

Introduction: A Country of Historical Legacies, Innovation and Transformation*

Won-Ho Kim**

INTRODUCTION

Many countries have experienced numerous challenges while trying to meet their populations' demands and respond to surrounding international circumstances. Among others, historical legacies have often defined their scope of reactions and manoeuvres, limiting their levels of transformation. In many cases, this results in marginal changes and constant internal struggles between vested interests and revisionist reformers.

South Korea, in this sense, is a unique case. Since the peninsula's division at the end of World War II, it has undergone tremendous transformation in political, economic, societal, cultural, and international dimensions. Post-colonial inherent poverty, the Korean War, civilian and military dictatorships, and financial crises exposed the

nation to a series of domestic and international challenges that would normally be insurmountable. However, sound nationalism, a creative state, consistent investment in universal education, and competition among private businesses ultimately made it possible to fundamentally transform the state, society, international relations, and culture. This did not occur, however, without sacrifices and continuous development challenges.

This special issue of the journal *OASIS* contains nine academic articles on Korea's historical legacies, geopolitical strategies, international development cooperation, technological innovation, and sociocultural changes and challenges. While this list of themes cannot exhaustively cover all important aspects of South Korea for a country study, it provides a solid academic

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n41.02>

** Professor Emeritus, Graduate School of International and Area Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea; Senior Fellow, Caribbean Research Center, Liaocheng University, China.

foundation for understanding the country's current state and position. Additional current themes of high relevance might include inter-Korean relations, defence industry and its international implications, shrinking population and limited potential economic growth, and the Korean cultural wave. This issue also includes three articles on the international challenges faced by Uruguay, Brazil, and India.

The following sections discuss themes covered by the first two articles on Korea's historical legacies and geopolitical strategies; the next three papers on Korea-Latin American relations; two works on Korea's technological innovation and the state's role; and finally, two essays on Korea's sociocultural changes regarding plastic surgery and multiculturalism. The papers on Uruguay, Brazil, and India are discussed where Korea's case study relates to their research questions, particularly regarding geopolitical strategies and innovation agendas.

HISTORICAL MEMORY AND SECURITY DILEMMAS

South Korea's foreign policy challenges present a unique case study in how middle powers manage both historical legacies and contemporary security dilemmas. The two papers examine two crucial dimensions of South Korea's international relations: its complicated relationship with Japan shaped by historical memory, by Maurício Luiz Borges Ramos Días, and its strategic positioning between the United States and

China influenced by North Korean threats, by Alana Camoça Gonçalves de Oliveira, Martha Silveira Nummer and Thaisa da Silva Viana. While these issues may appear distinct, they are interconnected through South Korea's need to maintain strategic autonomy while ensuring security in an increasingly complex regional environment.

The first dimension concerns South Korea-Japan relations, which continue to be affected by historical memory despite multiple attempts at reconciliation. The 1965 normalisation treaty between South Korea and Japan, while establishing formal diplomatic relations, did not resolve fundamental issues regarding historical interpretation and compensation for colonial-era damages. This incomplete resolution has led to periodic resurgences of tension, most recently seen in the 2019 dispute over forced labour compensation, where South Korean courts allowed individual citizens to sue Japanese companies. This pattern suggests that historical memory acts not as a permanent barrier but as a dormant factor that can resurface when triggered by political developments in either country.

The United States has repeatedly attempted to mediate these tensions, both during the 1965 normalisation and in recent years, recognising the strategic importance of cooperation between its two key Asian allies. However, American involvement, while often catalysing temporary resolutions, has not addressed the underlying divergence in historical narratives between the two nations. This divergence is particularly evident in how each country

remembers the wartime period, with South Korea focusing intensely on colonial experiences while Japanese historical memory creates what scholars describe as a “narrative black hole” around Korea (Sneider, 2022). The persistence of separate historical memories suggests that true reconciliation requires more than diplomatic agreements or external pressure. As demonstrated by recent developments, even periods of improved relations can be disrupted by new political tensions or court decisions.

The second dimension of South Korea’s foreign policy concerns its strategic positioning between the United States and China, complicated by the ongoing North Korean nuclear threat. South Korea’s approach has evolved beyond simple balancing or bandwagoning to embrace what scholars identify as a sophisticated hedging strategy. This strategy involves five key components: economic-pragmatism, binding-engagement, limited-bandwagoning, dominance-denial, and indirect-balancing (Kuik, 2015).

While both progressive and conservative South Korean governments have employed elements of hedging, their approaches have been influenced by different perceptions of threat and opportunity. However, this hedging behaviour occurs primarily during periods of relative stability. During times of heightened uncertainty or perceived threat from North Korea, South Korean policy tends to shift toward more explicit balancing or even bandwagoning with the United States.

This pattern differs from other middle powers’ strategic choices as this special issue discusses the case of Uruguay in the article by Magdalena Bas-Vilizzio and Nicolás Pose-Ferraro, the case of Brazil in the paper by Gustavo Fornari Dall’Agnol, and Graciele De Conti Pagliari, and the case of India in the work by Sahibzada Muhammad Usman, and Jia Wenshan. Unlike Uruguay’s positioning between Argentina and Brazil, or Brazil’s balancing between the U.S. and China, South Korea’s strategic calculations are fundamentally shaped by the existential threat from North Korea. This security imperative has maintained the U.S. alliance as a cornerstone of South Korean foreign policy, even as administrations have varied in their approach to China (Kuik, 2015). The comparison with India’s strategic positioning, particularly regarding China’s Belt and Road Initiative, offers interesting parallels. Like India, South Korea must balance economic opportunities with security concerns in its relationship with China. However, South Korea’s geographic proximity to China and its alliance with the United States create a more complex strategic environment.

The intersection of these two dimensions – historical memory and strategic hedging – reveals how South Korea’s foreign policy choices are constrained by both past legacies and present security imperatives. The periodic resurgence of historical tensions with Japan can complicate South Korea’s hedging strategy, potentially limiting its strategic options in dealing with China

and North Korea. Conversely, security imperatives may sometimes override historical grievances, as seen in moments of trilateral cooperation between South Korea, Japan, and the United States in response to North Korean provocations. Looking forward, South Korea's strategic environment suggests that both dimensions will continue to require careful management. The potential for historical issues to resurface with Japan remains, even as strategic necessity pushes for closer cooperation. Similarly, while hedging may remain South Korea's preferred strategy in dealing with U.S.-China competition, the North Korean threat ensures that the U.S. alliance will remain fundamental to South Korean security policy.

This analysis suggests that South Korea's foreign policy challenges cannot be fully understood through traditional frameworks of balancing or bandwagoning alone. Instead, they require recognition of how historical memory can constrain strategic choices, and how security imperatives can sometimes override but not eliminate historical grievances. As regional tensions increase and great power competition intensifies, South Korea's ability to cope with these complex dynamics while maintaining strategic autonomy will become increasingly crucial.

The experience of South Korea offers important lessons for understanding how middle powers can maintain strategic autonomy while managing both historical legacies and contemporary security challenges. It demonstrates that while external pressures and security imperatives may

drive strategic choices, domestic factors and historical memory continue to play crucial roles in shaping foreign policy outcomes. This suggests that analyses of middle power behaviour must consider not only structural factors but also the complex interplay between history, domestic politics, and strategic necessity.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION WITH LATIN AMERICA

The relationship between South Korea and Latin America has evolved significantly over the decades, marked by a complex interplay of historical, political, and economic factors. This section explores the multifaceted nature of South Korea's development cooperation with Latin America, drawing insights from three academic papers that focus on different aspects of these relations: South Korea-Cuba relations by Ruvislei González Saez, technological diplomacy in Latin America by Bárbara Bavolet, Matías Benítez and Desirée Chaure, and the strategic partnership between South Korea and Colombia by Ivonne Ramos and Betsy Suárez. These papers collectively highlight the challenges and opportunities inherent in South Korea's engagement with Latin America, emphasising the need for pragmatic approaches, technological collaboration, and strategic partnerships.

The relationship between South Korea and Cuba offers a unique lens through which to examine the broader dynamics of South Korea-Latin America relations. Historically, the diplomatic ties between

South Korea and Cuba were *de facto* severed following the Cuban Revolution in 1959. However, as highlighted by Ruvislei González Saez, there was no formal declaration of a diplomatic break, leading to a complex *de facto* relationship that has persisted over the years. Since the late 1990s, this relationship has been characterised by various forms of engagement, including tourism, cultural exchanges, bilateral trade, and interactions with ethnic Korean descendants in Cuba.

In a sense, Cuba has effectively managed a hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning strategy in its relations with both North Korea and South Korea. This strategic manoeuvring has allowed Cuba to deal with the geopolitical landscape while maintaining its identity and pursuing its national interests. For South Korea, the future challenge lies in enhancing its development assistance programs toward Cuba while overcoming political and socioeconomic differences, and possible barriers to be imposed by US administrations. To achieve this, South Korea must adopt a pragmatic approach that acknowledges the historical complexities of its relationship with Cuba. This involves recognising Cuba's unique geopolitical position and its strategic interests in maintaining balanced relationships with both Koreas. By focusing on areas of mutual interest such as tourism, cultural exchange, and trade, and on areas of Cuba's critical needs such as food production and electric power generation, South Korea can build trust and foster deeper cooperation with Cuba. Additionally, engaging with

ethnic Korean communities in Cuba can serve as a bridge for cultural understanding and collaboration.

Barbara Bavoleo, Matías Benítez and Desirée Chaure delve into the role of technological diplomacy as a cornerstone of South Korea's development cooperation strategy in Latin America. As a technological powerhouse, South Korea has positioned itself as a leader in science, technology, and innovation. This article raises critical questions about whether South Korea's technological development model will facilitate autonomous development in Latin America or perpetuate technological dependency.

South Korea's experience demonstrates that investments in education and research and development (R&D) are crucial for achieving technological advancement. The country's rapid transformation from a war-torn nation to a global technology leader was driven by strategic investments in human capital and innovation ecosystems. However, the potential for technological dependency remains a concern. To mitigate this risk, Latin American countries must develop robust local development strategies that prioritise education and R&D. By learning from South Korea's model while tailoring it to their specific contexts, these countries can harness technology as a catalyst for growth rather than becoming reliant on external sources.

South Korea's technology diplomacy should focus on collaborative partnerships that promote knowledge sharing and capacity building. Initiatives such as joint research projects, technology transfer

programmes, and educational exchanges can empower Latin American countries to develop their own technological capabilities. By fostering an environment of mutual learning and innovation, South Korea can contribute to building resilient economies in Latin America that are equipped to tackle future challenges.

Colombia stands out as a pivotal partner for South Korea's triangular cooperation efforts aimed at delivering development solutions across the Global South. As Ivonne Ramos and Betsy Suárez discuss, Colombia is not only a strategic ally but also an ideal partner for implementing development initiatives that leverage both countries' strengths.

The historical ties between South Korea and Colombia date back to their shared experiences during the Korean War when Colombia was the only Latin American country to send troops to support South Korea. This brotherhood has laid the foundation for a strong bilateral relationship characterised by mutual respect and cooperation. However, moving beyond historical ties requires substantive collaboration in areas such as economic development, security cooperation, and cultural exchange. By working together on development projects that address common challenges such as poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability, South Korea and Colombia can set an example for other countries seeking to engage in triangular cooperation. Colombia may be an ideal partner for enhancing South

Korea's soft power initiatives through collaboration on projects that showcase their shared values of democracy, innovation, and sustainable development.

These three papers underscore the complexity and potential of South Korea-Latin America relations within the context of development cooperation. From managing historical intricacies with Cuba to leveraging technological diplomacy across Latin America and forging strategic partnerships with Colombia, South Korea's engagement with the region is multifaceted yet promising. To maximise its impact on regional development outcomes while safeguarding against potential dependencies or imbalances, South Korean policymakers must adopt strategies tailored specifically towards each partner country's needs and aspirations while remaining committed towards fostering mutual understanding and equitable collaboration across all levels of interaction with its Latin American counterparts.

FROM STATE-LED DEVELOPMENT TO INNOVATION-DRIVEN GROWTH

The remarkable economic development of South Korea presents a unique case study in developmental economics, showcasing a successful transition from a poor, agrarian society to an advanced, innovation-driven economy. South Korea's developmental trajectory is examined with focus on its evolution from technological imitation to innovation leadership in the essay by Renato Balderrama and Marina Ruiz, and

the distinctive characteristics of its state-led development model in the work by Juan Gabriel Jaramillo Giraldo.

South Korea's initial economic growth was fundamentally based on a copycat model, where the country strategically imitated and adapted technologies from advanced economies. This humble start rather proved highly effective during the early stages of industrialisation, allowing Korean firms to rapidly acquire technological capabilities while minimising research and development costs. The strategy was particularly evident in industries such as electronics, automobiles, and shipbuilding, where Korean companies initially produced licensed or reverse-engineered products before developing their own technologies. The success of this imitation-based strategy was largely facilitated by the economy of scale approach, which led to the emergence and consolidation of large business conglomerates, known as *chaebols*. These conglomerates, such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG, became the primary vehicles for industrial development and technological advancement. Their size and resources enabled them to undertake substantial investments in production facilities and, eventually, in research and development.

The concentration of economic power in the hands of *chaebols* has been both a strength and a challenge for the Korean economy. While these conglomerates drove rapid industrialisation and technological advancement, their dominance has also raised concerns about economic inequality and market competition. This recognition

has led to significant policy shifts, particularly under progressive administrations, toward supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and *start-ups*. Recent years have seen increased emphasis on fostering a more diverse and dynamic economic ecosystem. The government has implemented various support mechanisms, including incubators and accelerators, to nurture innovative *start-ups*. Accelerators, in particular, have emerged as crucial institutions providing not only initial funding but also comprehensive support including mentoring, networking opportunities, and educational programs, typically through structured 3-6-month programmes.

Despite South Korea's recognition as one of the world's most innovative economies, however, the country faces significant challenges in leading the fourth industrial revolution. The country lags behind in crucial areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and 3D printing. Today, Korean companies identify AI as their most vulnerable area. The technological gap with countries like the United States and Japan is expected to persist, particularly in emerging technologies. These challenges stem from several factors, including recent insufficient investment in basic science, lack of creative education, and difficulties in securing specialised talent. The high dependence on foreign advanced technologies and inadequate coordination among government departments and industries further complicate the situation.

The uniqueness of South Korea's developmental state model lies in its distinctive

approach to state intervention. Unlike many Latin American countries that pursued similar industrialisation strategies in the mid-twentieth century, the Korean state maintained a delicate balance between government intervention and market mechanisms. The state's role was primarily facilitative, focusing on creating conditions conducive to private sector growth rather than attempting to monopolise business activities. This approach is particularly evident in the evolution of research and development activities. During the 1970s, the state took primary responsibility for R&D initiatives. However, from the mid-1980s, there was a significant shift as private sector investment in R&D surpassed government spending. This transition reflected the growing capability and autonomy of Korean businesses, particularly the *chaebols*. This point also has significant implications for other country case studies: for Uruguay as Magdalena Bas-Vilizzio, and Nicolás Pose-Ferraro stress innovation and R&D, and for Brazil as Gustavo Fornari Dall'Agnol, and Graciele De Conti Pagliari emphasize long-term investment in strategic sectors.

South Korea's trade policy underwent a significant transformation from protectionism to liberalisation. Until the 1970s, the government maintained protective measures to nurture domestic industries. However, the 1980s marked a turning point with the initiation of unilateral liberalisation policies. This shift was strategically managed, with the government providing clear signals to domestic businesses about the need to prepare for international competition. The

timing of this liberalisation is noteworthy, as it coincided with Korea's growing industrial competitiveness. The country's formal entry into the international trading system through GATT membership in 1967 had already set the stage for this transition. This membership proved crucial, providing Korean exports with Most Favoured Nation treatment and contributing to the country's export-led growth strategy.

South Korea's economic development presents a fascinating case of successful state-led development combined with strategic adaptation to changing global conditions. The country's transition from a copycat model to an innovation-driven economy, while maintaining a balanced approach to state intervention, offers valuable lessons for developing economies. The Korean experience demonstrates that successful economic development requires more than just state intervention or market liberalisation alone. It requires a sophisticated understanding of when to protect and when to expose industries to competition, when to lead and when to facilitate, and how to balance the interests of large corporations with the need for a diverse and dynamic economic ecosystem. As South Korea confronts the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution, its ability to adapt its development model while maintaining its innovative capacity will be crucial. The country's ongoing efforts to support SMEs and start-ups while addressing technological gaps in emerging fields will likely determine its future economic success. The lessons from Korea's development experience continue

to be relevant for understanding both the possibilities and challenges of economic development in the twenty-first century.

SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Beatriz Carvalho Sertori and Camilla Silva Geraldello discuss the phenomenon of plastic surgery in South Korea that represents a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors, which have transformed individual desires for self-improvement into a global industry. One could explore the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, adopting a more pragmatic approach that acknowledges the practical individual motivations behind the surge in plastic surgery while also recognising its evolution into a significant component of South Korea's medical tourism industry.

As the country underwent rapid economic development from the 1960s, societal attitudes towards physical appearance began to shift, with an increasing emphasis placed on Western beauty ideals, as occurred in Japan too. From a pragmatic standpoint, the decision to undergo plastic surgery in South Korea is often driven by practical considerations related to social and economic advancement. In a highly competitive society where physical appearance can significantly impact one's career prospects and social relationships, many individuals view cosmetic procedures as a necessary investment in their future. This perspective challenges the notion that the pursuit of plastic surgery is solely driven by

vanity or internalised oppression, suggesting instead that it can be a rational response to societal pressures and expectations.

The accessibility of cosmetic procedures across different socioeconomic groups has implications for social stratification and the reproduction of inequality. While plastic surgery may offer opportunities for individuals to improve their social standing, it also reinforces the idea that physical appearance is a form of capital that can be leveraged for personal and professional gain (Jin, 2020). The widespread acceptance of cosmetic procedures in South Korean society is exemplified by practices such as parents gifting their children plastic surgery as graduation presents (Kim, et al., 2019). This normalisation has not only reduced the stigma associated with cosmetic surgery but has also contributed to the development of a highly skilled and innovative medical sector specialising in these procedures.

The South Korean government has played a significant role in promoting the country's medical tourism industry, including plastic surgery. This strategic focus on medical tourism represents a pragmatic approach to leveraging the country's expertise in cosmetic procedures for economic gain. The government's efforts to market South Korea as a destination for high-quality, affordable plastic surgery have been successful in attracting international patients, particularly from other Asian countries.

The emergence of South Korea's plastic surgery industry as a component of the Korean Wave, or Hallyu, further illustrates the pragmatic evolution of this phenomenon.

What began as a response to individual desires for self-improvement has grown into a significant export industry that contributes to South Korea's soft power and cultural influence in the region and beyond. The global popularity of Korean beauty standards, propagated through K-pop and K-dramas, has created a demand for the "Korean look" that extends far beyond the country's borders.

However, the success of South Korea's plastic surgery industry on the global stage has also raised ethical concerns and challenges. The potential negative impacts of unrealistic beauty standards on individuals' self-esteem and mental health are particularly relevant in this context. As the industry continues to grow, there is a need for greater regulation and ethical guidelines to ensure patient safety and well-being. Furthermore, the globalisation of South Korean beauty standards through medical tourism and cultural exports raises questions about the homogenisation of beauty ideals and the potential erasure of diverse ethnic features. Critics argue that the promotion of a singular beauty ideal, often characterised by features such as large eyes, a high nose bridge, and a V-shaped jaw, may contribute to a loss of cultural diversity and reinforce harmful stereotypes.

While the phenomenon of plastic surgery in South Korea is often viewed through the lens of cultural critique or feminist theory, a more pragmatic approach reveals the complex interplay of individual motivations, societal pressures, and economic factors that have shaped this industry. The

evolution of plastic surgery from a personal choice to a significant component of South Korea's medical tourism sector and cultural exports demonstrates the dynamic nature of this phenomenon. Moving forward, it is crucial to continue examining the ethical implications of the plastic surgery industry while also recognising its potential for positive impact, such as improving individuals' self-confidence and contributing to economic growth. Policymakers, medical professionals, and scholars must work together to develop frameworks that balance the benefits of this industry with the need to protect individual well-being and cultural diversity. By adopting a pragmatic approach to understanding plastic surgery in South Korea, we could better handle the complex landscape of beauty standards, individual agency, and global cultural influence in the modern world.

Daniela Montalvo Granados y Serena Camposano touch upon the journey towards multiculturalism in South Korea that presents a complex narrative of societal transformation, economic imperatives, and policy evolution. One could explore the multifaceted challenges and developments in South Korea's approach to foreign workers and cultural integration, with a particular focus on low-skilled laborers and the broader implications for South Korean society.

South Korea's transition from a homogeneous society to one grappling with multiculturalism began in earnest during the late 20th century. The initial impetus for this change came from an unexpected

quarter: the shortage of brides in rural areas. This demographic imbalance led to an influx of foreign brides, primarily from Vietnam, marking the beginning of South Korea's reluctant embrace of multiculturalism. This phenomenon, while addressing a specific social need, inadvertently opened the door to broader discussions about cultural diversity and integration in South Korean society. As South Korea's economy continued to grow rapidly, another challenge emerged: labour shortages in sectors often described as 3D—difficult, dangerous, and dirty. These industries, typically shunned by South Korean workers, created a demand for foreign labour that could not be ignored. The government's response to this need was initially cautious and limited, reflecting the society's deep-seated preference for homogeneity. The Industrial Technical Training Program (ITTP), introduced in 1992, was one of the first formal attempts to address this labour shortage. However, this program, and its successors, often treated foreign workers more as temporary economic tools rather than potential long-term contributors to South Korean society.

The tension between economic necessity and cultural preservation has been a defining feature of South Korea's approach to foreign workers. The Employment Permit System (EPS), implemented in 2004, represented a more structured approach to managing low-skilled foreign labour. While it provided better legal protections for workers compared to the earlier trainee system, it still maintained a fundamental assumption of temporariness. This system,

while addressing immediate labour needs, did little to promote genuine integration or long-term settlement of foreign workers. The experiences of Filipino workers in South Korea, as detailed by Daniela Montalvo Granados y Serena Camposano, offer a poignant illustration of the challenges faced by low-skilled foreign labourers. The predominance of E-9 visa holders among Filipino migrants in South Korea underscores the country's reliance on foreign labour for specific economic sectors. However, the limitations placed on these workers—including restrictions on permanent residency and family reunification—reflect an ongoing reluctance to fully embrace the multicultural implications of their presence.

The hierarchical structure within South Korea's approach to multiculturalism becomes evident when comparing the treatment of different migrant groups. Marriage migrants versus low-skilled workers. This disparity highlights the selective nature of South Korea's multicultural policies, where certain groups are prioritised for assimilation while others are kept at arm's length. Recent developments, however, suggest a gradual shift in South Korea's approach to multiculturalism and foreign labour. The country's demographic challenges, particularly its critically low birth rate and aging population, are forcing a re-evaluation of long-held attitudes towards immigration and cultural diversity. The recent initiative to bring Filipino caregivers to South Korea to address childcare needs is a case in point. While this programme demonstrates a recognition of the need for foreign labour in

new sectors, the debates surrounding wage levels and working conditions for these caregivers highlight ongoing tensions between economic necessity and fair treatment of foreign workers.

The trajectory of South Korea's immigration policy and its approach to multiculturalism can be seen as an incremental process of adaptation and learning. From the initial focus on marriage migrants to the current grappling with low-skilled labour needs, South Korean society and policymakers have been forced to confront the realities of an increasingly interconnected global economy and the demographic challenges facing the nation. As South Korea moves forward, the challenge will be to develop policies and social attitudes that can balance economic needs with genuine cultural integration. This will require a shift from viewing foreign workers merely as temporary economic assets to recognising them as potential long-term contributors to South Korean society. The current system, which often treats low-skilled workers as disposable labour, is increasingly at odds with both economic realities and ethical considerations.

The concept of integration, as opposed to mere assimilation, will be crucial in this process. While South Korea's current approach often emphasises the adaptation of foreigners to South Korean culture, a truly multicultural society would also involve changes and adaptations within South Korean society itself. However, this transition is unlikely to be smooth or without resistance. Deep-seated cultural attitudes

and concerns about national identity will continue to shape the debate around multiculturalism in South Korea. The challenge for policymakers and society at large will be to manage these concerns while addressing the pressing economic and demographic realities facing the nation. Recently, the South Korean authorities announced that the number of foreign residents in South Korea reached 2,46 million in 2023, accounting for 4,8% of the total population (The Korea Herald, 2024). This figure approaches the OECD's criterion of 5% of total population for classification as a 'multi-ethnic, multicultural country,' and South Korea may become Asia's first multicultural nation in the near future. The tension between assimilation and integration, between economic necessity and cultural preservation, will continue to shape South Korea's journey towards multiculturalism.

REFERENCES

- Jin, S. (2020). Plastic's Past: The complex historical and cultural influences underlying South Korea's plastic surgery phenomenon. *The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies*. <https://utsynergyjournal.org/2020/10/07/plastics-past-the-complex-historical-and-cultural-influences-underlying-south-koreas-plastic-surgery-phenomenon/>.
- Kim, S., Arcodia, C., and Kim, I. (2019). Critical success factors of medical tourism: The case of South Korea. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16:24.
- Kuik, Ch.-Ch. (2015). Introduction: Decomposing and assessing South Korea's hedging options.

- The Asan Forum*. <https://theasanforum.org/introduction-decomposing-and-assessing-south-koreas-foreign-policy-options/>
- Sneider, D. (2022). *Different Wartime Memories Keep Japan and South Korea Apart*. United States Institute of Peace.
- The Korea Herald* (2024, October 24). Long-term foreign residents in South Korea at all-time high. <https://news.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20241024050567>.
- Yoon, S. and Young A. K. (2020). Cosmetic surgery and self-esteem in South Korea: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*, 44, 229-238.



Available in:

<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=53182098002>

How to cite

Complete issue

More information about this article

Journal's webpage in redalyc.org

Scientific Information System Redalyc
Diamond Open Access scientific journal network
Non-commercial open infrastructure owned by academia

Won-Ho Kim

**Introduction: A Country of Historical Legacies, Innovation
and Transformation ***

Oasis

no. 41, p. 3 - 15, 2025

Universidad Externado de Colombia,

ISSN: 1657-7558

ISSN-E: 2346-2132

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n41.02>