

# Korean Diaspora Focusing On The Netherlands

In recent years, the relationship between South-Korea and the Netherlands has, without a doubt, been solidified for a lot of reasons. Particularly in the last decade, in most part due to the “Korean wave”. Korea seems to have caught the attention of an increasing number of Westerners. There has, however, also been an increase in South-Koreans interested in the Western world, with more and more Koreans deciding to move to countries far away from their own. Scholars have been able to distinguish 4 periods, each driven by different historical factors that have caused Korean immigration. Those 4 periods are often referred to as “the Korean Diaspora”. In order to discuss this Korean Diaspora, a case study was made with the main focus being on Korean immigration to the Netherlands. As it is a fairly recent phenomenon, it was difficult to find trustworthy written sources. Therefore, to achieve the purpose of really grasping the Korean peoples’ reasons for choosing the Netherlands, whilst also listening to the Dutch take on Korea, we deemed it to important not only to consult the few written sources we managed to find, but to also hear the voice of the (Korean and Dutch) people directly. For this, internet surveys were made as well as written surveys, which were then spread in a Korean school in Amstelveen, whilst also interviewing Dutch people orally there on their knowledge and opinion on Korea.

We cannot start a paper that revolves on a term such as diaspora without defining what exactly it pertains to. Diaspora is derived from Greek and means the dispersion or scattering of a large group of people from the same ancestral home to other places in the world. This dispersion ranges from the Jews being forced into exile to Africans being forcibly taken during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Thus an important consequence to the historical meaning of diaspora is its reference to an involuntary element: those who are dispersed outside of their homeland are often forced out. Although in modern times, diaspora tends to refer to those who have left their home country, often in droves, due to social, economic or political reasons. These people leave their homeland in search for better conditions elsewhere, but always plan to return or have their descendants return to their home country at some point, they don’t view this ‘exile’ as a permanent. Diaspora is therefore “accompanied by a strong sense of connection to home (or homeland)... This may manifest itself as collective memory, myth, nostalgia, desire to return, organized action or commitment to homecoming... and so on.” (ryang, 2009, 2) Some academics have also tried to define what the difference actually is between Diaspora and Migration. While in theory, Diaspora and migration seem to refer to the same subject; the movement of a group of people from their home country to a new one, there is a nuance difference between the two. The key difference between Diaspora and migration is that in the former the “cultural, linguistic, religious, historical, and affective ties with the place of origin remain strong” (Smelser, Wright Baltes 2001, 3643). While in the latter “immigration from ‘an old country’ involves a one-way ticket, assimilation to the ‘new country,’ the adoption of a local citizenship and language, and

the public acceptance of local ways and customs”(Smelser, Wright Baltes 2001, 3643). At least this is the difference in theory, however the nuance is slight and the difference between the two can become blurred in depending on the situation. However for Diaspora the emphasis “is that the term conceptually connects home and abroad”<sup>6</sup> , whereas migration does not link the migrant with their home country as tightly as it does with the diaspora.

The Korean diaspora is often referred to as tongp’o (동포), a term that is preferred to kyop’o (교포), another term to describe the Korean diaspora in Korean, but which has come to have negative connotations by referring to people who have lost touch with their Korean root. While tongp’o has a more transnational implication, emphasizing links among various overseas Korean groups, kyop’o has a purely national meaning and refers to the Korean state. Both North- and South- Korea also have terms to refer to Korean citizens living outside of the Korean peninsula. North- refers to them as “haeokungmin” (해외국민), which means “overseas citizens”, while South- Korea uses the term “chaeokungmin” (재외국민), meaning “citizens abroad.

Looking at the Korean diaspora, there have been 4 distinct periods, each driven by different historical factors, causing the motivations and characteristics of Korean immigrants to be different in each period. The following division is agreed upon by most scholars. The first period was from 1860 to 1910, with 1910 being Korea’s annexation by Japan. The early immigrants from 1860 mainly came from bankrupt peasants who went to Manchuria in search for land to cultivate rice. The famine, that struck Korea in 1869-1870 caused large- scale migrations. Korean farmers and laborers immigrated to Hawaii, Manchuria and Russia in order to escape famine and poverty. Apart from the economic reasons that were clearly the push factors for this diaspora, there was also mention of cultural migration, like the small group of young Korean students that were sent by the Korean government to Japan for study purposes in 1881. The second period found place between 1910 and 1945. During the first half (1910 – 1938) Koreans were seen migrating to Japan and Hawaii seeking for job opportunities. In the second half (1939 – 1945) Korean men and women were forced to work in Japan’s war industries. While men were being sent to the battlefield to enhance the Japanese army for World War II, many Korean women were sent to that same battlefield to serve as comfort women. As a result, the population of Koreans in Japan increased rapidly reaching 2,3 million by August 1945, when the war ended. That period is also characterized by migration of political refugees and activists to China, Russia and the United States to carry out the Korean independence movement against the Japanese . The third period was from 1945 to 1962, and included events such as the independence of Korea (1945), the Korean war (1950 – 1953), the war bride act (1946) and the McCarrand and Walter act of 1952 . All of those together, along with the strong military, political and economical linkages between the US and South Korea contributed to a steady increase in the annual number of Korean migration. The final diaspora period has 1962, when the South Korean government passed the new foreign country Immigration law, as it

starting point and does not yet have an ending. 1965 can be seen as an important date as it was then that the US immigration policy was approved, which abolished the national origins system and opened the door for Korean immigration to the US in large numbers.

When those diasporas take place, with people permanently residing in countries other than the ones they were born in, the question can be raised whether they and in particular the generations after them can still be considered to share that original nationality. It has been noticed that scattered people often do retain a bond with their original home while many times also retaining a 'collective' memory and myths of their homeland, shared amongst themselves, along with the history and achievements of this past home. That phenomenon is undoubtedly strengthened by the forming of communities abroad, which often keep the traditions of their home countries alive. To find out whether the Koreans who are living in the Netherlands still feel truly Korean because of their ethnic lineage despite having lived abroad their whole life or most of their lives, is something we decided to ask the Koreans living in the Netherlands directly. When we asked them if they felt a strong bond with Korea, 11 out of 15 Koreans, male and female, answered yes. Out of the remaining ones, some answered no, while others weren't sure because they felt like they had become too westernized. Others were in doubt because it had simply been a very long time since they'd been to Korea, while at the same time, they still had some family members living there, who in a way still connected them to Korea. The opinions on whether they consider going back to Korea an option were divided. With people who were born and raised in the Netherlands, but who have Korean parents, the opinions seem less divided, as can be shown in the following results from our internet poll, in which 69 people have participated.

Figure 1:

Results online survey: 'Would you consider a person with Korean parents but born and raised in the Netherlands as a Korean? '

When looking at this figure one may ask which factors actually determine Korean national identity. The East Asia Research Center at Korea university did research to this question in 2005 and 2007 by conducting a survey (see figure 2) where they distinguished ethnic factors (referring to lineage and cultural elements) from civic factors (referring to territory, law, politics,...) , in order to see which one was deemed more important for the Korean national identity. To see whether the results obtained by the survey were still accurate today we asked the same questions in the form of an online survey where 69 people replied to (see figure 3).

Figure 2

Figure 3

When looking figure 3 we can conclude that civic factors are considered slightly more important than ethnic factors as qualifications of Korean national identities. The survey that we recently conducted, showed similar findings and reconfirmed that conclusion, as 59,68% of the Korean interviewees considered civic more important than the ethnic factors (40,32%).

Now moving onto the Dutch-Korean relationship: while Korea has had connections to the Netherlands for a couple of centuries, official diplomatic relations between The Netherlands and both South- and North-Korea are fairly recent, with the former starting in 1961 –and thus celebrating its 50th anniversary last year- and the latter starting in 2001- celebrating its 10th anniversary last year. Long before such official diplomatic relationships were agreed upon, both countries had already gotten familiar with each other through trading purposes, which in the beginning were mostly initiated by the Dutch and their trading fleet. As the years went by and both countries changed internally, while at the same time gaining more knowledge on each other's culture and people, they started to show a genuine interest for official relations.

As of 2011, statistics of the “NederlandsCentraal Bureau voor de Statistiek” stated the following about the number of Koreans living in the Netherlands: “37 North Korean-born and 3,012 South Korean-born persons, 4 persons of North-Korean origin and 446 persons of South-Korean origin born locally to two parents from outside the Netherlands.

2,159 persons born locally to one South Korean-born parent and one parent born in the Netherlands, for a total of 5,617 persons, not including ethnic Koreans from other countries.”

The 2011 statistics of “South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade” show a much smaller total of 1,771 persons, which has little changes from the 2009 total. Among those recorded, 108 were Dutch citizens, 614 were permanent residents, 253 were international students, and the remaining 796 had other types of visas. The most popular Dutch cities among Korean immigrants are Amsterdam or its surroundings, with 629 Koreans living there. Rotterdam comes in second with 521 Koreans, while the remaining 621 are residing in other parts of the country.

There are several reasons as to how the Korean and Dutch got to know more about a country so far away from their own and, ultimately, led to some of them to choosing to move. Some reasons may have come in more subtle ways than others; but all undeniably added to the Dutch-Korean relationships as it is today. We tried to gain more insight in how both think about each other and what could have driven the Koreans to move to here by, on the one hand, consulting official statistics and on the other hand, as mentioned before, listening to the voice of the people directly, through written, spoken and online interviews.

The following might not be very surprising: one of the main aspects that contributed to the Dutch-Korean relations are both countries' business purposes. The South-Korean company branches seem to have boomed, leading to a kind of representation of Korea in the world and the Netherlands. When we asked Dutch people what they could tell us about Korea, an often stated answer were companies such as Samsung, or car brands like Hyundai. Most of the Korean people we interviewed also said that they first came to Korea because of their parents' job, which made them move to the Netherlands.

A second, very important aspect that led to the increasing number of Koreans in the Netherlands is the Korean war, in which a lot of Dutch men fought alongside South-Koreans, resulting into Korean-Dutch families. Right after the Korean War, a small number of Koreans began to arrive in Europe, mainly wives of returning European officers and soldiers who had served in the Korean War, or adoptive children.

That leads us to the next important factor behind the number of Koreans in the Netherlands: adoption. Korean adoption has roots that extend far back into its cultural history. When Pak Chŏnghŭi came to power in 1961, he initiated an emigration program to countries (such as Saudi Arabia and West-Germany) that were in need of cheap labor, as a way of decreasing the numbers in the overpopulated South-Korea. Due to the amount of Korean laborers in those host countries, Korean communities were created. After the Seoul Olympics brought Korean adoptees to the international public eye, with adoptive families from all over the world traveling with their children to Korea to watch the Olympics and learn about their birth country, the joking, yet critical remark was made that "Korea's largest export was babies." The people and government of Korea took it as a sign of a weak and underdeveloped nation that was unable to care for its own children, which ultimately led to quotas in 1987 for the number of children allowed to leave the country each year, after which the number of foreign adoptions dropped drastically.

The trend of decreasing foreign adoption continued steadily until 1998, when economic problems in Korea led to a sudden increase in foreign adoptions. The Korean Health and Welfare Ministry reported that the year 1998 brought a 9.3 percent increase in the number of Korean children adopted by foreigners when compared to statistics from the year before. As a result of the economic conditions and the following increase of abandoned children, the Korean government permitted the quota restrictions to be lifted in 1998.

Specifically for the Netherlands, about 4,000 of the people of Korean origin residing in the Netherlands are Korean adoptees. Dutch interest in adoption of babies from Asia began to pick up in the late 1960s. An example of that interest is the Dutch writer Jan de Hartog, who had earlier adopted two Korean War orphans and was promoting charitable activities for children in Vietnam who had been orphaned due to the Vietnam War bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong in 1966. In 1968, he appeared on a Dutch television show with his two adopted Korean daughters. After the broadcast, nearly a thousand people called the studio and expressed interest in adopting Korean babies.

The number of adoptions has fallen a bit in recent years. From 1995 to 2006, the total number of adoptions from South Korea was 349, with just two in 2005 and only one in 2006. That made South Korean adoptees about 10.9% of the 3,194 international adoptions and 2.25% of the 15,467 total adoptions during that period .

There are also a number of other reasons why Koreans chose to move to the Netherlands, corresponding to the reasons behind the Korean diaspora as stated earlier. A reason often stated as to why Koreans choose the Netherlands above those other countries is because of study purposes. Apparently, the Dutch are known to be good at English, as well as Dutch. Most of the participants in our survey stated that they ended up moving to the Netherlands because of their parents' (mostly their father's) job, or for those study purposes (because of the cheap tuition fee and because of the good English) When asked how Korean immigrants came into contact with the Netherlands, some of the most frequent occurring answers to our written surveys included soccer (a lot of people mentioned GuusHiddink), tulips, but also more "reliable" sources such as the internet and books. There are a certain number of traits that both countries seem to assign to each other. For the Dutch, it might not come across as peculiar that they often start talking about the split between North- and South-Korea, because that's what is the most vivid in their minds. They're often able to tell more about North-Korea, largely due to the media in the form of articles or documentaries that have been brought to their attention. There is no doubt that the reason they remember North-Korea more than South-Korea is because of how shocking a country it is to them. South-Korea often seems to disappear in the shadow of what seems to be "the danger of North-Korea". We often recognize a hint of orientalism in their opinion on Korea, thinking it to be "more or less the same as China and Japan". We spot a similar trend among the opinions of the Koreans in Korea on the Netherlands. Where there is orientalism among the Dutch, there's also a kind of Occidentalism in the minds of the Koreans when it comes to describing the Dutch and their culture. When asked about their expectations before coming to the Netherlands, Korean immigrants between 12 and 38 answered that they thought there were going to be a lot of pretty blonde girls and some even answered that they thought there were going to be many "gay guys". That's peculiar considering orientalist-minded people often regard Korean guys or idols as "gay". From the internet survey however, they almost unanimously answered "yes" to the question whether it's possible for a Korean to be dating a Dutch person. Expecting a lot of Dutch people to be gay could also be a consequence of what the Korean immigrants described in our written survey as "Dutch open-mindedness". Both before coming to the Netherlands and during their actual stay in the Netherlands, they answer, the Dutch seem "kind and open-minded" people. Some go a bit more into detail and explain, when we ask them if it's easy to befriend Dutch people, that at first, the Dutch seem a bit cold, but once you get to know them, they're a lot friendlier. That also seems to be proof of how it can at first be a bit difficult for Korean immigrants to integrate in Dutch society. Once they get more accustomed to the Dutch culture and get to know its people better, however, they seem to grow more attached to both of them. When we asked them if they felt part of Dutch society, most of the participants to the survey answered "partially", even when almost everyone of them gave a positive answer to the question

whether they feel accepted by it. As the results from our written and oral interviews suggested, we were able to conclude that the reason behind the Koreans not completely feeling a part of Dutch society is because they're in a way still attached to their home country, as we talked about earlier.

An important factor in feeding the connection with their home country is the communities they form. Everyone who participated in our written survey, 10 males and 5 females aged 12 to 38 all answered that they were a part of a Korean community. They first got to hear about the communities through the internet, through their parents or other Koreans, or finally also through the Korean church itself. As mentioned earlier, in the process of adapting to the country Koreans have immigrated to, Korean immigrants often create those communities as a way of connecting to people whom they share a special sort of bond with: their home country.

In those Korean communities, Korean churches often play an important role. They serve as both spiritual and social institutes for Korean immigrants and have three main functions. Firstly, Korean church serves both as a social center and cultural identification platform for Koreans in America. Secondly, it serves as an educational institute by teaching immigrants' children the Korean language (if necessary), history, and culture. Lastly, it is often seen as a place to keep Korean nationalism alive. Aside from those three main purposes, Korean church also provides Korean immigrants with various ways of help such as rent apartments, find jobs, enroll their offspring in school, arrange driver's licenses, and of course find friendship and fellowship. For immigrants the church has thus acted as the center of the community. According to a recent study, 90% of some 30,000 Korean immigrants in New Zealand attended church, even though many of them did not attend church in Korea. The need for networking in a new country encouraged them to start attending church. One Korean church, for example, even offered a seminar on how to set up a small business. The church thus offers much more than a place to worship God and learn about the Bible. In a lot of cases, it has become a kind of home. Moving beyond meeting the needs of the Korean immigrants, the Diaspora churches are in a strategic position to engage in world missions. A lot of Koreans seem to build churches wherever they go and so become largely engaged in evangelizing their own people and their neighbors. The Korean churches have incomparable opportunities to attend to peoples around them with the gospel because they can engage in missions to their adopted country as well as to other countries. Western churches are often oppressed by their history of colonization and missions, but the Korean church does not have such a negative history and therefore has a special role in world mission. The South Korean embassy lists five Korean churches in the Netherlands, among which three in Amsterdam, which doesn't seem very weird as, as stated earlier, the official statistics name Amsterdam as the place in which the highest number of Koreans live. Of the remaining two churches, one is located in both Rotterdam and Leidschendam. The Korean church is in close relation with the Korean school. Often members of the church invite students at the schools, these are Korean and also Dutch, to attend events and service at the church.

Making a clear conclusion is difficult considering the fact that there hasn't yet been any research done about Korean diaspora in the Netherlands and we lacked time and experience to do enough research ourselves. However, it is noticeable that the relationship between South-Korea and the Netherlands is expanding and improving which is inevitably leading to an increase of South- Korean migration to the Netherlands. This is mainly due to an increase of Korean companies in the Netherlands. We tried to compare official statistics and written sources with the opinion of the Koreans themselves, and were able to draw an interesting conclusion, namely that the opinion of Koreans living in Korea on the Netherlands differs a bit from that of Koreans who have already been to the Netherlands and particularly from the opinion of those who are living here permanently. One example, something that became clear through our surveys, is what factors the Koreans judge as "being Korean". It is understandable that Koreans in Korea have a slightly different point of view than those living in the Netherlands, whether it be permanently or for a period of time. Coming into contact with the Dutch culture is often enough to change their opinion. It also seems like the opinion changes according to their age, because younger people seem to be able to integrate a bit more easily into the Dutch society, hence making them feel more a part of it, while adults often feel a stronger tie to South-Korea, which is not to say that young Koreans don't either. One thing we were able to learn from this experience is that, as opinions are often based on own experience, it does seem like, to get a clear understanding of what kind of people the Dutch are, what their country or culture is like, you often get the best results when you directly visit the country. That's something that is not only bound to the Dutch-Korean relationship, but to all international bonds. Even though we only found a hint of both Occidentalism and Orientalism while preparing for this paper, there's no doubt that there's still a lot of people out there that base their opinions on a country while being heavily influenced by those two factors. Getting to know other countries by actually visiting countries might help, even if it's only a little bit, to get a broader image of what the countries are actually like.

#### Dutch interviews

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuVxTu8H4Qc&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=1>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWlp79KxoPg&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=2>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zuvDhyDqfw&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=15>

#### Korean Interviews

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Oc6s7gXYfo&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=14> (dating)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQyirF7TtFE&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=13> (disappointments)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H0Yd0OllmY&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=12> (impressed)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHBRFiKMN5Q&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=11> (live permanently)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmOsK0TR5dk&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=10> (integrated)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szFEhQ-x8d4&list=PL3GUvPX1HMM-2VOuzUx44JiuAtzzCOdPg&index=8> (similarities)

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