

Migrant Workers and Citizenship

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Citizenship and Nationality:

Citizen literally means a person who lives in a city. Free grown-up men who lived in a polis in old Greece and merchants & handicraftsmen who lived in a free city and were liberated from the yoke of feudalism in medieval Europe were called citizens. However, since the 18th-19th century, citizens now meant residents in a city but extended to members of a nation-state. Citizen became a synonymous with people of a particular nation.

Nation-state is a composed word with nation and state. Nation is a cultural community of people who think they have common heritage and destiny. State is a legislative and political organization controlling a particular territory. Nation-state can be defined as a political community with united equal citizens residing within a territory. An outsider is considered not to be a citizen. Characteristic of the Nation-state is clearly stated out when it is compared to the Universal state, a virtual concept. In the universal state, all human beings are free and they can be equal universal citizens. However, in reality human community is divided with a unit of state-nation and a citizen of a country is difficult to be a citizen of another country at the same time. State-nation drew a distinction between its people and foreigners based on citizenship.

A citizen is a subject who has the civic, political and social rights. A citizen exercises various rights including the right to vote. At the same time, a citizen owes a duty to serve to the community and state. Ideally, a citizen belongs to a nation-state. Based on that, a nation-state includes all resident within its territory as citizens. In this case, a citizen is the synonym for a national. However, in the nation-state system, a fundamental conflict existed between a citizen and a national, such as anti-semitism and racism.

A nation-state does not provide a particular group of people living in its territory with citizenship or forces them cultural assimilation. A nation-state partly deprives some rights from a group of nationals who have the citizenship officially but do not have full attachments to the state. Discrimination against native country, class, sex, nationality, race, religion and other criteria exists within a nation-state. This means some groups of nationals cannot be full citizens.

Benjamin Disraeli evaluated that two nationals existed in a country mentioning the rich who adapted themselves to the system and the low level class lived as if they were a totally different nation in England in the 19th century. Bob Jessop said the 'two nations' policy', criticizing the Thatcherism rejected a welfare state based on full employment and compromise between classes in the 1980s in England, and it advocated a theory of cruel competitiveness and possessive individualism.

'Two nations' pointed out the existence of groups of nationals who were discriminated unfairly, who had incomplete citizenship, or who were excluded from the power systematically.

Globalization and Multi-identity

Globalization had challenged citizenship based on a nation-state. A great number of people's movement through boundaries between countries raised a question about 'belonging to a nation-state'. As the number of foreigners have increased around the world, cultural value and customs have rapidly become different. There is no time for cultural assimilation and its process. The boundary of a nation-state itself has fallen down. Millions of people with different citizenship live in more than two different countries. Millions of people live in a foreign country where they do not have citizenship. According to the International Organization for Migration, as of 2000, the number of people who live in a foreign country exceeded 150 million. The power to control economy, welfare system and nation's culture has been encroached. Globalization markets, trans-national enterprises, international regional organizations, trans-national organizations and newly extended international culture have gradually exercised their influence. A concept of citizen as a person who spent most his or her life in a country has lost its ground.

Millions of people are deprived of civil rights because they cannot be citizens of a country where they currently live. There are also millions of people who do not exercise their rights as citizen. The number of citizens who do not have attachment to cultural community of a nation-state because of boundaries with a lot of halls and multiple identities are also high. This has eaten away the foundation of a nation-state as a practice place for democracy.

A concept of citizenship that an individual belongs to a nation-state is no more suitable. Cases that a national is not the synonym for a citizen have increased. A model of a nation-state itself has been washed out. A great number of people belong to more than one society at the same time at the various levels and have several collective identities. To explain this, a new approach to citizenship is necessary.

The standard for vesting citizenship is not necessarily to be a nation-state. Therefore, need for extending citizenship has been raised. According to Etienne Balibar, human right movements had extended civil rights to human being rights. A concept of citizenship being provided to citizens of the world society transcending nation-states' boundaries has more encouraged.

Migrant Workers in Korea and Citizenship

The 'Freedom of migration and residence' is the basic human rights prescribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the freedom is usually allowed within a limited boundary. Over the boundary, problems of documents for immigration, migration, or change of citizenship are combined. Therefore, a nation-state controls migration of its people and foreigners. It is considered as a part of sovereignty. In most of countries foreigners are regulated in visa, residence permit and work permit. A nation-state takes this measure in a bid to protect its own people's job opportunity.

At the end of 2002, up to 360,000 migrant workers lived in Korea. The Korean government accepted foreign workforce to cover the shortage of domestic labor not as a status of immigrant or citizen but of temporary migrant worker who provides labor for the set period and then returns to their country.

In the Korean society where a concept of nation is put on a family line, nobody wanted migrant workers to settle in Korea and damage the legend of a single-nation state. Out of the thousand migrant workers in Korea, only 30,000 are recognized as workers under the Labor Standard Law.

In other words, legislative workers are 9.2% of the total migrant workers. The rest are 40,000 industrial trainees and 290,000 undocumented workers. Those are trainees who learn industrial technique through their experience and these are people who smuggled themselves into Korea or tourists who overstayed for more than the allowed period.

The Korean government has thoroughly discriminated and ruled out migrant workers. Migrant workers are not human beings but subjects of control and disposal while they are discriminated based on nationality. Most of migrant workers in a production line are not included into workers in the Korean society. Often migrant workers' basic rights are invaded. To overcome these problems,

Roh Moohyun government is planning to introduce the work permit system which will provide them with a status of worker. However, the new system is also far from accepting migrant workers as citizens.

Democracy and Globalization of Citizenship

All members of the society should raise political voices as citizens to keep and strengthen democracy. All people cannot be 'nationals' who have common history and culture. To deal with this dilemma, two methods can be sought for.

First, a new form of citizenship that can deal with the pressure of the globalization is needed. 'Citizens of democratic state' where 'nationals' consisting of a part of a nation-state are dismantled and where open and flexible attachments are based should be substituted. Traditional practices that provides only people who belongs to a cultural community of a nation-state with citizenship should be shredded off. It should be changed to grant citizenship to all people who are qualified for it. Native, family's residence, economic activities and cultural contribution can be also standards for granting citizenship. For example, Germany revised the citizenship nationality law in 1999 and combined a principle of the traditional bloodline with a principle of the born place. Therefore, foreign children born in Germany could obtain citizenship.

Second, the important political decision-making being implemented in the levels of international regions or trans nations, the way for people to participate in a democratic method should be developed. Then, migrant workers will be able to have an identity as citizens, or members of universal society, not as strangers who are excluded from the nation-state. In the process, inequality among individuals and nationalities will be overcome. Therefore, a concept about the citizenship that can include equality among individuals and acknowledgement of collective difference should be created and promoted.
