Although North Korean refugees in South Korea are legally considered "Korean" citizens, to their frustration, they are sometimes classified among the several emerging minority groups in South Korea who are changing the demographic landscape of an otherwise homogeneous nation. From the South Korean government's point of view, the rapid rate at which North Korean refugees now arrive in the South has transformed the administration’s support policy from what used to be a simple guarantee of livelihood in South Korea into a major welfare program for an increasingly significant and rapidly growing segment of the population.

As soon as North Korean refugees arrive in the South, they are debriefed by the South Korean government and then sent to the Hanawon facility, where they receive education and training for living in South Korea. After Hanawon, they receive a stipend and mostly go on to live in government-subsidized housing across South Korea, with the majority of them settling in the Seoul-Incheon-Gyeonggi Province areas. For many North Korean refugees, this is the point at which the mix of excitement of freedom and difficulties of settlement begins. North Korean refugees at South Korean schools face the immense dual challenge of discrimination (mostly based on their North Korean origin, but also on language and at times physical appearance) and their lack of understanding of South Korean society. Both factors adversely affect employment, social standing, and self-esteem.

North Koreans may also be disadvantaged by a South Korean employment system that often gives a leg up to those who attended or graduated from the same schools as their prospective employers. More importantly, problems in educational and employment opportunities usually arise not from South Korean attempts to deny such opportunities, but from the structural shortcomings arising from North Korean refugees having to adjust to very different surroundings. Because of the different background of the North Koreans, it is difficult for a teacher or employer to have the same expectations towards a North Korean refugee that they would towards a South Korean.

Assistance is needed to help North Korean refugees catch up with South Korean counterparts as they settle in the South. This is where both governmental and non-governmental assistance comes in. It is interesting to note that the growing awareness about North Korean refugees and their mounting challenges of assimilating in South Korean society is paralleled by the rise of international migration as a major issue for international governments and global civil society. International migration has become one of the most compelling issues in the context of globalization as borderless societies and cultures have led to economic gains and diversity of cultural products. The interplay between global and local civil society illuminates some of the issues North Korean refugees face in South Korea, particularly with regard to educational and em-
employment opportunities.

Concerning resources for North Korean refugee settlement in South Korea, one area of global and local interplay is international public relations. If raising awareness is the precondition for gaining support from the international community, the Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR) is one such organization that has recognized this early on and has successfully mobilized resources from various international entities. A second model can be found in the Foundation of Young Professionals Institute of Korea (YPIK), an NGO dedicated to policy research on economic and welfare issues affecting Korea’s youth as a whole. The third model of global and domestic interplay in providing for North Korean refugees in South Korea comes in the form of Korean expatriate efforts. For example, the Saejowi (Organization for One Korea) started as a social group of like-minded individuals seeking to prepare North and South Koreans for future unification, and has provided medical assistance and practical educational programs for housewives and the elderly and more recently a lecture series for university students.

These three models for meeting the challenges of North Korean refugee settlement in South Korea touch upon several issues that inextricably link local with global civil society: international publicity, international corporate social responsibility, international research curriculum, expatriate communities, and international philanthropic organizations. Yet the efficacy of these models should not hide the challenges of implementation, chief among them being the many hurdles in realizing support for the welfare and social justice of North Koreans in South Korea.

The local-global dimensions of North Korean refugee settlement in South Korea present important opportunities for learning and collaboration with the United States in devising effective government or civil society responses. As a country formed by immigrants, the United States has experienced both the best and worst in accommodating new social groups over the past two centuries, and racial conflicts of American inner cities over the past several decades have an uncanny resemblance to many of the issues facing North Korean refugees in South Korea. “Affirmative action” is one policy that is already in place for North Koreans in the South, and once the program is expanded and the budget increased, learning from the inception, implementation, and aftermath of affirmative action in the United States will be very useful.

Prospects for U.S.-South Korea civil society cooperation on North Korean refugees are evident in all three models of local-global interaction identified above. For example, in its international public outreach efforts, NKHR has been effective in building a cooperative relationship with the National Endowment for Democracy. With Microsoft funding, YPIK has sought collaboration with Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, whose mission of assisting young people from low-income communities seemed very appropriate for tackling North Korean refugee challenges in education and employment. In 2008, Saejowi developed a pilot program for university leadership education supported by a Korean-American philanthropist and facilitated by the U.S.-based Give2Asia, and has also enlisted the help of Korean-American medical students in operating health care assistance programs.

The task of integrating a significant refugee population is a great challenge for a South Korean society that has always seen itself as homogenous and perennially catching up with the world’s more advanced countries. At the same time, it is useful to reflect upon South Korea’s achievement in democratization and economic development, through which it has become a more benevolent society concerned with improving the welfare of its citizens, including those North Koreans who are newly arrived.

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This essay is based on a chapter in Global Civil Society 2011: Globality and the Absence of Justice, edited by Martin Albrow and Hakan Seckinelgin, Palgrave Macmillan, January 2011.

NEWS & EVENTS

JUNE 23, 2011—CENTER FOR U.S.-KOREA POLICY AND KOREA ECONOMIC INSTITUTE—WASHINGTON, DC

SOUTH KOREA’S GREEN GROWTH STRATEGY: WHERE IT STANDS AND WHERE IT’S GOING
9:00 am-1:30 pm | 1800 K Street NW, Suite 1010
The Asia Foundation’s Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and the Korea Economic Institute will host a seminar on South Korea’s Green Growth strategy, featuring a keynote address by Young Soo-gil, Chairman of the South Korean Presidential Committee for Green Growth. To RSVP please contact Sarah Howe at sh@keia.org.

JUNE 13-15, 2011—THE ASAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES—SEOUL, KOREA

THE 1ST ASAN PLENUM: OUR NUCLEAR FUTURE
The Westin Chosun Hotel, Seoul
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies will host its inaugural plenum on “Our Nuclear Future.” This plenum seeks to shape the global debate on our nuclear future in light of recent developments and in anticipation of Seoul’s hosting of the 2nd
Nuclear Security Summit in April 2012. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will serve as a panelist. **Event details are available at:** www.asanplenum.org.

JUNE 10-11, 2011—PACIFIC FORUM CSIS—HONOLULU, HI

**U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS, REGIONAL SECURITY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE**

*Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu*

Pacific Forum CSIS in collaboration with Fudan University’s Center for American Studies and The Asia Foundation will hold the 11th dialogue on U.S.-China relations. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will speak on Korean peninsula issues. **This event is closed to the public.**

MAY 28, 2011—KOREA UNIVERSITY—SEOUL, KOREA

**EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY FORUM**

*Asiatic Research Institute, Korea University*

Korea University, Korea Future Foundation, and Northeast Asian History Foundation will hold the inaugural East Asian Community Forum on “Rising China and the Future of East Asian Community.” See-Won Byun, Research Associate of the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, will present a paper on North Korea and East Asian community building.

MAY 17, 2011—EAST-WEST CENTER—WASHINGTON, DC

**2011 KOREA-U.S. JOURNALISTS EXCHANGE**

*11:00 am-12:30 pm | 1819 L Street NW, 6th Floor*

As part of the East-West Center’s 2011 Korea-U.S. Journalists Exchange on “Bridging Gaps in Understanding between Korea and the United States: Threats and Alliances on the Korean Peninsula,” the East-West Center will hold a session on “U.S. Policy and the Korean Peninsula.” Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, will serve as a panel speaker.

APRIL 26, 2011—JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY—WASHINGTON, DC

**WORKSHOP ON CHALLENGES OF NORTH KOREA**

*4:30-9:00 pm | 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 500*

The Korea Studies Program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies held a workshop on North Korea featuring student paper presentations. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, served as a commentator on a panel on North Korea and its allies.

APRIL 14-15, 2011—BROOKINGS—WASHINGTON, DC

**FOREIGN POLICIES OF EMERGING-MARKET DEMOCRACIES**

*1777 Massachusetts Avenue NW*

The Managing Global Order project at Brookings and the International Forum for Democratic Studies at the National Endowment for Democracy hosted a two-day conference on the foreign policies of emerging-market democracies and their efforts to advance human rights and democracy. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, served as a commentator on a panel on South Korea.

**PUBLICATIONS**


For a complete list of publications, please visit: www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org.

**VIEWS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

“Today, the Korea-U.S. alliance is stronger than ever and the bilateral economic and trade relations are developing steadily...We need continuous attention and cooperation to improve the alliance to the next level in terms of both quality and quantity.”

--President Lee Myung-bak, Remarks during a visit by a U.S. bipartisan Congressional delegation led by U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, Seoul, April 2011.

“The benefits of KORUS go far beyond the economic bottom line. Ratifying KORUS is profoundly in our strategic interest, as well. We have such a deep and broad relationship between our two countries. We are allies, partners, and friends.”

--Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State, Remarks at U.S. Chamber of Commerce Breakfast, Seoul, April 17, 2011.
For more information on Center activities please visit: www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org.

The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy aims to deepen and broaden the foundations for institutionalized cooperation between the United States and South Korea by promoting a comprehensive U.S.-ROK alliance partnership on emerging global, regional, and non-traditional security challenges. A project of The Asia Foundation, the Center is based in the Foundation’s Washington DC office.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, just, and open Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research.

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