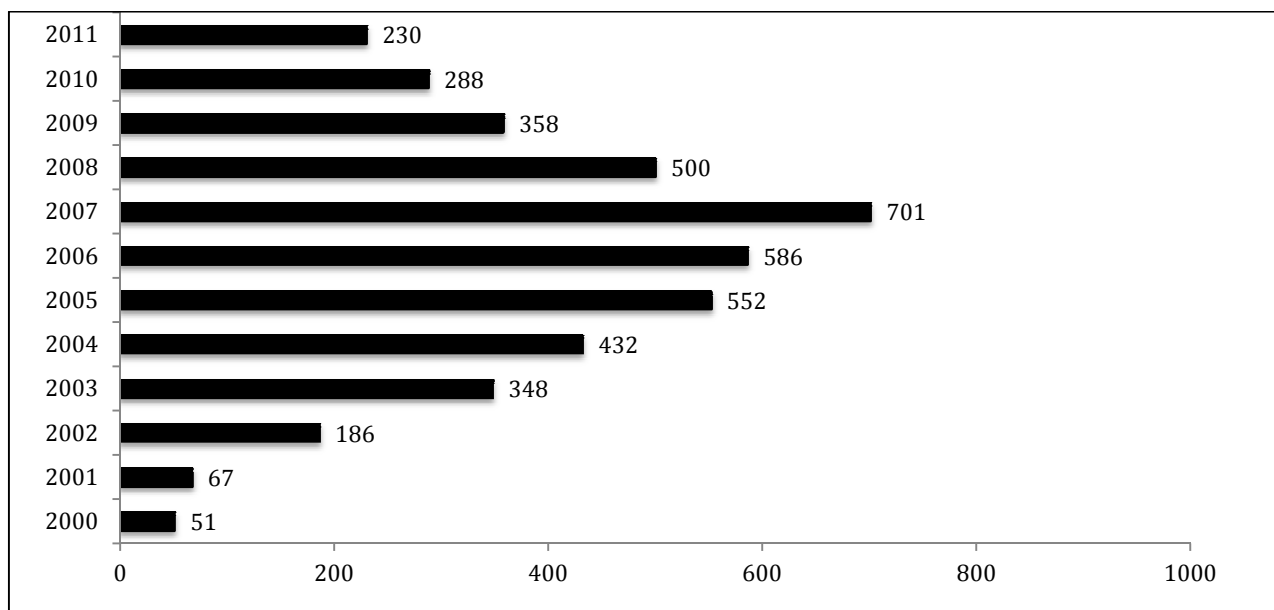


Figure 2. The Number of Binational Marriage (Mongolians-Koreans, 2000-2011) (Unit: the Number of People). Source: General Authority for State Registration, Mongolia (2011).

Table 4. Nationality of Marriage Immigrants in Korea (2011) (Unit: the Number of People, %)

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

Notes: Above-surveyed statistic figures include a total of male and female marriage immigrants, but it could be fine that the figure is almost equivalent to Mongolian female marriage immigrants. According to the Ministry of Security and Public Administration’s 2009 statistics, there is no Mongolian male marriage immigrant in South Korea at all. Source: Ministry of Security and Public Administration, Republic of Korea (2011).

immigrants in South Korea. In 2009, the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) announced its survey result that 62% of Mongolian immigrant women got a college education. The figure is worthwhile to be closely looked, especially, compared with (both Korean and Han) Chinese female marriage immigrants who have recorded the highest percentage among all female marriage immigrants; the higher education level of Korean Chinese were only 13%, and Han-Chinese had 19% (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family [MOGEF] 2009). The Policy Report of 2010, “Research Studies to Support the Employment of Female Marriage Immigrants”,

written by researchers of three ministries and one public research institute, compared the employment rate of foreign immigrant women in South Korea with the rate in their own countries before marriage. The research result explained that Mongolian women showed the second largest gap (-47.7%), following Japanese marriage migrant women (-63.7%) (Kim and Lee 2010). The percent 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 immigrant 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 Korea. Needless to say, 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 Mongolia and South Korea is reversely a strong proof of the high educational standard of Mongolian women.

Realistically, Mongolian marriage immigrant women are mostly from the middle class rather than the lower income family, which is another proof that they are comparatively more educated than immigrant women with other nationals. Table 5 shows that Mongolian women who married Korean men in 2004 and 2005 were inclined to obtain the higher educational achievement even than their own Korean husbands.

Korean grooms married to Mongolian brides are found to show unusually low proportions in agricultural laborer and more than half of them (57.1%) residing in the Seoul metropolitan area, including Seoul (see Table 6).

In the midst of such demographic features shown, the role of Mongolian female marriage immigrants is gradually coming to the fore in South Korean multicultural society (see Table 7).

Above all, the well-educated migrated Mongolian women are a great asset in promoting economic, social, and cultural links within various stakeholders. 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 and Lee 2010). Mongolian women's hope to enter the labor market and willingness to receive vocational education and

training (VET) are the highest among all marriage immigrant women residing in South Korea. Table 8 indicates Mongolian female immigrants' active willingness to participate in diverse VET courses. The enthusiastic attitude increases the suitability of the Mongolian female immigrants 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.

Women resources development is extremely multi-dimensional. Various factors and surrounding circumstances must be integrated into a series of organized processes. Thinking of Human Resource Development 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 unique social feature, the (Koreanized) multiculturalism, because they are supposed to encounter the existing social dilemmas such as inactive female labor market, women wage disparity, and women's career break.

Recently, the Korean society is getting to pay more attention to marriage immigrant 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 requires a radical change from the roots.

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
Mongolia	6.6	35.2	58.2	27.4	58.8	13.9

Note: Source: Kim (2010)⁵.

Table 6. Occupation of Korean Husbands by Brides' Nationality (2004) (Mongolian Case Only) (Unit: Percent, %)

Nationality of foreign brides	Occupation of Korean husbands				
	Professor, manage, or clerical	Service or sales	Technical or manufacture	Agriculture or simple laborer	Others
Mongolia	23.0	25.7	31.1	17.1	3.1

Note: Source: Kim (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	Other regions	Foreign country
Mongolia	22.2	34.9	10.9	31.9	0.0

Note: Source: Kim (2010).

Table 8. Marriage Migrants' Willingness to Receive VET (Survey Subject: 20-44-Year-Old Women) (Unit: Percent, %)

	Nationals	Willingness to receive VET
1	Mongolia	87.7
2	Philippines	86.9
3	Cambodia	82.5
4	Han Chinese	81.8
5	Vietnam	81.6
6	Thailand	79.2
7	Korean Chinese	72.0
8	Japan	68.2
9	North America, Australia, and Western Europe	26.8
10	Others	75.3

Note: Source: Kim (2010).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper dealt with intertwining migration of Mongolian population to South Korea and Korean-Mongolian binational marriage.

Since the launch of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Republic of Korea (South Korea), the binational partnership has been continuously stronger and more constructive as time goes on.

South Korea has become the primary destination country for Mongolian migrants for the last two decades. About 40,000 Mongolian population including Mongolian marriage migrant women influencing on demographic and socioeconomic changes in both South Korea and Mongolia. However, binational marriages registered in Mongolia have been steadily declining, there is still willingness of Mongolian women to marry Korean men and need of international marriage in Korea. It can be assumed that binational marriage will be continuing.

The Mongolian women married with a Korean man 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. Regarding the fact that the Mongolian immigrant women experienced both cultures, which are not abstract or superficial but real hand-on experiences acquired from everyday life, their bridge role deserves high expectation.

The general human rights for marriage immigrant women, the more essential agendas like gender equality deal with an invisible “value”, so more profound and elaborate studies are needed for migrant women and binational marriage.

Notes

1. South Korea's official country name in 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 (Human Resources Development Service of Korea's homepage, <http://www.hrdkorea.or.kr/ENG/4/2>).

3. Those people who are illegally employed and are overstaying with 30-day tourist visas on which most Mongolians enter South Korea.
4. It could be shown that the binational 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.
5. The sources of Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 are micro data from the marriage and divorce registration for 1990-2005, are utilized in Doo-Sub Kim's study.

References

- Algae, S. 2013. “Impact of Out-migration to Korea: Macro- and Micro-Level Consequences in Mongolia.” *The Journal of Multicultural Society* 4(1):32-75.
- Batbayar, T. 2010. “Mongolia's Foreign Policy in the 1990s: New Identity and New Challenges.” *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia* 17:202-236.
- Campi, A. 2012. *Expanding Prospects for ROK-Mongolian Relations—The View From Ulaanbaatar*. Retrieved (http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei_kor_eacompass_template_aliciacampi.pdf).
- Foreign Investment and Foreign Trade Agency of Mongolia (FIFTA). Eurasia Capital. 2011. *Korea and Mongolia*. Retrieved (<http://www.eurasiac.com>).
- Foreign Investment and Foreign Trade Agency of Mongolia (FIFTA). Eurasia Capital. 2011. Retrieved (<http://www.eurasiac.com>).
- Kim, D. S. 2010. “The Rise of Cross-border Marriage and Divorce in Contemporary South Korea.” In *Asian Cross-border Marriage Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press.
- Kim, S. K. and T. Lee. 2010. “Research Studies to Support the Employment of Female Marriage Immigrants.” Policy Report 2010-09.
- Ministry of Education (MOE). 2012. Education Statistic Data.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Republic of Korea. 2011. *Overview on Mongolia*. Retrieved (<http://www.mofa.go.kr>).
- . 2012. *Brief Information on Mongolia*. Retrieved (<http://www.mofa.go.kr>).

- . 2013. *Brief Information on Mongolia*. Retrieved (<http://www.mofa.go.kr>).
- Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF). 2009. *Education Level of Marriage Immigrant Women in South Korea*. Seoul, Republic of Korea.
- Ministry of Security and Public Administration (MOSPA). 2011. *Overview on Migration and Immigrants*. Retrieved (<http://www.mospa.go.kr>).
- Mongolian National Statistical Office. 2011. *National Census on Mongolians living abroad*. Ulaanbaatar.
- Okin, S. M. 1999. "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" Pp. 9-24 in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Edited by J. Cohen, M. Howard, and M. C. Nussbaum. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University.
- Remarks by Sukhbaatar Batbold, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2009. Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute.
- Seol, D.-H. 2006. *Women Marriage Immigrants in South Korea: Immigration Process and Adaptation*. Retrieved (http://www.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/capas/publication/newsletter/N33/33_01-2.pdf).
- Statistics Korea. 2012. *Chronological Statistics on Population Movement: The Number of International Marriages (the Country-based)*. Seoul, Republic of Korea.
- Tsogtsaikhan, B. 2008. "Demographic Changes and Labor Migration in Mongolia." Presented at the *PECC-ABAC Conference on "Demographic Change and International Labor Mobility in the Asia Pacific Region: Implications for Business and Cooperation"*. March 25-26, Seoul, Korea.

Bio

Tsetsegjargal Tseden, Ph.D., associate professor, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia; research field: gender issues in Mongolia.