

Chapter 7 International Migration and Foreign Workers in South Korea

Yin Hao

Director & Professor

Population Research Institute

Academy of Northeast Asia Study, Jilin University

China

Tel: 86-431-516-6071 Fax: 86-431-518-4603

E-mail: yinhao@public.cc.jl.cn

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Abstract

In order to alleviate the population pressure at home, South Korea established the Immigration Law in 1962 and encouraged migration abroad. About four decades since the early 1960s, the number of South Korean permanent emigrants numbered nearly 900,000; among these, about 80% was linked migration or marriage migration, and over 70% chose America as their destination. However, since the late 1990s, the trend of South Korean migration has reversed, and the phenomenon of counter stream has appeared.

Several decades of industrial development, together with the improvement in South Korean economic standards, have gradually increased the country's domestic wages. In particular, in the mid-1980s, the domestic labor movement was unprecedentedly strong

and wages subsequently increased sharply. The result was that South Korean firms progressively invested abroad, and the small and medium-size enterprises in South Korea suffered from a great labor shortage. The phenomenon of South Korean foreign workers came into being in these circumstances.

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a massive influx of foreign labor into South Korea. These foreign workers came for financial reasons through employment, mostly from Asian countries where the income level is much lower than that in South Korea, and entered South Korea by various legal as well as illegal channels. The main reasons for this increase in number of foreign workers have been the severe labor shortage in South Korean companies and the wide disparity in income standards between South Korea and the countries of the foreign workers. The substantial increase in the number of foreign workers has aroused much attention by the accompanying problems. In order to solve the labor shortage in the country's companies, especially some small and medium-size enterprises, the South Korean government established the Foreign Industrial Training Program in 1991. This was an expedient measure because, although foreign trainees are not employees in the real sense, the foreign trainees can be employed as non-experienced workers. The South Korean government then set up the Foreign Industrial Training Employment Permit System in 1998 to support the program.

Not many foreign workers in South Korea are employed legally, and most of those that are academics and workers with high skills such as university professors, researchers, language instructors and others engaged in special professions. Although such people are foreign workers, the problem has mainly stemmed from foreign industrial trainees and so-called illegal sojourners.

The so-called illegal foreign workers constitute a large proportion of all foreign workers, and their number has been continuously increasing. These illegal foreign workers mainly involve those who have overstayed their legal period in South Korea and those who entered the country by various illegal channels. This increase in the number of illegal foreign workers has resulted in many social and economic problems in South Korea.

要 約

韓国では、国内の人口圧力を緩和させるための人口政策の一環として、1962年に「海外移民法」を制定し、積極的な海外移民策を導入した。それから、約四十年間にわたり、海外への移民は 90 万人近くに達しているが、その八割近

くは縁故移動または縁事移動（国際結婚）によるものである。また、海外移民の七割以上がアメリカへの移民である。しかしながら、1990年代に入ってから、韓国の移民の流れには逆流が発生し、帰還移動者が増えるようになっている。

一方、1960年代初めにスタートした工業化過程において、経済成長に伴い、韓国の賃金水準も次第に上昇してきた。とくに、1980年代後半の労働運動の高まりに伴って、賃金が急上昇した。その中で、中小企業には労働力不足が生じてきた。韓国の外国人労働者問題はまさにこのような背景のもとで発生したものである。

1980年代半ば頃から、外国人労働者が韓国に流入するようになったが、そのほとんどは韓国での就労を目的とした、韓国より所得水準の低いアジア諸国からの入国者であった。韓国政府は、国内中小企業の人手不足を緩和させる目的で、1991年に外国人産業研修生制度を導入し、外国から研修生を受け入れはじめた。研修生は、正規な就業者ではないが、実際にはほとんどの場合において単純労働者として労働に従事している。つまり、韓国政府は研修生という便宜的な方法で外国人労働者を導入してきたのである。1998年、韓国政府は外国人産業研修生就業制度を導入した。

韓国の合法的外国人就業者はそれほど多くなく、大学教授、研究者、語学教師またはその他の特定職業などの頭脳労働者である。韓国の外国人労働者問題を論ずる場合、その対象となるのは、主に外国人産業研修生といわゆる外国人不法就業者である。外国人不法就業者とは、不法残留または不法入国して就労している外国人であり、その増加が韓国社会に多くの問題をもたらしている。韓国では今後しばらくは外国人労働者問題に悩まされ続けるであろう。