

Mongolian Students Studying in Korea: Examining Policies and Charting Utilization Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigates the evolving cultural and diplomatic ties between Mongolia and Korea since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1990. As the popularity of Korean popular culture and economic ties increase, along with cultural exchange between the two nations, there has been a significant rise in the demand for Korean language education in Mongolia. This trend is primarily driven by the younger generation, resulting in a substantial presence of Mongolian students in Korea. The stability and growth in the number of Mongolian students studying in Korea underscore sustained interest and engagement. This article carefully examines the multifaceted factors contributing to this trend, encompassing cultural exchanges inspired by Korean popular culture, governmental initiatives, and Mongolia's rich educational history. Notably, it addresses the historical foundations of Mongolia's high literacy rate and the proactive role of Mongolian parents in fostering education. The expansive higher education sector in Mongolia is explored, acknowledging its growth since the early 1990s. Additionally, the study sheds light on the challenges confronted by international students in Korea, emphasizing the necessity for robust support systems. Furthermore, it delves into Korea's initiatives to attract and seamlessly integrate foreign talent, with a focus on Mongolian graduates, into its workforce. This paper also recognizes the complexities and dynamics that prompt Mongolian students to seek international opportunities, emphasizing the need for support structures. This perspective is essential for the leaders and officials of both nations as they navigate the educational landscape and plan collaborative ventures contributing to mutual economic and social development.

Keywords: *Mongolian International Student, Education, Cultural Exchanges, Study Abroad Policy, Adaptation Challenge*

INTRODUCTION

Mongolians and Koreans are not easily distinguishable based on their physical appearance. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that both share diverse historical and cultural roots in various aspects. In terms of race, as Mongoloids, they exhibit phenotypic characteristics such as an East Asian skin tone, dark brown eyes, straight hair, sparse body hair, small stature, flat and prominent cheekbones, and Mongolian spots on the hips.

Additionally, Korean and Mongolian languages belong to the same Altaic language family, and linguistic similarities have been identified, influenced by interactions during the late 13th century and the early 14th century, when the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) was under interference by the Yuan, a Mongol-led imperial dynasty of China (1271-1368). Until the late 20th century, interactions between the two nations were disrupted due to differences in political ideologies. However, following the end of the Cold War, Korea and Mongolia officially established diplomatic relations in March 1990. Subsequently, exchanges have expanded across various fields such as economy, culture, politics, and various other fields. Institutions like the Sejong Institute play a pivotal role in promoting Korean culture, targeting young individuals with a keen interest in the Korean language and culture. Besides Sejong Institute, educational institutions at all levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary, have expanded, with a growing trend in private tutoring and online courses. Notably, Mongolian universities started teaching Korean in 1991, producing competent individuals capable of bridging the linguistic and cultural gap through local university programs in Korean language and Korean studies (Sainbilegt 2007, 40).

Thanks to the surge in the Korean Wave, opportunities for Korean language education, including private academies and online courses, have significantly increased. Moreover, the proficiency level of Korean language

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ability, particularly achieving a level 4 or higher on the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), has become a prerequisite for admission to Korean universities. Consequently, there has been a rise in private educational institutions catering to international students seeking to study in Korea, leading to an increasing number of students majoring in Korean language and Korean studies at universities (Jun-ho Lee et al. 2022, 36-40). The growing interest in learning Korean can be credited to the dynamic exchanges and partnerships between Korea and Mongolia. Various collaborative organizations, such as the Korea-Mongolia Association, Korea-Mongolia Cultural Exchange Association, and Korea-Mongolia Exchange Promotion Association, have arisen to enhance interpersonal and material exchanges between the two countries. As of the end of June 2019, Mongolia has witnessed the establishment and entry of a total of 627 Korean corporations (Lee and Shin 2019, 23) Public institutions, including those in Gyeonggi Province, media organizations, and medical institutions, are actively contributing technical expertise and services, as well as participating in official development assistance (ODA) initiatives with Mongolia.

Particularly, Mongolia's younger generation can be considered the driving force behind such vigorous bilateral exchanges. According to the statistics from the monthly report of the Korea Immigration Service, the overall status of international students by nationality reveals that Mongolia has consistently ranked within the top five countries over the past decade. Even more remarkable is that, considering its relatively small population, Mongolia undisputedly occupies the top position. Particularly noteworthy is the perception of Korea as a 'worth-learning' country among Mongolia's younger generation. This study aims to investigate Mongolian students studying in Korea, who play pivotal roles in significant cultural exchanges, extending beyond being mere bridges between the two nations. To accomplish this, the study will initially evaluate the current status of Mongolian international students, followed by an exploration of their experiences during their studies and their lives in Korea post-graduation.

Mongolian Students Studying in Korea

The increase in Mongolian students studying in Korea can be attributed to the active exchanges between the two countries and the growing popularity of Korean popular culture. However, another contributing factor is the demographic contrast between Korea, facing population decline due to aging, and Mongolia, which is a relatively young country. The fact that Mongolia is significantly younger than Korea plays a role in this trend. The age group actively engaged in academics or work, the 0-14 age range, constitutes 26.16% of the total population (males 434,400/females 417,335), while the 15-64 age group represents 68.24% (males 1,076,692/females 1,144,759). In contrast, the elderly population aged 65 and above, considered as the senior citizens, is merely 5.6% (males 73,245/females 109,037). As of 2023, Korea faces an aging population of 18.4% for individuals aged 65 and above, with only 11% belonging to the youth category. The average age of the entire population is much higher than that of Mongolia, standing at 43.2 for males and 44.5 for females, in comparison to Mongolia's average age of 27 (Worldometer 2023; Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation 2023, 3). Given this trend, it can be anticipated that Mongolia's younger generation will continue to fill the gaps in student recruitment faced by local universities and businesses in Korea due to population decline. Furthermore, the number of Mongolians visiting Korea is expected to steadily increase in the future.

According to statistics from the Korea Immigration Service, as of December 31, 2023, the total number of international students studying in Korea is 151,484, with Mongolian students comprising 13,802. Mongolia holds the third position overall, following Vietnam and China. In the statistics for December 2022, 2021, 2020, and 2019, Mongolian students ranked fourth with 11,431, 8,838, 8,240, and 8,739 individuals, respectively, following students from Vietnam, China, and Uzbekistan.

Table 1. Status of Mongolian Students Studying in Korea 2013-2023

Year	No. of Mongolian students/Tot. international students in Korea	National Ranking by Country
2013	4,166 / 81,847	2 nd
2014	3,735 / 86,410	3 rd
2015	4,847 / 96,357	3 rd
2016	6,000 / 115,927	3 rd
2017	7,784 / 135,087	3 rd

2018	8,650 / 160,671	3 rd
2019	8,739 / 180,131	4 th
2020	8,240 / 153,361	4 th
2021	8,838 / 163,699	4 th
2022	11,431 / 197,234	4 th
2023	13,802 / 226,507	3 rd

Sources: Data from the statistics report of the Korea Immigration Service

The figures for the same period in 2018 were 8,650, placing Mongolia in the third position after China and Vietnam. Despite the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to lockdowns and isolation worldwide, the number of Mongolian students studying in Korea remained relatively stable, showcasing a consistent presence in the top rankings. Surprisingly, rather than decreasing, the number of Mongolian students witnessed a significant increase of over 3,000 between 2021 and 2022 as the impact of the pandemic diminished.

In the early 1990s, Mongolia transitioned from socialism to a market economy, leading to the removal of ideological content related to socialism from education. Additionally, in 1995, through an amendment to the education law, Mongolia revised the Soviet-style 10-year system to the current 12-year system (5-4-3) that has been maintained since 2008. The introduction of a new educational system based on democratic principles contributed to a decrease in the illiteracy rate, and significant changes occurred in the education sector, including the emergence of private educational institutions. Over the past approximately 20 years since the opening-up, many students have pursued education abroad, with about 90% of them studying in the United States. After completing their studies, the majority of these students returned to Mongolia, engaging in university education or pursuing high-level professional careers. The educational methods and academic culture experienced in the United States have had a profound impact on Mongolia's education system (Ganchimeg and Cha 2017, 122-130).

Mongolian students studying in democratic countries have found international education to be a natural choice. Following the historic visit of Korean President Kim Dae-jung (Feb. 1998 – Feb. 2003 in office) to Mongolia in 1999, mutual visits between key leaders of the two countries increased, fostering a more vibrant exchange. As official exchanges between the two nations expanded, cultural interactions also grew. In 1998, the Korean drama 'Sandglass' was first broadcast on Mongolian public television, marking the debut of Korean dramas in Mongolia. Subsequently, popular dramas such as 'Winter Sonata' in 2002 and 'Dae Jang Geum' in 2003 were aired in Mongolia, firmly establishing the Korean Wave in the country. Since 2009, most of the popular Korean dramas have been regularly introduced on Mongolian television, and this trend continues to the present day. Beyond dramas, Korean trends in fashion, makeup, and more have become popular in Mongolia, integrating Korean cultural influences into the daily lives of lives of Mongolian individuals (Park and Oh 2014, 65-69; Sainbilegt Dashdorj 2021, 326-343). Korea's sophisticated and dynamic popular culture, sharing the sentiments of Eastern cultures, has significantly contributed to redirecting the path of international students towards Korea since the 2000s. While Korea's international standing has risen, including economic aspects, this cultural phenomenon has also played a significant role in attracting students who wish to study in Korea.

Korean Government Policies on International Students

According to the Ministry of Education's "Statistics on Foreign Students in Domestic Higher Education Institutions" for the year 2022, the number of foreign students has steadily increased since 2004 (16,832 students), reaching a record high of 166,892 students in 2022 (Ministry of Education 2022). When examined by country of origin, Asian countries such as Mongolia, China, and Vietnam account for 88.2% of foreign students. This is attributed to the advantages of geographical proximity, lower study-abroad costs, and relatively easy admission procedures. Additionally, the presence of many countries with close political, economic, and cultural ties could be another contributing factor.

Since the June Democratic Struggle in 1987, Korea has laid the foundation for its development as a democratic nation after achieving the direct election system for the presidency. From the 1990s onwards, Korea rapidly grew, being recognized as one of the four newly industrialized Asian economies alongside Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. This swift economic growth, coupled with a shift in cultural policies during President Kim Dae-

jung's era, contributed to the flourishing of Korean popular culture.

Starting from the mid-2000s, the Korean government actively pursued policies to attract foreign students, resulting in a more than 9.5-fold increase in the number of students until 2015. In 2011, the government introduced the Internationalization Capability Certification System to systematically assess and enhance universities' infrastructure and systems for supporting international students in their admission, academic pursuits, daily life, employment, and graduation. In 2012, the Ministry of Education established the 'Study Korea 2020 Project' with the goal of attracting 200,000 foreign students by 2020. The objective was to not only increase the quantity of international students but also shift towards qualitative management, enhancing the value of higher education in Korea and contributing to the nation's development through the recruitment of outstanding talents for study, employment, entrepreneurship, and residence.

Since 2014, the focus has shifted to integrated management to improve the quality of student management and overcome challenges faced by foreign students in Korea. In March 2014, the government formulated the 'Strategic Plans for Attracting and Supporting Foreign Students' Settlement' to support and manage foreign students throughout their entire journey, from entry to graduation, aiming to utilize them as globally competitive talents. In 2016, a work-study integrated visa was introduced to provide a foundation for scholarship students invited by the government to secure desired jobs in Korea. Additionally, a short-term study visa was established, allowing students to obtain a visa for short-term studies and enabling a smooth transition to a long-term study visa if desired (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international students in Korea did not see a significant decrease. This can be attributed to flexible policies allowing visa extension or change to support students in continuing their studies in Korea. Post-COVID-19, the Ministry of Education announced comprehensive changes to study abroad policies, summarized as establishing the new normal for remote learning, innovating university operation standards, promoting inter-university sharing and collaboration, strengthening universities' vocational and lifelong education functions, and globalizing Korean education. If regulations on remote learning are completely lifted, it may lead to an expansion of attracting international students who can pursue their studies in their home countries during the semester. However, potential challenges such as a decline in the quality of education services and negative impacts on student services may arise from the perspective of managing educational quality and providing student services (Kim et al. 2020, 1-25).

According to the '2023 Study Korea 300K' project, the goal is to attract 300,000 international students by 2027, aiming to propel Korea into the top 10 countries for international education (Park 2023, 2-4). To operationalize this objective, a subsequent establishment of policy implementation is warranted. In December 2023, the Ministry of Justice formalized the 'Fourth Basic Plan for International Residents Policy (2023-2027)' following deliberations by the International Residents Policy Commission. This fourth basic plan, spanning from 2023 to 2027, serves as the overarching comprehensive government strategy delineating the fundamental principles and directions of immigration policy for the next five years. Upon scrutiny of this foundational plan, it becomes apparent that, primarily, to systematize immigration management in support of national interests, the adoption of a pre-announcement system for the total issuance of major employment visas, referred to as the Employment Visa Quota Pre-Announcement System, has been embraced. In order to support the employment and settlement of international students in industries experiencing a shortage of skilled workers after graduation, a domestic study-abroad talent visa linkage track is also in development.

To attract and nurture immigrants essential to the domestic economy, the activation of a fast track for outstanding talents, including permanent residency and naturalization, is implemented to ensure the swift acquisition of permanent residency status and nationality for individuals with specialized degrees in science and engineering (The Republic of Korea Policy Briefing 2023). Korea is facing challenges such as a declining working-age population due to low birth rates and an aging population, a decrease in the school-age population, and issues related to regional depopulation. For these reasons, there is a shift in the trend of international student policies, moving beyond mere attraction to providing opportunities for career exploration during their studies, fostering employment, and cultivating foreign talent for settlement. In this context, it is anticipated that

international students, who can be considered as skilled professionals familiar with Korean culture, will have more opportunities in the future.

Educational Landscapes: Parental Aspirations in Mongolia from Historical Background to Present Realities

Mongolia's rich history of a high literacy rate stems from the communist government's provision of free education, including boarding schools for nomadic children (Weidman 1998, 79-81). The adult literacy rate reached 99.2% in 2020, marking substantial growth from 97.8% in 2000 (World Data Atlas, 2020). The mid-twentieth century witnessed a drastic increase in literacy rates, coinciding with the shift from traditional Mongolian script to Cyrillic (Batchuluun 2010, 681-686).

Mongolia experienced a highly sophisticated education system centered around Buddhist monasteries called 'Datsan' until the 17th to 19th centuries. This educational system spanned a diverse array of subjects, ranging from medicine, philosophy, astronomy, astrology, law, mathematics, music, painting, calligraphy, and more. Datsans played a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of knowledge, as outlined by Kim and Choi (2016, 312-330), with the educational system within Datsans involving the transfer of wisdom from experienced monks to the younger generation. This transmission of knowledge extended beyond religious teachings, encompassing various facets of traditional Mongolian knowledge. Such contributions significantly shaped the overall educational landscape. In this context, it can be inferred that Datsans exerted a substantial influence on the heightened educational fervor in contemporary Mongolian society, influencing enduring traditions of elevated educational enthusiasm across various dimensions.

Similar to their East Asian counterparts, Mongolian parents show a keen interest in their children's education and actively work to create conducive learning environments. As the youth population steadily grows, the number of students in educational institutions is increasing (Bayanmunkh and Hyun 2021, 44). Parents generally aspire for their children to pursue professions with high practical and social recognition. However, they do not impose their expectations on their children. Most parents respect their children's opinions, actively supporting their chosen majors and providing opportunities for academic autonomy. While there is a prevalent expectation for children to attend national universities, the challenging educational conditions outside major cities lead to a heavy reliance on school-based education. Reflecting a pragmatic approach, Mongolian parents acknowledge the evolving occupational landscape, particularly with the ongoing industrial and economic transformations in urban centers.

The education aspirations of Mongolian parents exhibit a pragmatic and forward-looking nature. Recognizing the importance of education for securing good jobs, parents emphasize early foreign language education, with some opting for overseas study opportunities. This reflects the belief that obtaining a foreign degree and proficiency in a foreign language significantly enhances job prospects, as seen in the success of globally-educated young professionals from renowned international institutions. In conclusion, Mongolian citizens anticipate that these educated young leaders will contribute significantly to overcoming societal challenges, using a scientific approach for the benefit of public governance, society, and the economy (Erdenechuluun 2021,17).

Mongolian Government's 'Study Abroad Policies'

Mongolians have traditionally held intelligence and education in high esteem, with every parent aspiring to cultivate well-educated and intelligent individuals in their children. Reflecting this educational fervor, the number of universities in Mongolia per 10,000 individuals is five times higher than that of the Russian Federation, 5.4 times that of Japan, and 15 times that of Turkey. The expansion of Mongolian higher education has been remarkable since the country's transition from a planned economy to an open-market economy during its shift to democracy in 1990. Between 1991 and 2017, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) increased from 14 to 113, and the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education rose from 14.0% to 69.0% (Market Report Mongolia 2022). Unfortunately, despite the abundance of universities and institutes (88 in total), the quality of education provided by domestic institutions has experienced a decline in recent years. A significant number of graduates from these universities find themselves inadequately prepared for the competitive human

resources market. Consequently, a growing lack of confidence in the country's education system, particularly in higher education, has led many young individuals to pursue studies abroad, seeking internationally recognized and high-quality education (Soyol Lundegjantsan et al. 2022, 5).

The Mongolian Ministry of Education was established in August 1921, and the sending of the first student to Germany for undergraduate studies in 1926 can be considered the initial step towards the internationalization of university education in Mongolian higher education history (Batdulam Sukhbaatar, Study on Parental Involvement Preparation at a Preservice Institution in Mongolia, School Community Journal, 2014, Vol. 24, No. 2, 190). Until 1990, Mongolia managed overseas study programs at the national (government) level, and the conditions for studying abroad were quite stringent, with limited opportunities for individuals to pursue overseas education. Moreover, until 1990, only students going to former Soviet Union countries were sent abroad for studies. According to Ministry of Education records, approximately 60,000 students had the opportunity to study abroad between 1926 and 1990.

Mongolia transitioned to a democratic nation in November 1990, and since 1992, all restrictions related to overseas study were lifted, allowing everyone the freedom to study abroad. With the advent of democracy in Mongolia, the government has been actively sending students to advanced countries to strengthen international exchanges, cooperation, and attract skilled individuals and professionals for national development. To facilitate this, the government has introduced various laws, regulations, and policies over the years. In 2011, the 'Higher Education Financing Law' was enacted, followed by the 'Study Abroad to the Top 100 Universities in the World' policy in 2013, the 'Dispatching Doctoral and Master's Students Abroad with National Fund Support' policy in 2014, the 'Scholarship Loan for Studying Abroad' policy in 2020, and the 'Mongolian President's Scholarship for 2,100 Students' policy in 2021. Currently, individuals in Mongolia have several options for studying abroad with financial support, including scholarships and living expenses provided by the government or foundations.

First, there is an option to study abroad as a government-invited student by participating in government scholarship programs. Second, individuals can study abroad by obtaining a student loan for overseas studies from the Mongolian Scholarship Foundation. Third, participating in global foundation support programs allows students to study abroad as full scholarship recipients. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2021, a total of 1,144 students were selected as government scholarship recipients, and they are currently studying in 24 different countries. The top Asian countries where Mongolian students most commonly study abroad are China, Korea, Singapore, and Japan, in that order (Li 2022, 380-381).

As evident, Mongolia is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and a resource-rich nation with considerable endowments of minerals such as uranium, gold, coal, and copper (Country Strategy Note, Mongolia 2015). The European Union offers scholarships like the GoEuro European Study Abroad Scholarship, the United Kingdom has the Trendhim Scholarship, Azerbaijan provides the Alimardan Bay Topchubashov Scholarship, and Japan, through the World Bank, administers programs like the Japan World Bank Graduate Scholarships. These initiatives seek to motivate Mongolian students to explore educational opportunities abroad.

Adaptation Challenges and Factors Influencing Adjustment Among Mongolian Students Studying in Korea

Even with high cross-cultural adaptability, adapting to a foreign country is challenging for adults who have already formed their cultural identities. The rising influx of international students in Korea has positive implications, including financial support for universities and the promotion of internationalization through enhanced diversity. Nonetheless, it comes with challenges, evident in issues like dropout rates and the growth of illegal residents (Lee et al. 2020, 1-4).

Negative outcomes may be attributed to the inadequate management of the respective universities. On the other hand, these negative results could be related to international students' adaptation to university life and cultural adjustments during their studies (An and Rhee, 2017; Song and Jang, 2010). In this regard, the insights from various previous studies are noteworthy. The research by Park Sojin (2013) suggests that attending local

universities in Korea is perceived as an opportunity for students who failed or lagged behind in their home country's competitive entrance exams, allowing them to easily pursue university education at a lower cost. In a study by Lee MinKung (2012), local universities with lower international recognition compared to those in Seoul offer relatively inexpensive tuition, relaxed admission criteria, and various scholarship benefits to attract foreign students. The students choosing these universities are said to differ socioeconomically and culturally from international students in Seoul. Considering the undeniable hierarchy within Korean universities, the arguments presented in these studies seem valid. Thus, universities located outside global cities like Seoul may be seen as a secondary choice for students in lower economic and academic standings.

Research on Mongolian students is still limited; however, considering previous studies, the preference for the Korean education hierarchy and international cities may not play a significant role in the school selection process for Mongolian students, as argued by Kim Dohye and Choi Heejeong (2019). In other words, many Mongolian students seem to skip the entire 'university selection process,' choosing specific universities simultaneously with deciding to study in Korea. Therefore, maladaptation among international students in university life can stem from various factors, such as unmet expectations related to studying abroad or disappointment with the inadequate infrastructure or student services in the chosen school or region. Additionally, research on cultural differences experienced by learners before coming to Korea, compared to their expectations, has indicated a prevalence of negative perceptions rather than positive ones. The media's portrayal of an excessively idealized target culture, not realized in reality, may contribute to a discrepancy between learners' perceptions of reality and their ideals, potentially leading to maladaptation (Yang 2018, 237).

Factors influencing adaptation to university life may vary by country of origin (Kim 2018, 34). For example, Mongolian international students, when compared to students from other countries, exhibit higher adaptability to a new culture and better adjustment to university environments (Kim and Kim, 2015). However, despite their high cultural adaptation levels, Mongolian students tend to have lower emotional adaptation levels (Bimedekhgui 2020). This finding is consistent with other studies, including research on Mongolian postgraduate students, which found that while they adapted well to university environments, their emotional adaptation levels were lower. Additionally, Mongolian students who had fewer Korean friends or were less involved in Korean learning support programs tended to have lower levels of school and academic adaptation (Choi and Cho, 2014).

Comparing similar studies on Mongolian students studying in Japan reveals differences in academic performance due to age and social status. Younger students demonstrate greater psychological adaptation, whereas older students often initially identify themselves as minorities and lean towards their Mongolian identity while in Japan. In terms of social adaptation, unlike students from other nationalities, there is a greater ease of integration into Japanese academic and social culture (Jia and Tao 2019). This suggests a positive attitude towards Japan upon returning home, anticipating a bridging role between the two nations. These studies collectively provide meaningful insights into the correlation between academic achievement and emotional adaptation levels.

CONCLUSION

Mongolia refers to Korea as 'Solongos,' the land of rainbows (Kang and Yoo 2023). Like the rainbow evoking hope, diversity, harmony, and peace, Korea has become a land of learning chosen by many Mongolians as a study destination. Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1990, the securing of mineral resources has become a driving force for economic development, leading Korea to expand its presence in Mongolia. The increasing strategic value of Mongolia is attributed to its abundant resources and vast territory, making it a nation with high growth potential. Mongolia possesses over 6,000 mineral deposits, including coal, copper, gold, uranium, iron ore, zinc, tungsten, molybdenum, and rare earth elements, making it a resource-rich country. It holds 15 strategic mineral deposits, including the Oyu Tolgoi (gold and copper) and Tavan Tolgoi (coal) mines. In terms of petroleum, there are at least 20 to 30 oil fields with a minimum of 100 million tons of petroleum reserves. Furthermore, Mongolia, with advanced agriculture and animal husbandry, is anticipated to offer promising prospects for future agricultural cooperation. It is expected to play a meaningful role not only in the context of future food security for Korea but also in the dimension of energy resource security.

Beyond economic considerations, Korea and Mongolia have deep historical and cultural connections. Since the modern era, Mongolia has maintained a traditional alliance with North Korea, and after establishing diplomatic relations with Korea, the two countries rapidly developed their relationship, suggesting a positive role in the future reunification process of the Korean Peninsula (Koo 2011).

Recently, the growing popularity of Korean entertainment, including K-dramas and K-pop, has increased the visibility of Korean products such as cosmetics and electronic devices. This trend has also impacted the tourism industry, leading many Mongolians to seek out Korean products and visit Korea. The influence of Korean culture in Mongolia has not only left a deep impression and admiration among the younger generation but has also contributed to a growing number of Mongolians expressing favorable views towards Korea. The cultural impact in Mongolia is not one-sided; rather, it reflects a strong aspect of mutual exchange, such as the historical interactions between Goryeo-style (高麗樣) and Mongolian influences (蒙古風) in the 13th century (Kim 2006, 246).

Due to the aftermath of a declining birthrate in Korea, the labor market is experiencing a reduction in the working-age population. In order to utilize highly-educated foreign workforce like these individuals, it is crucial to establish educational programs in collaboration with the students' majors and university career centers to support academic adaptation and employment. Developing employment linkage programs in cooperation with businesses is also essential. Additionally, increasing interest in international students within their majors and operating major-specific Korean language programs are necessary to address the academic adaptation challenges faced by foreign students.

Universities should consistently provide information related to academics and campus life for international students. Within each major, professors should offer necessary support through counseling and mentoring from fellow Korean students. Promotion of various programs at the university and major levels is also crucial, and there is a need to discover and improve programs that align with the needs of Mongolian international students. To ensure a more positive experience for Mongolian students in Korean school life, cultural exchange programs and community cultural tourism experiences that help Korean peers understand Korean culture and social norms are essential. Interacting and communicating with Mongolian students through these programs will contribute to changing discriminatory perceptions and fostering a more inclusive environment for them.

In the 2000s, unskilled laborers entered the Korean labor market driven by economic reasons and aspirations for the 'Korean Dream.' In contrast, Mongolian international students and highly skilled immigrants are now entering specialized fields in both technical and non-technical disciplines, focusing on self-development and major-related skill enhancement. In an effort to secure outstanding talent, Korean society actively implements policies to support the employment of foreign international students. To facilitate employment for foreign high-achievers holding bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees, the conditions for obtaining the Job Seeking Stay Permit (D-10) have been relaxed. Particularly, specific provisions exist for the E-7 visa category, closely related to allowing foreign professionals with specialized knowledge, skills, and expertise to enhance competition among job seekers in Korean society.

Despite the opportunities available for highly skilled foreign individuals, practical challenges such as wage discrimination and difficulties in promotions persist (Shin 2023, 325). For international students to sustain employment in Korea after graduating from university, it is crucial for them to secure positions in industries falling under a specific category (E-7 visa). However, the options within this category are overly restrictive, and the eligibility criteria are stringent, resulting in only approximately 10% of the total graduates obtaining employment visas. Recently, the Ministry of Justice labeled this situation as a 'killer regulation' and announced plans to significantly ease regulations on employment for international students as part of regulatory reforms. However, concrete measures for this reform have yet to be clearly outlined. While foreign labor is managed through the Ministry of Employment, there is a notable absence of coordination among relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment, and the Small and Medium Business Administration, particularly concerning foreign workers with an academic background. Since 2003, the Human Resources Development Service of Korea, operating under the Ministry of Employment and aiding the

domestic settlement of foreign labor through the employment permit system, is poised to effectively manage the seamless integration of international students aspiring to pursue employment opportunities in Korea.

To address these issues, considering the integration and management of laborers who entered through the employment permit system alongside those from academic backgrounds, such as Mongolian international students, could be beneficial. This approach aims to facilitate their entry into a labor market characterized by academic expertise, offering specialized jobs that capitalize on their unique skills. By creating ongoing education opportunities linked to degree programs for Mongolian international students, Korea can nurture a pool of global talent, not only anticipating an increase in attracting international students but also contributing positively to economic potential growth through the development of excellent human capital.

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