

## **Democratizing and Globalizing U.S.-Korea Relations**

*An Address by Katharine H.S. Moon Marking the Establishment of SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies at Brookings*

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Hello! I am very happy today-- to be with you here at Brookings and to be surrounded by three-four generations of family members.

My husband Jeff Frankel and I had lunch with Dr. Han (Sung-joo) just about two weeks ago in Seoul. As Dr. Han mentioned in his video greeting, I have been working on U.S.-Korea relations officially since I was 21 years old. As an undergraduate at Smith College, I worked in the Political Section of the U.S. embassy in Seoul. I was very excited to be in the midst of real-life politics as well as cocktail parties that seemed glamorous at the time.

It was 1985. Two days after I began my post, drama unfolded on May 23: 73 college students broke into the U.S. Cultural Center and occupied the library for about four days. I witnessed first-hand the dedication of the embassy staff to resolve the crisis in a safe and peaceful way. Round-the-clock negotiations, sleepless nights, and unceasing determination to hear out the students and their passion for democracy, as well as to maintain the stability of relations between Seoul and Washington. Kathy Stephens, now former ambassador to Korea, and Ed Dong, currently minister-counselor at the embassy, were part of that hard-working team.

That was my initiation into foreign policy and diplomacy.

Thirty years later, here I am, at Brookings, embarking on a great adventure! In the months I have been working with my colleagues at Brookings, I have come to realize that this is my dream job. I truly feel that this job was made for me and that I was made for this job. Both Brookings and I take seriously scholarly depth and integrity. And we work with the conviction that good scholarship can educate the larger public and accurately inform policy.

I plan to focus my initial work on three main areas: 1) issues of democracy in Korea 2) a more global approach to North Korea; 3) and a broadening of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Today, the Republic of Korea boasts a dynamic democracy, per capita income rivaling some European countries, leadership in telecommunications, hot cultural exports, and a green growth strategy to which the government and many in the private sector are committed. A film industry that enjoys international acclaim, world-class divas who perform at grand opera houses, students who rank at the top of international test scores, and the largest number of international students per capita in the United States, especially in graduate studies.

Koreans are world-famous for working hard. But they also play hard. Singing and dancing are practically part of the Korean DNA. I am no exception.

Although I am a San Francisco native, I spent my early childhood in the 1960s in the home of my maternal grandparents. I was a physical appendage to my grandmother, Kim Yei Yang, when she went to the Korean mountains and streamsides to picnic with her friends, play *hwato*, and dance and sing to the beat of the *jango*, the Korean hour-glass drum. I learned to appreciate the heart-throbbing beat of traditional Korean music and the wisdom of simply enjoying life even through the hard times that my elders embodied.

Korea is probably the only society where tone-deaf people go to schools and pay to have buckets put over their heads in order to learn how to sing. Of course, many of you here are experts at dancing Gangnam Style. What you may not know is that In Poland, 2012, beauty contestants performed Gangnam Style on stage—in bikinis! K-pop and the Korean wave are pervasive around the globe. Recently, Thailand created an entire Thai drama about watching Korean dramas!

Even Egypt holds K-pop competitions. A teenager named Eman Badr won in 2011. An Egyptian newspaper noted: she is “self-taught in Korean reading, writing and speaking, and dreams of one day living in South Korea.” This is Korean soft power at work and a “Korean Dream” spreading globally.

But the reality of the Korean Dream, like the counterpart in America, is challenging; disappointment is part of the challenge. Thousands of defectors and refugees from the DPRK enjoy legal citizenship south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. A few among them have become leaders in the ROK government, and one among the more than 25,000 is in the National Assembly. But most experience discrimination and dislocation in their adopted country. How will this group of marginalized Koreans develop a national identity that aligns with the domestic and foreign policies of the Republic of Korea?

Right now, most defectors tend to vote conservatively and oppose the DPRK regime. But will that continue? How these “new Koreans” regard the United States and the alliance over time, perhaps as a hindrance to reunification, or as inadequately dealing with Pyongyang, or something else—we do not know. In the mid to long-term, their minority status will compel them to force changes in Korean democracy. If they remain on the margins of society, what kinds of interpreters of democracy might they become to their kin and colleagues in the North, especially if and when unification begins?

Defectors already have become vocal demanders of human rights protection for North Koreans in China, and Korean legislators have added their support. Americans have provided funding and training for defector groups. When Pyongyang protests balloon launches that rain down propaganda and transistor radios in North Korea, not only defectors, but Americans too get implicated. Such new actors complicate the U.S.-peninsular relationship. Can our respective democracies be flexible enough to accommodate new actors and issues? What kinds of challenges and opportunities will new demographic factors present to U.S.-Korea relations?

And while Koreans protest China's unjust treatment of North Korean border-crossers, tens of thousands of Chinese cross into Korea to earn higher wages and develop skills. They are joined by tens of thousands of other foreign nationals, from the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Nepal to name several.

And they are not necessarily temporary migrants. Many are the spouses, mostly wives, of Koreans. They become naturalized as ROK citizens and rear children who are bi- or multi-racial Koreans. Estimates show that by 2020, these "new Koreans" will exceed 1.5 million in a population of 50 million, in addition to over 1 million foreign nationals working in Korea today. By 2030, immigrants could make up more than 6 percent, and by 2050, about 10% of the population. This is brand new territory for a nation with a self-identity as *danil minjok*, one ethnicity, one heritage.

The need for foreign labor and for human reproduction is critical in a country with the lowest birthrate in the world, excepting only Singapore, and with one of the fastest aging populations. By 2050, the elderly will comprise close to 40% of the population. Each will depend on two young people to support them economically. Compare that with 2010, when about 15 young people were working to support each of the elderly. The working-age population will peak in 2016; in 2050, 5.5% of GDP will go to pensions while the growth rate is expected to shrink dramatically.

We know that elderly populations tend to be politically and economically conservative. What might be the implications for Korea's foreign policy and specifically, U.S.-Korea relations? How can and will the new Koreans participate in democratic life? This includes the question, what foreign policy preferences they will espouse. We need to consider how willing and able the elderly and the hyphenated Koreans will be to support government assistance to defectors and possibly millions of refugees? How willing and able would they be to pay for reunification with the North? How will they calculate their individual and family needs, and will those claim priority over support for increased burden-sharing in the alliance with the U.S.?

As students of democracies, we have to study the obvious and not-so-obvious manifestations of these and other societal changes.

Although strategic alliances are rooted in geopolitics, they cannot endure and thrive without domestic public support. Koreans and Americans need to invest in domestic assets that tie the two peoples together: democratic values and governance; aspirational norms that include equality in gender, ethnicity, and class—and non-discrimination— as well as people-to-people diplomacy among various professions, age groups, and issues areas.

In order to make bilateral relations more productive, the U.S. and Korea also need to think and act globally, together. In the 2000s, with the rise of China and the economic decline of Japan, regional changes became more important in calculating the purpose and capabilities of the alliance. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars showed how the alliance and the military preparedness of both countries needed to be more globally connected. In the current decade, an increased focus on and expansion of U.S. military strategy and assets called "Reposturing" touches the security and politics of numerous nations in the Asia-Pacific.

I'm glad that Dean Harding is with us today. I originally entered my Ph.D. program at Princeton University to specialize in Chinese politics. It will be useful in my work at Brookings. Today, we all think about China. With respect to North Korea, China's focus on its own domestic stability, its allegiance to treaty obligations with Pyongyang, and its economic primacy in the DPRK's foreign investments and market share make Beijing an unlikely candidate to lead the way in opening up the North in favor of the interests of the U.S. and the ROK. In my opinion, the U.S. and the South Korea have been too dependent on China, with few constructive outcomes to show for their hopes and expectations.

We of course need to maintain good partnership with China and Japan, but we need to learn from those who actually have been able to make peace and diplomatic headway with Pyongyang: Europe, Australia, Canada, Southeast Asia, South America. At least 45 European countries, as well as the European Union, have diplomatic ties with North Korea, including close allies of the U.S.: the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey. To the south, Brazil, Mexico, and over 20 Latin American nations engage the DPRK.

In Asia, almost all the members of ASEAN work with North Korea legally and with established protocol. When I was in the North last summer on a research trip with academics from the U.S. and Canada, I was startled to see cans of Coca Cola at a restaurant: I studied a can like a strange artifact and found written on it [www.cocacola.it](http://www.cocacola.it). Italy buys Coke from the U.S. and then sells it to North Korea. Is the U.S. really free of trade with the DPRK? Malaysian fruit drinks flood the North Korean market, and Mongolians, whose economy is fast-growing, work with North Koreans on mining technology, tourism, and other enterprises. North Korea is not as isolated as some might want it to be, and frankly, other countries are securing their market share with a long-term view in mind. Ultimately, the numerous nations with the diplomatic ties will be obligated to assist the North and the costs of reform and/or reunification. This is a practical consideration the U.S. and South Korea should keep in mind.

President Park Geun-hye has already moved to connect the ROK's economic and geopolitical interests with Europe and with Southeast Asia. The VIP policy—reaching out to Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which all have diplomatic ties with the DPRK—is a significant start.

Increasingly, Korea's global reach extends farther in geography and issues. In 2010, it became the first non-G7 country to host a summit meeting of the G20. One of the most substantive accomplishments at that meeting was the plan for IMF reform, particularly an expansion of quotas and reallocation away from over-represented European countries toward under-represented Asian countries. This was a big leap forward in influencing global governance.

Last, Korea's "miracle on the Han" extends to the environment and offers lessons for multilateral cooperation. As in many other rapidly developing countries, Korea's air and water pollution had risen intolerably with rapid industrialization. But in the 1990s (by which time income had reached the threshold of about 7 million *won* per capita and democracy was in place), Korea raced back down the far side of the Environmental Kuznets Curve. Sulfur dioxide concentrations in Seoul peaked in 1991, but fell 85% by 1997. These days, air in Korea is again turning brown as the result of pollution blowing across the Yellow Sea from China, thus embodying the trans-border phase of environmental issues. When dealing with the global commons, national efforts have limits. Therefore, Korea's leadership on the environment is most welcome. Hopefully, the United States will follow suit.

In closing, the U.S.-ROK alliance is of course bilateral, but the way the world works is multilateral and global. The U.S. and Korea must find ways to expand common interests and to make them globally more relevant.

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ceaseless support and care. And all those who are working behind the scenes to make today and the study of Korea a success. I also thank my late father, Douglas Kwang-Hwan Moon, for having encouraged me to serve as a human bridge between the United States and Korea since I was a child— and for having instilled in me the greatest good: the importance of education and public service.

Thank you.