

Transnational Local Grassroots Society Decides Bottom-up

Mobility of Labour Migrants' NGOs

—comparison between South Korea and Hong Kong

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Introduction

Labour migration in developed East Asian economies is catching a lot of academic attention. There are more than 200,000 foreign migrants currently live or work in Hong Kong. If we only count the legally registered foreign labor migrants, Hong Kong has around 1/10 overseas Philippine labour migrants and is the largest market for foreign labour migrants¹. Most of these labour migrants are South East Asian domestic helpers, who have become more and more indispensable in Hong Kong society.

From 1960's to 1970's, South Korea used to be a migrant-exporting country during its fast industrializing process by sending labour workers to America, Germany, Japan and Middle East. South Korean labour's wage used to be a pathetic 1/12 of American labor's in 1970's². To take Germany for example, South Korea used to send nurses and mine workers in large numbers under the former's preferential labour immigration policy³. These labours have brought considerable overseas remittances back to the country.

Since the late 1980's, a comparatively grown-up economy generates incrementing demands for labours, foreign migrants became an indispensable component of South Korean economy. Now there are around 333,000 foreign labour migrants in South

¹ Manila Times. 23rd April, 1991 P. 4

² Frederic Deyo, ed. *The Political Economy of East Asian Industrialism*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987

³ Fuhr, Michael. *Performing Kyopo-rock: aesthetics, identity, and Korean migrant ritual in Germany*. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 11:1, p.115-122 p.116

Korea, most of whom are Chinese Korean minority and South East Asians⁴. Mostly they work for small business, restaurants, and individual employers on temporary contracts. Their employment status could be unstable and unrespected. Chinese Koreans take more than 50% of the total foreign labour migrants in South Korea.

The huge number of foreign labour migrants has called for more non-governmental governance, NGOs and other grassroots organizations have developed very rapidly in both economies over the past decades. Hong Kong “is home to more than 2,500 organizations and associations of overseas migrant workers”⁵, these organizations have promoted many civil agendas concerning critical issues⁶. South Korea is also famous for its active civil society, from 1990’s to the new century, increasing protests about unfair payments, medical treatment, irregular checks on foreign migrants, and social discrimination have taken place⁷.

Nonetheless, transnational labour mobility and migrants’ transnational interaction in the guest society would make the labour migrants’ grassroots society format differently from each other. This article would like to compare the labour migrants’ grassroots activities through local NGOs between Hong Kong and South Korea by accessing their mode of cooperation and relevant influential factors. The hypothesis is that a transnational connection and cooperation both within a single migrant group with its home country and among different migrant groups in the guest society is decisive and influential to the prosperity of grassroots organizations and NGOs in the guest society, and only with this more positive policy changes could be promoted.

Labor Migration in East Asia

—rationale of comparison between South Korea and Hong Kong

⁴ Kim, Wang Bae. Migration of Foreign Workers into South Korea—from periphery to semi-periphery in the global labor market. *Asian Survey*, Mar/Apr 2004:44,2,p.316-335 p. 316

⁵ Ford, Michele. Organizing the Unorganizable: Unions, NGOs, and Indonesian Migrant Labour. *International Migration Vol. 42 (5) 2004*, p. 99-119

⁶ Law, Lisa. Sites of Transnational Activism: Filipino Non-governmental Organizations in Hong Kong. In Brenda S.A. Yeoh, Peggy Teo and Shirlena Huang (eds), *Gender Politics in the Asia-Pacific Region*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002 P.205-22

⁷ Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development—written statement submitted by MINBYUN-Lawyers for a Democratic Society, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status. (UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council Seventh Session, Agenda Item 3, 20th February 2008)

“Contemporary migration is increasingly an economic phenomenon”⁸, different from the political-motivated migration in the early postwar era among East Asian countries, the current labor migration trend is mainly economy-oriented as “Japan, Korea, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong became recipient countries two decades ago, after a period of sustained growth”⁹. Japan used to be the center attracting foreign labour migrants until the other New Industrial Countries (NICs) like Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan rise economically and form a circle of meniscus as the second-layer of receiving foreign labours in the 1980’s¹⁰. Hong Kong and South Korea both rised economically in 1960’s with an export-oriented economy relying tremendously on foreign trade, they are called the “Four Asian Tigers” alongside with Taiwan and Singapore. Not only their economy structure and modernization path are similar, many of their current economic problems also resemble a certain similar model.

As an international trade and financial center, Hong Kong’s pillar industry includes financial industry, tourism, retail, and service industry. It is famous for attracting both high-skill and low-skill international migrants working and living there. This article is going to focus and compare the low-skill migrants in Hong Kong with the case in South Korea, who are mainly South East Asian domestic helpers from Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka. They started to enter Hong Kong under the Supplementary Labour Scheme in the 1980s¹¹, most of who work on short-term contracts. Philippines and Indonesia have the most immigrants in Hong Kong. There were in total 147,400 Philippine labour migrants (until 2001), and more than 75,000 Indonesian labor migrants in Hong Kong (until 2003).¹² With a large number of working middle-class female population in Hong Kong, there has been an increasing

⁸ Jai-Joon Hur. Demographic Change and International Labour Mobility in Northeast Asia—Issues, Policies and Implications for Cooperation p. 63-91 in Hugo, Graeme; Soogil Young (ed.). Labour Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region—Dynamics, Issues and a New APEC Agenda (A Survey and Analyses of Governance Challenges on Labour Migration for APEC Economies). Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008 p.70

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kim, Wang Bae. Migration of Foreign Workers into South Korea—from periphery to semi-periphery in the global labor market. *Asian Survey*, Mar/Apr 2004:44,2,p.316-335 p. 318

¹¹ Wong, S, Moore, K. and Chin, J.K. Hong Kong: Demographic Change and International Labour Mobility, paper presented at the PECC-ABAC Conference on Demographic Change and International Labour Mobility in the Asia-Pacific, Seoul, 25-26 March 2008, and its update.

¹² AMC data accessed in 2012

need for domestic helpers. Among them, especially Philippines, are welcomed on the civil level for their low payment demand, professional and friendly working manner, and English language proficiency.

In South Korea, the economy of which rises with an export-oriented industrialization during 1960's-1970's, a continuous exploration on high-technology industry and prosperity of small business further generate more demands for labour workers. Since the late 1980's, there has been an increasing demand for more labor migrants due to the "rapid wage increase"¹³ and people's high expectation for social status¹⁴. Besides, with a domestic labor shortage, especially with an estimated minimal population growth rate¹⁵, the jobs involve dirty and simple physical work are always disguised and in urgent need for workers. Most of South Korea wouldn't like to take the "3D¹⁶" jobs for a lower payment. The largest group of labour workers in South Korea is Korean descendants from China, Japan, and other parts of Asia, though with a strong accent, they generally could work without language barriers in South Korea.

In recent years, both Hong Kong and South Korea have witnessed many incidents about labour migrants demanding more civil rights, social recognition, and legal protection. As guest economies¹⁷ which resemble many comparability between themselves, the NGO and other grassroots activities in Hong Kong and South Korea would compare and inspire our understanding about labour migration and non-governmental governance. More interestingly, in recent years, South East Asian labors—mainly Philippine domestic helpers (*Fei Yong*)—are showing an increasing momentum of surging into South Korea mainly because of the language competitiveness, the comparison would also be of practical value for policy

¹³ Kim, Wang Bae. Migration of Foreign Workers into South Korea—from periphery to semi-periphery in the global labor market. *Asian Survey*, Mar/Apr 2004:44,2,p.316-335 p. 328

¹⁴ Most of South Korean people would disguise indecent jobs, with a high expectation on overseas education and white-collar job.

¹⁵ According to the UN statistics, the population growth rate would reduce to -0.1% between 2025-2030

¹⁶ Dirty, dangerous, difficult (demanding).

¹⁷ To avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and focus on the real point, this paper is going to mention Hong Kong and South Korea as two economies in a parallel dimension. There are mainly two reasons to compare the two except the similarity in labor migration phenomenon: first, their economies, GDP, and salary levels are comparable; second, they both have the independent legal and administrative right to make policy and relevant regulation decisions on labor migration affairs.

innovation.

Labour Mobility and Non-Governmental Organizations

Although labor migrants always have generated numerous overseas remittances for their home countries and are recognized for their economic contribution, but their home countries haven't really provided many systematic legal and administrative assistance for these overseas citizens¹⁸. Non-governmental organization is an important factor in organizing these migrants' grassroots activities and mediating their relationship with the guest country authority. The mechanical flexibility and mobility of these NGOs make them the natural bridge between host and guest countries, more importantly the ordinary migrants would have access to these non-governmental institutions.

NGOs have become an omnipresent component part of migrants' labour movements increasingly. There are mainly three types of NGO in current labor migrant communities: the sub-institution of government-led NGOs, merged public-service providing organizations, and purely civil grassroots groups. Korten has raised a "four-phase developmental model" of NGO, which emphasizes two types of NGO function transition—from community-based to boundary-free, from local, national mode to regional mode¹⁹. Both in Hong Kong and South Korea, NGOs are doing impressively in the following dimensions: propaganda, information sharing, public resource facilities, and advocacy on the reform of anti-discrimination legislation and implementation.

Important Factors Influencing Labour Migration Society in South Korea and Hong Kong

¹⁸ Gibson, K., L. Law and D. McKay. Beyond. Beyond Heroes and Victims: Filipina Contract Migrants, Economic Activism and Class Transformations. Paper submitted to International Feminist Journal of Politics, 2000 p.3

¹⁹ Korten, David C. Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda. West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1990

1. Policy Frame, Structural Attractiveness of Economy—Seeds Buried for Potential Conflicts

Jai-Joon Hur has raised a concept of “two asymmetric policy tracks” in migrant-receiving countries, which is “liberal toward inflows of professionals and investors, and restrictive toward low skilled workers”²⁰. Migration policy makers’ decisions could be understood with a rational choice framework. Hong Kong and South Korea both show a similar pattern of migration governance, by actively promoting the inflows of professionals and actively managing the inflows of low-skilled migrants. In Hong Kong, there is one out of five Hong Kong families employing foreign migrant labor averagely²¹. “Migrant workers can stay in Hong Kong on a series of two-year visas and work contracts”²², its cultural openness and liberal policy allow labour migrants practically stay employed in limitless time. The need for these domestic helpers is generated within citizens’ daily life, most of the working middle-class families would be rich enough to provide transportation, private accommodation, and public holidays for those domestic helpers once they decide to hire them through Skyp interviews or person-to-person interviews. Most of these labour migrants would stay with local or other migrants’ families’ life, which would be a very natural chance to integrate with local life.

The current foreign labor migration policy of South Korea takes shape on the basis of <*Industrial Trainee System*> issued in November, 1993, which allows foreign workers enter South Korea by taking a language test in Korean. Then they could enter South Korea and receive one year’s training before they officially start working for certain industries. Only when they have accomplished one year’ work they could start enjoying partially the right set in <*South Korean Labor Law*>, and usually by that time they are already in heavy debt by borrowing money to pay the intermediaries.

²⁰ Jai-Joon Hur. Demographic Change and International Labour Mobility in Northeast Asia—Issues, Policies and Implications for Cooperation p. 63-91 in Hugo, Graeme; Soogil Young (ed.). Labour Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region—Dynamics, Issues and a New APEC Agenda (A Survey and Analyses of Governance Challenges on Labour Migration for APEC Economies). Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008 p.64

²¹ Sim, Amy. Organising Discontent: NGOs for Southeast Asian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong. A.J.S.S. 31: 3, p.478-510 p..478

²² Hsia, Hsiao-Chuan. The Making of A Transnational Grassroots Migrant Movement. Critical Asian Studies, 2009 (41): 1, p. 113-141 p.127

From 2005, this system is reformed into the *<Employment Permit System>* However, it still doesn't recognize that these current employed foreign labor migrants could fully be part of the "objects/beneficiary" of *<Labour Law>* in South Korea. The worst is that the part needs to be changed remains unchanged, "foreign labor migrants cannot organize their own trade unions"²³, which is an ironic phenomenon compared to the prosperity of civil associations and civil activities in South Korea.

The associations of small business and other civil, religious associations in South Korea have invested abundant efforts to relieve restrictions on the employments of foreign labor migrants over the years. Starting from 2011, Chinese Korean minority people could apply the *<Industrial Trainee System>* without taking the language test. Though China has the most illegal migrants in South Korea (76,351) then, most Chinese Korean people could pursue their South Korean dream with the "Visiting-Employment-Visa" (H2, implemented since 2007), which allows them to stay four years and ten months in a row in South Korea. South Korean authority faces a dilemma of "loosening or tightening", for this round of loosening again would generate another round of illegal residents as the first wave of H2-visas expire in 2012 (around 2% of H2-visa-holders would become illegal immigrants).

In 2004 and 2011, South Korean government has issued "Limited Amnesty" to those labour migrants who have illegally stayed over a certain period of time. After granted D-4 visa, they could legally search hourly employed jobs. If they receive 9 months' technological training in designated institution, they could receive H-2 visa and legally job-hunt in more diverse industries. More than 6000 Chinese Korean labour migrants have benefited from this policy.

Speaking the same language with South Korean, most of these Chinese Korean minority people still stay within their own ethnic community in South Korea, lacking of a comfortable or decent environment for them to make friends and keep in touch with South Koreans. Unlike the South East Asian domestic helpers in those local families of Hong Kong, there is a very important civil linkage missing between these

²³ Kim, Wang Bae. Migration of Foreign Workers into South Korea—from periphery to semi-periphery in the global labor market. *Asian Survey*, Mar/Apr 2004:44,2,p.316-335 p. 328

Chinese Korean labour migrants and local South Koreans.

The labour migrants in Hong Kong could congregate on Sundays, socialize and share information with each other, which forces them to stay organized in a certain form. This is a very efficient way for these floating foreign workers to construct a sense of civil consciousness and collective identity.

From the above we could see that Hong Kong has a much more convenient and simpler regulation system for foreign labour migrants to enter, South Korea obviously is regulating the foreign workers' entrance and employment according to different industries' demands in a conservative manner.

2. Overseas Remittances and Economic Expansion

Table Remittances, Percentage of GDP as of 2006

	Outflow	Inflow
Korea	0.48	0.10
Hong Kong	0.19	0.16

Source: World Bank

Table Remittances with Respect to Exports, Imports and GDP, as of 2006 (Unit: US\$ million)

	Remittances		Exports	Imports	GDP
Korea	Inflow	918	375,850	379,170	888,024
	Outflow	4,244	0.24%	0.24%	0.10%
Hong Kong	Inflow	297	1.13%	1.12%	0.48%
	Outflow	365	394,952	372,287	189,799
			0.08%	0.08%	0.16%
			0.09%	0.10%	0.19%

Source: Remittances and GDP from World Bank, and Exports and Imports from WTO.
GDP of Chinese Taipei is also from WTO.

From the above two tables we could see that Hong Kong is more balanced considering the outflow and inflow of remittances and its percentage in GDP. However, South Korea has a lower fertility rate and an estimated negative population growth rate, and with its own pursuit for "20-50 club"²⁴ among the OECD countries, a growing population is one of South Korea's development goals. Secondly, Hong Kong's export includes a considerable amount of entrepot trade goods, but the most of

South Korea's export goods are self-developed products domestically. Last but not the least, though with an imbalanced outflow of remittances, Chinese Korean people would bring more business opportunities in mainland China for South Korean enterprises, the potential economic expansion and return is quite high for South Korea.

3. Similar Geographical Proximity, Different Psychological Boundness

Both for Chinese Koreans and South East Asians, transportation to their immigration destination hasn't been a challenge. However there is a difference between their perception on the "foreign land" they would land on. For Chinese Koreans, Korean Peninsula is their "motherland" if their Chinese citizenship still reminds them that China is their "fatherland". For South East Asians, there is almost none home-like belongingness in Hong Kong. Instead, they have to struggle to adapt to the modern-style life in Hong Kong.

4. Policy Conditions of Sending Counties

Since the early 1990's China has been opening up more and more on the control of Chinese Koreans' visit to South Korea. In Manchuria, China, the local economy is going through a transition as the reform of many local SOEs deepens, the under-developed light industries and the high reliance on agriculture make it very challenging to absorb the large amount of laid-off workers and young labors. For those Chinese Korean minority people who know the Korean language, the attractiveness of labor jobs in South Korea is considerably high.

"China does not have a blanket emigration policy covering all categories of emigrants"²⁵, after letting these ethnic minority citizens travel abroad for labour jobs, China hasn't release much official guidelines regarding relevant governance. From the table below we could see that unauthorized foreign residents is an prominent issue in

²⁵ Jai-Joon Hur. Demographic Change and International Labour Mobility in Northeast Asia—Issues, Policies and Implications for Cooperation p. 63-91 in Hugo, Graeme; Soogil Young (ed.). Labour Mobility in the Asia-Pacific Region—Dynamics, Issues and a New APEC Agenda (A Survey and Analyses of Governance Challenges on Labour Migration for APEC Economies). Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008 p.84

South Korea, considering China's large population base, its omnipresence would push South Korea authority to scale back its loosened policy.

Table Foreign Residents by Nationality as of June 30, 2008

	2003 Total	2008 Total	Authorized Foreign Residents	Unauthorized Foreign Residents
China Korean Chinese	237,497	559,771 (325,976) 377,616 (299,384)	458,122 345,704	101,649 (18.2%) (9,347) 31,912 (8.5%) (8,715)
U.S.A.	106,390	125,436 (8,870)	119,390	6,046 (4.8%) (158)
Vietnam	24,908	78,948 (44,526)	62,856	16,011 (20.4%) (9,245)
Philippines	32,451	50,129 (33,810)	35,788	14,341 (28.6%) (7,565)
Thailand	27,545	45,956 (30,405)	30,578	15,378 (33.5%) (4,825)
Mongolia	16,824	34,470 (15,477)	20,126	14,344 (41.6%) (4,093)
Japan	42,504	32,544 (1,332)	31,589	955 (2.9%) (16)
Taiwan	25,725	26,113	24,977	1,136 (4.4%)
Indonesia	31,475	25,722 (21,512)	19,636	6,086 (23.7%) (3,744)
Uzbekistan	14,712	21,421 (10,474)	12,299	9,122 (42.6%) (2,391)
TOTAL	678,687	1,145,660		

* Source: KIS (2008).

** Note: The number in parenthesis is the number of foreign workers. The percentage in parenthesis is the percent of unauthorized resident for each nationality.

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5. Social Integration of Labour Migrants in Two Countries

Among all the legally registered residents in South Korea, Chinese Korean takes the largest proportion and shows a continuous strong intention to pursue a permanent residence (Table), and the low-skilled migrant issue is the predominant issue in the general foreign migration governance agenda. Except the decision-making level, the social integration between these foreign migrants—especially low-skilled ones—with local South Koreans might be much more challenging than a reform in legislation.

²⁶ Kim, Hyuk-Rae. Contested Governance in the Making of Multicultural Societies: Labor Migration and International Marriages in South Korea. Korea Observer, Vol. 40, No.2, Summer 2009, p.273-300 p.285

Countries ^o	Registered Foreigners ^o
China (Non-Korean Chinese) ^o	147,138 ^o
(Chinese holding South Korean visa) ^o	368,163 ^o
Vietnam ^o	114,123 ^o
Philippines ^o	34,000 ^o
Indonesia ^o	31,471 ^o

Source: Ministry of Justice, R.O.Korea, updated to June, 2012²⁷

Foreign Migrants in South Korea

Categories		Number	Countries of Origin		
Foreign nationals in Korea (legal and illegal)		910,149	China	USA	Vietnam
			382,237 (42%)	108,091 (12%)	54,698 (6%)
Legal					
Dongpo with foreign citizenship** (Overseas Koreans Act)		Number	China	USA	Canada
			229,982	200,822 (87%)	20,221 (9%)
Foreign workers (236,262)	Professional (Immigration Act)	24,038	United States	Canada	UK
			6,604 (27%)	5,163 (21%)	1,602 (7%)
	Arts/sports (Immigration Act)	3,183	Philippines	China	Russia
			1,866 (59%)	281 (9%)	223 (7%)
	Unskilled Employment Permit System	209,041	China	Vietnam	Philippines
			80,629 (39%)	24,992 (12%)	23,394 (11%)
Illegal					
Illegal foreigners		211,988	China	Philippines	Thailand

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Take Seoul as example, in this city lives the largest group of Chinese Korean in South Korea, most of who cluster in the comparatively marginal areas of Seoul (See the table below).

²⁷ Statistics Annual Report of Entry Record and Foreign Migration Policy (2011) issued by the Ministry of Justice

²⁸ Lee, Yoonkyung. Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-Nationalism in Korea. Critical Asian Studies 41:3 (2009), p. 363-380 p.368

District (Gu) [Ⓟ]	Chinese Korean population [Ⓟ]
<u>Yeong-deung Po</u> [Ⓟ]	32794 [Ⓟ]
<u>Gu-ro</u> [Ⓟ]	25957 [Ⓟ]
<u>Geum-cheon</u> [Ⓟ]	15789 [Ⓟ]
<u>Gwan-ak</u> [Ⓟ]	14550 [Ⓟ]
<u>Gwang-jin</u> [Ⓟ]	8343 [Ⓟ]
<u>Dong-dae-mun</u> [Ⓟ]	6091 [Ⓟ]
<u>Song-pa</u> [Ⓟ]	5452 [Ⓟ]
<u>Gang-seo</u> [Ⓟ]	4383 [Ⓟ]
<u>Jung</u> [Ⓟ]	4171 [Ⓟ]
<u>Yang-cheon</u> [Ⓟ]	3908 [Ⓟ]

Most of the time these Chinese Koreans work for manufacturing, catering and construction industries, they merely have direct contacts with South Korean people except the limited communication with their colleges. During the field research in Gu-ro district of Seoul city, Chinese signboard could be easily seen everywhere, and Chinese with a strong Manchurian accent could be captured as people walk past you. Most of these Chinese Koreans stay within their own community, they introduce job to each other, stay in touch with their families through each other, and also have conflicts with each other.

This underground transnational community is an unorganized but efficient channel of supporting Chinese Koreans' migrant journey from China to South Korea. As the author has experienced at the Seoul Immigration Office, there are many small private organizations facilitating Chinese Korean people's transnational activities between South Korea and China. Although many tragedies inevitably happens because of a lack of official legislative and administrative supervision on both sides, most Chinese Koreans still have to rely on such kind of channel to exchange information

In South Korea, the discriminations that foreign labor migrants face mainly includes a postponed salary, over-time working, gender inequality, bad and insecure

²⁹ Official website Korean.net. Overseas Ethnic Korean Foundation

http://cafe.naver.com/overseaskoreans.cafe?iframe_url=/ArticleRead.nhn%3Farticleid=1329&
last accessed on 6th, September, 2012

working environment. One of the most essential debate is that whether we should include foreign labor migrants into universal labor legislation in South Korea, as well as into the civil groups which protect the foreign labor migrants' rights and interests.

In Hong Kong, “most of the Filipino migrants often come to Hong Kong with some organizing experience”³⁰, and “the first NGO established in Hong Kong” for migrant workers is Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (MFMW) in 1981. Not only being the migrant group with the longest history and largest population in Hong Kong, Filipinos also have a prestige for helping migrants from other nationalities. Migrants from other nationalities mostly feel Filipinos are competitive and active, that's why they enjoy a comparatively higher salary than other. Filipino grassroots organizations' leaders “have found creative ways of realizing international solidarity, starting with cultural sharing, and gradually developing a transnational network for migrant issues”³¹ This kind of horizontal interaction and communication among different migrant communities have definitely strengthened the civil society's social influence on a grassroots level, currently there are more than 20 formal civil migration organizations in Hong Kong, some are single-nationality-oriented and remarkably some are multi-nationality-oriented. Four of these are Filipinos' organizations, namely Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants Filipinos (APMM), Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU), Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (MFMW), United Filipinos in Hong Kong (Unifil-Migrante-HK).

³⁰ Hsia, Hsiao-Chuan. *The Making of A Transnational Grassroots Migrant Movement*. *Critical Asian Studies*, 2009 (41): 1, p. 113-141 p.127 p. 136

³¹ *Ibid.* p..130

Glossary of Organizations	
AMCB	Asian Migrants' Coordinating Body
APMM	Asian Pacific Mission for Migrants
APMMF	Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants Filipinos (see APMM)
ASL	Association of Sri Lankans in Hong Kong
ATKI	Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong
BH	Bethune House
CTU	See HKCTU
Feona	Far East Overseas Nepalese Association
FMWU	Filipino Migrant Workers Union
FOT	Friends of Thai
Gammi	Indonesian Migrant Muslim Alliance
HKCTU	Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions
HKPA	Hong Kong Peoples Alliance [on WTO]
IMA	International Migrant Alliance
IMC	International Migration Conference
KMP	Peasant Movement of the Philippines
MFMW	Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers
Panap	Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific
Pilar	United Indonesians against Overcharging
TRA	Thai Regional Alliance
TWA	Thai Women Association
Unifil-Migrante-HK	United Filipinos in Hong Kong

As we can see from the above, the communication and transnational supporting among South East Asian migrants on a grassroots level is functioning well in Hong Kong. In South Korea, the isolated atmosphere among different ethnicities is one of the catalyst for discriminations towards foreign labour migrants.

6. Cases of Two NGOs—KCTU and AMCB

Firstly inspired by “the self immolation of a garment worker Chun Tae-il on November 13th, 1970”, labour social movements in South Korea developed rapidly over the past decades. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions was founded on November 11th, 1995, by uniting hundreds of enterprise unions it became “a leading force for democratization” and labour social movements. With the influx of migrant workers since late 1980’s, migration labour issue has become the focus of KCTU. Since migrant workers can not form their own trade unions according to relevant legislations, there hasn’t been an influential registered labour migrants organization in South Korea. Their poor working situation could not be effectively reported and improved through their own grassroots organizations. KCTU has become a mediator agency between migrant workers and decision-making institutions. Migrant workers would demonstrate at the headquarters of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions

to let their voices be heard, and KCTU would work with these migrants and other relevant NGOs to let their voices be heard both on the national and international levels. In a joint report issued by MINBYUN-Lawyers, KCTU, the Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union and the Emergency Committee to Stop Repression against Migrants to the General Assembly of UN, both empirical reflection and legislative suggestion have been made.

For Chinese Korean people, they have to face both verbal and physical abuses and a dual-track citizenship obtaining system³². Since many of them would join cultural and religious organizations, KCTU has been working with these migrants indirectly through these civil organizations. Their efforts go for the reform of the <Industrial Trainee System> (from 1993-2004, reformed into the *Employment Permit System*), an “amendment of the Labour Standards Act to extend the law’s application to migrant workers”, and campaigns in mobilizing migrant workers to form their own geographically-oriented or industrial-oriented sub-unions³³.

Different from South Korea’s top-up guidance and assistance way, most of the NGOs or the civil groups are founded from bottom up in Hong Kong, with a practical demand to socialize with their own people. This kind of grassroots organizing pattern unites migrants through most of their direct daily concerns. For example, Indonesians would rent a big place for providing life services to its fellows, the services cover grocery shopping, internet and telephone service, festival celebration, and even hair cutting. Partially due to many South East Asians’ unique cultural life, these migrants don’t show a strong willingness to integrate with the local Westernized modern life. Filipinos would assemble and maintain their own cultural life, such as singing their own ethnic songs as they play guitar.

Take Hong Kong Asian Migration Center³⁴ for example, this NGO has experienced what Korten has raised in his “four-phase-developmental-model”, through

³² According to Lee (2009), overseas ethnic Koreans (*jewye dongpo*) are grouped into those from OECD countries and those from China or Russia, the former one, according to the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans, could obtain residency and other life convenience much more easily, and of course they encounter less discrimination and uncomfortableness in their daily life.

³³ The official website of Korean Confederation of Trade Unions

³⁴ Founded in 1989 in Hong Kong by different migrant groups

cooperation with local media, many verbal/physical abuses, low-payment cases would be known by the society, and finally cause attention on decision-making levels such as ASEAN and local government.

7. Employment Condition and Status

Although both the migrants in Hong Kong and South Korea face the same issue of low salary level, labour migrants in Hong Kong face less tough working condition. The “‘trainees’ worked the same as regular Korean workers” with a less payment (“usually less than 50 percent of a regular South Korea worker’s wage”³⁵). It takes them one or two years to pay back the money they have borrowed for getting to South Korea. The average hourly payment of South East Asian helpers is 60 HK\$ (10 US\$), and for a domestic helper who works full-time in an employer’s place (with both eating and accommodation), the monthly salary level is around 2,000 HK\$ (366 US\$). However, since most of them live and eat with the families they work for, the living burden for them in the guest city is still very low. There is a research conducted by Hong Kong Asian Migration Center shows that more than 27% of the labor migrants in Hong Kong face the problems of over-low payment; secondly more than 22% of them only have four days’ break every month. This figure is still better than that of Chinese Koreans in South Korea.

Conclusion

From the above analysis we could find that South Korea conducts a more conservative regulation on foreign migrants, mainly because most of its foreign migrants are low-skilled people who might show a strong willingness to stay for long term in the guest country. Although both economies share similarity and need abundant labour migrants, but the domestic helper who help out with the middle-class families press less instabilities and long-term-stress to the local guest society. With a clearly oriented emigration policy from sending countries, South East Asian migrants

³⁵ Lee, Y. K. (2009). "Migration Migrants, and Contested Ethno-Nationalism in Korea." Critical Asian Studies 41(3): 363-380.

enjoy more safety and normality out of a labour migrant's life. However, Chinese Korean labour migrants in South Korea enjoy a much less integrated and open cultural life, for that with their psychological attachment to the homeland culture, there is less cultural diversity created within the migrant community. Also because of this, there is very limited transnational communications among different ethnic migrant groups in South Korea. With a comparatively separated community from the locals, the social integration and cultural diversity develop on two tracks leading to opposite directions. Henceforth that even with a strong NGO supporting mechanism, there wouldn't be enough regular civil bottom-up mobility from the grassroots level. If foreign migrants especially low-skilled ones want to construct a mature and strong grassroots society in the guest society, there would be a stronger call for civil and transnational cooperation rather than the single support from NGOs.

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