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Asia Society
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Ambassador Series

Interview with H.E. Dawn Elizabeth Bennet, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Republic of Korea

May 25, 2023 — From beginning her diplomatic career in Paris, taking two years of language training while posted in China, and now raising awareness of New Zealand among the Korean community, **H.E. Dawn Elizabeth Bennet**, the New Zealand ambassador to the Republic of Korea, was pleased to share her experiences as a female diplomat and a single mother. Her Excellency spoke passionately about the value of culture while outlining her views on how modern life and traditions are embraced and preserved in both New Zealand and Korea.



Interview with H.E. Dawn Elizabeth Bennet, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Republic of Korea

The ambassador provided a detailed itinerary and travel advice for anybody planning a trip to New Zealand and went on to discuss her perception of cultural diplomacy in Korea and potential collaborations between New Zealand and Korea. Watch the full interview to hear more about her in-depth knowledge of both New Zealand and Korea!

ABOUT H.E. DAWN ELIZABETH BENNET, AMBASSADOR OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA



H.E. Dawn Elizabeth Bennet began her illustrious career in trade in New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) in 1997 as a Policy Officer. In 2009, she was appointed Senior Policy Officer of the Australia Division at MFAT. She then served as Deputy Director of MFAT's APEC division in 2011 for one year.

Let's Talk #Korea



July 27, 2023 — Asia Society Korea boasts a network of hard-working ambassadors aspiring to make the most of their time in Korea. From ambassadors just starting out their posting to those that are settled in and getting into the thick of their diplomatic work, our foreign diplomatic community is diverse and thriving.

In the latest installment of our Ambassador Series, we gather their reflections on how Korea's reach is extending across the globe and expanding its realm to cover more than just K-pop and K-drama. With this year being the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, it is also interesting to see how Korea has managed to rise from the rubble and emerge as a leader of soft power in a matter of decades.

Featured ambassadors are **H.E. Khaled Abdelrahman Hassan Abdelrahman** of Egypt, **H.E. Khalid Ebrahim Al-Hamar** of Qatar, **H.E. Dawn Elizabeth Bennet** of New Zealand, and **H.E. Michelle Winthrop** of Ireland.

Interview with Joy M. Sakurai, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul



June 27, 2023 — Korea welcomed **Joy M. Sakurai** as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul in January 2023. While having worked closely with the U.S. Embassy throughout the year, this is the first time Asia Society Korea got to hear Joy Sakurai's personal thoughts on drawing out the highlights of Seoul's diplomatic scene, adjusting to life in the city with her family of four, and opening doors to communicate through language.

To kick off the interview, we touched base on Ms. Sakurai's extensive career covering stations all across the globe; Vientiane, Laos; Fukuoka and Tokyo, Japan; Jakarta, Indonesia; Islamabad, Pakistan; and Washington, DC, USA. Working abroad often goes hand in hand with global development, and we were curious how her experience practicing diplomacy in diverse environments has played into her overarching narrative as a diplomat.

Deputy Chief of Mission Joy M. Sakurai attended Google Arts & Culture event, held at The War Memorial Of Korea, on Feb 22, 2023

Joy M. Sakurai: One of the things I like best about living and working overseas is getting to know people all over the world, in their own languages and in their own context, and working together on shared challenges and opportunities. Working in person with foreign governments is critical to advancing policy goals, building positive relationships, and strengthening our ability to impact positive change together as nations. By immersing yourself in the languages, the culture, and the history of each post you discover new ways of looking at issues you may not have considered before. Working with our locally employed staff, who are the engine and often the subject matter experts in our overseas Missions, is especially rewarding.

The Deputy Chief of Mission is charged with overseeing many of the internal processes and interpersonal communication inside the Embassy. I love supporting all of the Embassy teams here as we advance the U.S.-Korea bilateral relationship. Here at Mission Korea, I am inspired by the talented, dedicated staff who are using their creative energy to further a dynamic partnership with a very close ally. As a team, each day we're making a difference, and for me, that is always exciting.

Korea has established itself as a key player in cultivating partnerships through cultural diplomacy. At the same time, a substantial number of young Americans are interested in studying, working, and building a family in Korea. We asked Ms. Sakurai for her thoughts on this observation and the expanding population of expats, especially American expats, in Korea.

Joy M. Sakurai: It's amazing how much of Korean culture, whether it be food, music, beauty products, or movies and TV has become so widely known in the United States. We've seen it through the boom in Korean content Americans enjoy. K-pop mega group Blackpink headlined one of our biggest music festivals recently, Korean YouTubers have millions of U.S. subscribers. Shows like *The Glory* or *Physical 100* dominate Netflix's most watched list. It's one of the reasons why Netflix's CEO made sure he met President Yoon first thing in Washington to announce Netflix's plan to invest an additional \$2.5 billion to create new Korean shows and movies over the next four years. In addition, Samsung phones, Hyundai cars, and LG appliances are just a few examples of the Korean products in the United States, and these and more are brand names that Americans trust as high-quality and good value.



Deputy Chief of Mission Joy M. Sakurai posed with Korean girl group members, Minzy and Yubin, at Google Reception, held at the Habib House, on Feb 23, 2023

As to why Korean culture is so popular, it was clear for the whole world to see during the most recent summit - Koreans and Americans have so much in common. We share the same values, enjoy each other's company, and want to continue creating the bonds that allow us to gain a deeper appreciation for one another. Our Alliance is not just about work relationships between our senior leaders. Countless acts of friendship between everyday Americans and South Koreans have built and sustained deep bonds between our two countries. Korean-Americans have made significant contributions to enriching American society, whether as leaders at the national level, in business, in sports, the arts, and so much more.

For many young Americans making their way to Korea for the first time, I'm sure this will lead them to discover a new language, culture, and way of viewing the world that they might not have considered before. After difficult years of pandemic restrictions, Koreans are once again the 3rd largest group of international students attending American universities, and South Korea has also become the 5th most popular study abroad destination for U.S. students. The experiences that young Americans and Koreans will have in one another's countries will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Cuisine plays a vital role in opening doors to explore new cultures. As a Japanese American born and raised in Hawaii, Ms. Sakurai recounts coming across familiar foods in Korea and shares her appreciation for how food ties people together.

Joy M. Sakurai: There is some truly amazing food in Korea, and I've been enjoying getting to know Korean food more thoroughly now that I'm living here. I am very fortunate that Hawaii has a large Korean-American population, so I grew up enjoying mandu, galbi, and many other Korean foods at local restaurants. Immigrants from Japan, China, Korea, the Philippines, and many other countries in the region have had a strong influence on local cuisine in Hawaii, sometimes with a fusion twist. Spam musubi is a perfect example of fusion of the Japanese rice ball with nori (gim) with Spam from America that became so popular on the islands during and after World War II. Spam seems to have made its mark in Korea too—I've seen it in kimchi fried rice and convenience store rice balls as well!

Last month the United States celebrated Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, and food plays a big role in Asian and Pacific Island cultures. For many it's how we communicate, how we show love. Over the course of time so many Asian foods have become a part of "American cuisine". K-food is a great example: kimchi and bulgogi are standard dishes throughout the United States.

Ms. Sakurai is joined by her spouse and two children in a time and place undergoing a societal transition in which women are increasingly serving as major figures in professional domains and gender equality is being openly sought. She takes us through her strategies for juggling career and family obligations in Korea's evolving workplace landscape.

Joy M. Sakurai: Balancing career and family—whether that looks like partners, parents, children, or pets—is a personal calculation, and the right decision can look different for everyone. For me, I've had a supportive partner who has allowed me to pursue some great opportunities in the foreign service, but we've still had to make tough decisions and sacrifices along the way. There are still only 24



Deputy Chief of Mission Joy M. Sakurai attended Google Reception, held at the Habib House, on Feb 23, 2023

hours in a day, and there's no one way to do it right, just the way that works right for you. Some ways that we juggle and balance everything is that between my husband and I, we each pick a few of our individual strengths that we use to support the family. For example, my husband is great at staying organized and planning ahead. I am better at planning social activities and cooking. We find things that all four of us will enjoy and try to prioritize that during our free days together, such as taking a day trip to a place nearby, enjoying a meal at a favorite or new restaurant, or going to the pool together. I also don't feel guilty about taking a 'lazy day' on some weekends, where we stay at home and each of us recharges in our own way. We try to have breakfast and dinner together whenever possible, even if that means my husband and I have to do a little bit of work online later in the evening after dinner.

Korean society is undergoing a transition right now when it comes to gender roles and expectations in society and also, as you note, facing a demographic challenge. As we look to the future, in order to meet our shared goals and tackle shared challenges, we need to draw on the unique talents of people from every facet of our societies – we can't leave anyone on the sidelines. In the United States, promoting gender equality so that all women have the opportunity to live up to their full potential is a top priority of the Biden administration. The ROK is a global leader and now plays a critical role in fostering emerging democracies, as well as upholding democratic principles around the world. As we strive together to guarantee freedoms for those outside our borders, we must continue to ensure safeguards and uphold democratic principles within them. How to effectively empower women is a conversation we are having at home as Americans, but also abroad with key allies and partners like the Republic of Korea. I look forward to discussing this further and sharing more of my experiences, and the experiences of the United States where it is helpful.

Last but not least, we hear from a true polyglot the value of learning new languages. Especially with foreign language education being one of the most essential types of education in Korea, we wonder how this can lay the foundation for Korea to foster a generation of global-minded individuals.

Joy M. Sakurai: I love learning languages because it opens doors to communication with other societies and people, and also helps me understand the cultural nuances of a place. It also helps to learn about another history, culture, and perspectives when you can absorb it through that society’s native language. Language learning is one of the best ways to actually walk in someone else’s shoes. In the same way, I’ve found the best way to learn and maintain a language is by talking with other native speakers!



Deputy Chief of Mission Joy M. Sakurai attended Earth Day event, held at the Annex, on May 26, 2023

It's so interesting that during the pandemic in the United States, we saw a skyrocketing interest in language learning. According to data, in March 2020, the language app Duolingo saw a 300% boost in new users. And just last year in 2021, Korean was the seventh most-studied language in the world on the app, and second in Asian languages in the United States. And it's not just casual learners stuck at home either, this is a trend—according to the Modern Language Association, U.S. college student enrollment in Korean language classes rose 78% from 2009 to 2016. While a lot of this has to do with the increasing popularity of K-dramas and K-pop, it is also important driver for interest, not just in popular culture, but in politics, business, history, or any number of possible career fields.

Meanwhile here in Korea, Department of State programs the Fulbright U.S. Student Program's English Teaching Assistant Programs place Americans in classrooms across South Korea to teach English, which serves as a doorway for people in the United States and Korea to form meaningful bonds—whether those are through business, education or travel. Because while a foreign language looks good on a resume, it really is the key to opening up the rest of the world.

Get To Know Our Ambassadors



August 30, 2023 — Asia Society Korea is pleased to present the intricate world of diplomacy in South Korea with a series of conversations with our dear Honorary Ambassadors. The latest Ambassador Series feature offers an exclusive opportunity to witness firsthand accounts from esteemed ambassadors, shedding light on their roles and experiences.

Tune in to hear about their ambassadorial agendas, providing unique perspectives on the diplomatic landscape of Korea, heartwarming tales of finding remedies for homesickness through food, and profound recollections of insights gained by navigating the diplomatic world as women for over four decades.

Featured ambassadors are **H.E. Asaf Al-Tal** of Jordan, **H.E. Chring Botumrangsay** of Cambodia, **H.E. Elizabeth Buensuceso** of the Philippines, **H.E. Ekaterini Loupas** of Greece, **H.E. Savitri Indrachapa Panabokke** of Sri Lanka, and **H.E. Sten Schwede** of Estonia.

Student Program

2023 Voice Of Youth (VOY)



August 16, 2023 — On Wednesday, August 16, 2023, Asia Society Korea held the finale of its title summer student program, “Voice of Youth,” during which this year’s cohort of fellows presented their research findings to a panel of distinguished judges.

The event marked the conclusion of the 2023 season of Voice of Youth, which entailed a rigorous selection process and a period of intensive research. During the two months leading up to the presentations, the five fellows refined their research utilizing resources provided by Asia Society Korea, such as mentorship by members of Asia Society Korea’s network.

We would like to extend our gratitude to this year’s panel of judges:

- **H.E. Vu Tung Nguyen**, Ambassador, Embassy of Vietnam
- **H.E. Akiva J. Tor**, Ambassador, Embassy of Israel
- **Young Joon Kim**, Board Member; former Partner of Milbank LLP
- **Joon Oh**, Board Member; Chair of Save the Children Korea
- **Mason Richey**, Senior Contributor, Asia Society Korea

We are proud to announce the winners of Voice of Youth 2023:

- Winner: **Byeong Kyu Jun**, Korea National Open University, Bachelor’s degree in Economics
- Runner-Up: **Isabelle Pia Sison**, Korea University, Master’s degree in Area Studies (East Asia)

Asia Society Korea serves as a platform for young and bright thinkers to pursue solutions for the next generation. The Voice of Youth program is a medium through which the ideas developed among this circle are shared with and built upon by the broader community. We are honored to host such interaction and look forward to expanding this network over the coming years.

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Webinars

Celebration Summit at Seventy: The U.S. and South Korea Renew Their Vows with State Visit



May 4, 2023 — **Christian Davies**, Seoul Bureau Chief of the Financial Times, and **In-Bum Chun**, Senior Contributor at Asia Society Korea and Lieutenant General (Ret.) of the Republic of Korean Army, share their overall impressions of President Yoon's recent state visit to the United States, as well as the results and implications of the summit, focusing primarily on how the summit addressed some of the main tensions underlying the alliance.

Mason Richey, Senior Contributor at Asia Society Korea, moderated the discussion, raising provoking questions pertaining to major Korean concerns, including pressure from U.S.-China strategic competition, extended deterrence and the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), the war in Ukraine, and the economic risks, as well as potential, for Korean companies in the context of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

ABOUT THE MODERATOR



Mason Richey is a senior contributing writer to Asia Society Korea and an associate professor of international politics at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Seoul, South Korea). Dr. Richey has also held positions as a POSCO Visiting Research Fellow at the East-West Center (Honolulu, HI) and a DAAD Scholar at the University of Potsdam. His research focuses on U.S. and European foreign and security policy as applied to the Asia-Pacific. Recent scholarly articles have appeared (inter alia) in *Pacific Review*, *Asian Security*, *Global Governance*, and *Foreign Policy Analysis*. Shorter analyses and opinion pieces have been published in *War on the Rocks*, *Le Monde*, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Forbes*, among other venues.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS



In-Bum Chun is a graduate of the Korea Military Academy (KMA) in 1977. He was selected as the aide to Lieutenant General Lee, Ki-Baek. In 1983 General Lee, as Chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, was a victim of the Rangoon bombing. Lieutenant General (Ret.) Chun was credited with saving General Lee's life and was awarded the National Security Medal (Kwang-Bok).



Christian Davies is the Seoul bureau chief of the Financial Times. Before then he worked as the Warsaw correspondent for the Guardian and Observer newspapers, and as acting Central Europe correspondent for the FT. He has been published in the New Statesman, Foreign Policy, Politico, Haaretz, Prospect Magazine, The Lancet, and the London Review of Books.

Global, Pivotal Partners: Europe-Korea Relations in the 21st Century



June 26, 2023 — The European Union and South Korea mark sixty years of diplomatic relations in 2023, with Seoul's relationships with both Brussels and the European capitals at their apogee. From economics to security and culture, South Korea and Europe cooperate in a range of areas critical for the preservation and advancement of the rules-based international order. That said, challenges do exist, such as adaptation to global economic shifts, dealing with revisionist states, and climate change. To address these issues and more, the Asia Society Korea invites you to a conversation with EU Ambassador to Korea **H.E. Maria Castillo-Fernandez**, Dutch Ambassador to Korea **H.E. Joanne Doornewaard**, and Swedish Ambassador to Korea **H.E. Daniel Wolvén**.

ABOUT THE MODERATOR



Mason Richey is a senior contributing writer to Asia Society Korea and an associate professor of international politics at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Seoul, South Korea). Dr. Richey has also held positions as a POSCO Visiting Research Fellow at the East-West Center (Honolulu, HI) and a DAAD Scholar at the University of Potsdam. His research focuses on U.S. and European foreign and security policy as applied to the Asia-Pacific. Recent scholarly articles have appeared (inter alia) in *Pacific Review*, *Asian Security*, *Global Governance*, and *Foreign Policy Analysis*. Shorter analyses and opinion pieces have been published in *War on the Rocks*, *Le Monde*, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Forbes*, among other venues.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS



H.E. Maria Castillo-Fernandez is a European diplomat/official of Spanish nationality, now Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Korea. Prior to this position, she was EU Ambassador in Malaysia from 2016-2020, Head of Division for India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh since September 2012 at the European External Action Service of the European Union, in charge of managing and coordinating the European Union's overall relations with these South Asian countries as well as with the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).



H.E. Joanne Doornewaard was appointed as the Ambassador of the Netherlands to South Korea in 2019. Her previous positions include: Ambassador of Netherlands to Sri Lanka (2015-2018); Deputy Director of the Communications Department (2011-2015); Project Leader of International Energy Affairs at the Ministry of Economic Affairs (2008-2011); Deputy Head of Economic Department in Warsaw (2003-2008); Head of Politics, Press and Culture in Mexico City (1999-2003).



H.E. Daniel Wolvén is a career diplomat with nearly twenty years of experience in the Swedish Diplomatic Service. He most recently served as Head of the Office for Foreign Affairs and the Security Policy Council at the Swedish Prime Minister's Office, in which capacity he advised the Swedish Prime Minister on a wide range of foreign and security policy issues.

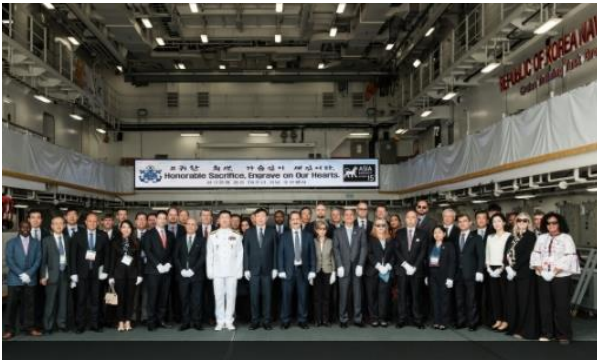
Events

Asia Society Korea 15th Anniversary in Busan



June 12-13, 2023 — Asia Society Korea embarked on an exciting adventure to mark its 15th anniversary on Monday, June 12th. The destination? Busan, the vibrant city that shines at the southern end of the Korean Peninsula. **Mr. Dong-Bin Shin**, Chairman of Asia Society Korea, played host to over 50 distinguished guests and members of the Asia Society community. Together, they embarked on a memorable journey to commemorate fifteen years of pursuing common objectives and forging meaningful relationships along the way.

The festivities began at Signiel Busan. Dinner opened with welcoming remarks from Chairman Mr. Dong-Bin Shin and was then followed by a toast from **Busan City’s Mayor Mr. Hyong-Joon Park** and warm words of congratulations from the **ROK Navy’s Chief of Operations Admiral Jong-Ho Lee**. The night concluded with a shared moment of awe as guests basked in the spectacular panoramic night views of the city from LCT’s X the Sky Observatory Deck.



The next morning began aboard ROK Hansando. Here, members took part in a poignant Remembrance Ceremony to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice Agreement. Led by **Deputy Commander and Rear Admiral Sang-Sik Lee**, those in attendance paid their respects and honored the veterans in a ceremony which saw the attendees casting flowers onto the water below.

A congratulatory lunch followed, hosted by **Busan’s Vice Mayor Mr. Sung-Kwon Lee** at LOTTE Hotel Busan. Then, a visit to the Busan Port to learn about the World Expo 2030 brought the outing to a wonderful close. As attendees bade farewell to one another and to the city, a renewed sense of purpose in our role of building and strengthening partnerships across the people and institutions of Asia and the United States was tangible. Together, we move forward, inspired by the memories and experiences that will forever remain with us.



Asia Society Korea at the 9th Annual Korea Peace Forum



June 29, 2023 — Asia Society Korea’s executive director **Ms. Yvonne Yoon-Hee Kim** presided at the annual peace forum co-hosted by Yonhap News Agency and the Ministry of Unification as a moderator. The session was joined by senior U.S. officials **H.E. Philip S. Goldberg**, U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, and **Lt. Gen. Scott L. Pleus**, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Forces Korea, followed by a speech from **H.E. Jin Park**, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea. Under the theme of "70 Years of the ROK-U.S. Alliance: the Present and Future of the Korean Peninsula," the forum reflected on the geopolitical shifts affecting the security environment of the peninsula as the South Korea-U.S. alliance marks its 70th anniversary.



A Summer Rendezvous: Private Screening of Film “Concrete Utopia”



August 8, 2023 — Despite the summer heat reaching peak levels, Asia Society Korea members and friends enjoyed a cool evening thanks to the chilling performance delivered by the cast of Korea’s latest disaster thriller, Concrete Utopia. Asia Society Korea and LOTTE Cultureworks welcomed over 130 guests at the private screening of the film, held at LOTTE CINEMA in Seoul’s landmark LOTTE World Tower on the eve of the official release date. The cast, including Lee Byung Hun, Park Seo Joon, and Park Bo Young, and director Uhm Tae Hwa stopped by the event to greet the guests and share the key takeaways of the movie.



Photos courtesy of Asia Society Korea’s friends Marco Devon and Ray Chetti



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to promote Asia awareness to the
world **BECOME A MEMBER NOW!****

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The Glitch

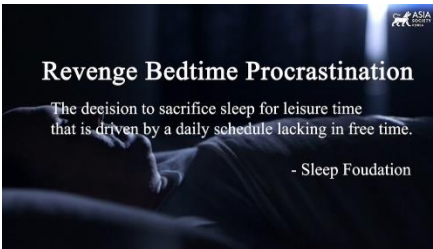
#9 AAPI Heritage Month: Celebrations and Challenges



By David Tizzard, Asia Society Korea Senior Contributor and Lee Yoon-seo, guest contributor

May 24, 2023 — In the ninth episode of The Glitch, Asia Society Korea celebrates Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage (AAPI) month by engaging with the community, inquiring about the month's significance, important concepts, persistent challenges, and future actions that can be taken. Asia Society Korea Senior Contributor **David Tizzard** led the team with the assistance of guest contributor **Lee Yoon-seo**.

#10 Revenge Bedtime Procrastination



By David Tizzard, Asia Society Korea Senior Contributor and Jasmine Ko, guest contributor

June 26, 2023 — In the tenth episode of The Glitch, Asia Society Korea senior contributor **David Tizzard** and guest contributor **Jasmine Ko** explore a new modern phenomenon: revenge bedtime procrastination. Tizzard and Ko uncover why more and more Koreans are choosing to sleep less in the 21st century, including FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), living in a hypercompetitive society, and a desire to reinstate autonomy in their lives.

#11 Peace and The Endless War: The Korean Armistice Agreement



By David Tizzard, Asia Society Korea Senior Contributor and Jasmine Ko, guest contributor

July 27, 2023 — 70 years ago, The Korean War (1950-1953) came to a halt with the signing of The Armistice Agreement. While this document didn't necessarily end the war, it did end a tragic and devastating conflict and finally bring peace and stability to the people of this land. In the subsequent decades, the two Koreas have experienced vastly different fortunes. In Episode 11 of "The Glitch," Asia Society Korea Senior Contributor **David Tizzard** and Guest Contributor **Jasmine Ko** travel to the 38th Parallel to see firsthand the line that divides these people and explore the history and ramifications of the document that secures our safety.

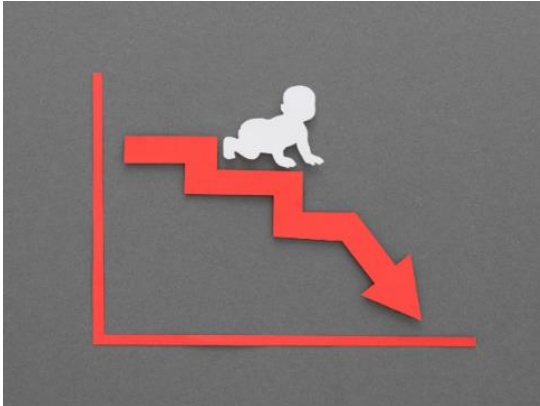
The Glitch continues to provide you with data, analysis, and authentic Korean voices.



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If you want to become a member, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Paying for Birth: Is it Worth It?



By Suna Kim, Program Coordinator at Asia Society Korea

May 30, 2023 - Baby payments and family support programs have long been critical policies for nations seeking to balance and maintain population growth while also assisting families in need of guidance raising children. The strategies adopted for assisting families with children often differ according to the cultural, political, and historical circumstances of those implementing them. Here in South Korea, for example, the country has spent approximately 200 billion US dollars building programs to help families with new-born babies over the past 16 years. The concept of investing in childcare is not new: it is a strategy that has proven to work effectively in many countries. However, with the birth rate falling to record low levels every year, Korea is receiving criticism and constantly scrambling to find new and better solutions. When examining family assistance in greater detail,

it becomes clear why some nations have been complimented for their birth policies while others, like South Korea, are receiving backlash.

As of 2022, women in Korea receive a payment of 2 million won (\$1,510) after giving birth. The Yoon government made the decision to provide children under the age of one 700,000 won (\$528) and those under the age of two 350,000 won (\$264) a month in 2023. These benefits are estimated to increase to 500,000 won (\$377) and 1 million won (\$755) respectively in 2024. While it may appear that Korea is moving toward a better parental allowance for childcare and proactively seeking economic solutions to the country's low fertility rate, the policy is nevertheless drawing criticism because of what some see as its "throw money at it" approach.

Countries like Denmark, for example, provide some of the most lauded financial benefits for families, allowing them to receive up to two forms of assistance. The Child Cheque, for instance, is a quarterly tax-free payment that households receive until their child turns 18. The parents receive \$756 USD every quarter for the first two years, which gradually declines to \$157 USD per month when the child is between 15 and 17 years old. Similarly, Swedish parents receive a monthly allowance until their child is 16, while Luxembourg citizens with children receive a monthly allowance that covers schooling and certain living expenses until the end of their child's schooling or until they turn 25.

These key differences have led some experts to conclude that Korea's current methods will fail in the long term since they focus solely on "birth" rather than a longitudinal look at the child's life cycle. Moreover, when tackling this issue, cultural aspects should not be ignored. Many workplaces in Korea still exhibit traditional male hierarchical dominance, preventing monetary rewards from being as effective as they should be. Women in the workforce who request maternity leave are either demoted or, in the worst-case scenario, fired from their jobs unless they can find work that provides adequate maternity leave. From this perspective, it is evident that the "throw money at it" approach is inefficient for giving both short- and long-term help to families with newborn children. Although providing some form of monetary assistance is preferable to none at all, it appears that the differences between the Korean approach to family support and that of other countries are due to factors that initially caused the low fertility rates and the societal attitude toward not having children. Thus, without first addressing them, the problem will remain unresolved.



[KoTEX Issue No.6, May]

The Effect of Stereotyping: A Perspective on Media Diversity

By Suna Kim, Program Coordinator at Asia Society Korea

July 26, 2023 — The acclaim and honors that Korean media has earned from the foreign community have raised the value and notoriety of Korean dramas, films, and other forms of Korean-produced media. Korean media is making new history, from *Parasite* winning the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2020 to *The Squid Game* winning several Emmy Awards in 2022. However, the Korean media also faces criticism, particularly because of this attention. More foreign audiences are becoming aware of the diversity that is embodied and presented by Korean media, and this has raised some controversy.

The portrayal of diversity in media, particularly mass media, is a challenging issue for all authors and producers behind the cameras. Stereotyping is commonly associated with the representation of people and cultures, which can lead to inaccurate grasping or sentiments about foreign cultures and foreigners. The media, which is a powerful social structure, strongly influences a person's perspective of reality (Gergen, 1999). Many of the messages that people acquire from the media are inadvertent. The media is an effective tool that can ingest knowledge into the minds of people of all ages. For example, Hollywood has a long and infamous history of portraying Asians as math nerds, odd, and cutely strange people. As a result, misconceptions about a certain culture or group of foreigners might lead to an unintended bias against all members of that group.



In the recent Korean drama *Backstreet Rookie*, one of the Korean characters interacted with a Nigerian customer in a convenience store and suggested they were a Jamaican family because of the character's thick dreadlocks and exaggerated Jamaican accent. Many spectators from around the world viewed this kind of interpretation of "black style" as a reinforcement of unfavorable preconceptions. Furthermore, many viewers in Korea laughed when the 2018 Korean drama *Miss Hammurabi* depicted the lead character wearing a burqa as a satirical response to Korea's traditional and patriarchal workplace. However, such images have not necessarily provided viewers with information about burqas, their cultural significance, or their history. This is because the show focused on Korean corporate

regulations rather than burkas. Many viewers from other countries, however, felt that the representation was inappropriate and was used as a mockery. Any incorrect or inappropriate representation of a culture has the potential to offend a certain audience.

The main issue here is what follows these clichéd representations of culture in the media. A culture or a group of people might be portrayed favorably or poorly, giving the impression that everyone exercising the culture fits into the same negative framework. A certain attitude toward other cultures and the people who inhabit them is produced by the representation itself. This extends beyond South Korea to include all instances in which stereotypes are employed in the international media. While some may find humor in it, even if it is a satire about their own culture, others may find it terribly offensive to see their culture depicted in such a negative light. In all honesty, nobody would be pleased if everything they stand for was ridiculed and shown in a poor manner.



The most crucial strategy is to teach media literacy to viewers all over the world so that they can recognize when anything in the media is exaggerated or, more often than not, completely false. People need clear guidance on how to distinguish between comedy and mockery, especially in a time and place where people are closely connected, obtaining and sharing

information, and learning about one another through the media. Thus, while portraying other cultures and foreigners in the media, a two-way effort must be considered: to inform and educate viewers on what constitutes accurate and inaccurate portrayals in the media, and to advise writers and producers to think carefully about the possible repercussions of portraying diversity in the media. Everyone enjoys a good laugh, but when it comes to representing diversity in media, the objective should be to provide people knowledge that is both identifiable and relatable as well as pleasant, exciting, and engaging.

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Beyond Barbie: Unveiling Asia's Reaction to Foreign Media

By Suna Kim, Program Coordinator at Asia Society Korea



August 30, 2023 — The film *Barbie* has achieved remarkable success at the global box office. However, there have been discussions in some Asian countries about potentially banning the movie. The Vietnamese authorities imposed a complete ban on the film due to the inclusion of a map supporting China's territorial claims over the South China Sea. A similar scenario unfolded in the Philippines, where the government requested that the map be digitally blurred before permitting the film to be screened in the country. But it's not just about geopolitics. Many of the themes found in the movie have sparked discussions and criticism across the region, raising questions about gender, equality, and the empowerment of women.

The film managed to achieve substantial success in China, where Chinese feminists embraced it as a counterbalance to the male-centric patriotic action movies that dominate the Chinese box office. In Korea, however, *Barbie* fared far worse and saw a

disappointing performance at the box office. Scholars and critics argue this setback is linked to surrounding gender inequality issues and a resistance to feminist perspectives within the country. Given that Korean feminism tends to align more closely with radical feminism than liberal feminism, one could posit that a degree of unfavorable sentiment exists towards feminist concepts or feminism in its entirety. However, immediately attributing *Barbie*'s underperformance at the Korean box office solely to feminism is a stance that lacks thorough substantiation. On the contrary, female-centric content in Korea has demonstrated success, as evident from the impressive achievements of girl groups in the K-pop scene. Hence, the assertions linking *Barbie*'s failure to feminism appear to carry a subtle undertone of ethnocentrism. More importantly, we can observe the challenges faced by certain Korean viewers in comprehending and assimilating the themes presented in particular foreign films. In this instance, *Barbie* serves as an example, stirring numerous conversations centered around themes of female empowerment.

Barbie, as a case in point, deviates from the realm of conventional toys or subjects of media discourse for children in Korea. As a result, the sentimental attachment to *Barbie* remains limited within these cultural boundaries. This cultural disparity alone can be exemplified as a reason for the film's underwhelming performance, shedding light on how the acceptance of foreign films or the perception of feminism in Korea significantly diverges from prevailing Western paradigms.

It's important to bear in mind that the willingness to embrace foreign concepts, whether they pertain to feminist humor or Western ideologies, is significantly impacted by a nation's stance on the matter and the current political climate. These sentiments highlight the gray area in which many viewers perceive the themes presented in '*Barbie*' as distinctly unfamiliar or uncomfortable. While this aspect certainly has political implications, it's also essential to acknowledge that these reactions stem from cultural disparities and how the younger generation identifies with those cultural nuances.

With that in mind, the underperformance of *Barbie* at the Korean box office should not be solely attributed to a focus on Korea's Confucian patriarchy or its radical feminist movement. Instead, it should be comprehended through the lens of the themes and subjects that resonate with the Korean audience—what they find captivating, relatable, or entertaining. Various Asian nations have their own unique reasons for either embracing or banning foreign movies such as *Barbie*. In any case, a more scholarly approach involves addressing this matter from multifaceted perspectives, including cultural, generational, and political dimensions, rather than attributing the reluctance towards foreign elements solely to a specific movement such as Korean feminism.



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