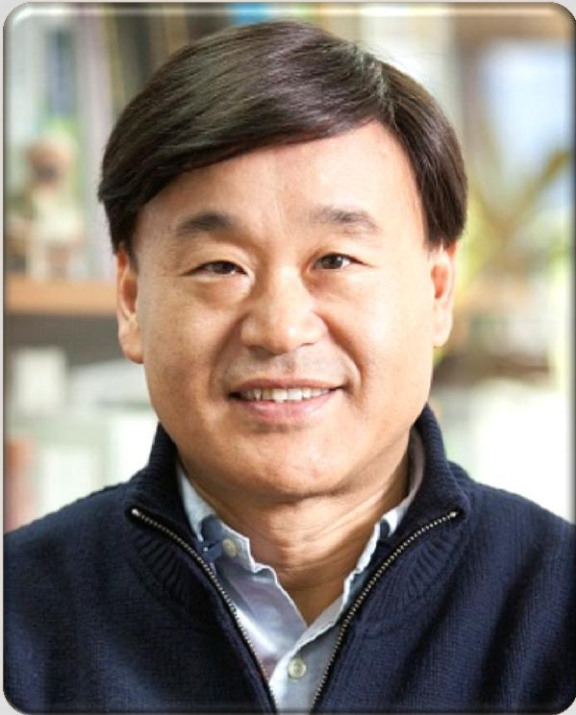# The Development and Characteristics of Multiculturalism in South Korea

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# Introducing In-Jin Yoon



- BA in Sociology from Korea University
- MA and PH.D in Sociology from the University of Chicago
- Assistant Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara
- Professor of the Department of Sociology, Korea University
- Head of the Brain Korea 21 Project Group for Conflict Society
- President of the Association for North Korean Migrants Studies
- Advisor to the Committee on Foreigner Policy

# Migration transition

- Societies go through a number of fundamental changes such as industrial transition (from agricultural society to industrial society) and demographic transition (from rapid population growth to population decline and aging)

- Migration transition follows industrial and demographic transitions.
  1. Initial stage of emigration
  2. A stage of both emigration and immigration
  3. Final stage of immigration

# From an immigrant-sending country to an immigrant-receiving country



Korean miners and nurses to West Germany in the early 1960s



Foreign migrant workers entered Korea since the late 1980s

Source : http://www.khan.co.kr/

# Special Exhibition on Korean miners and nurses to Germany



Korea Immigration History Museum in Inchon

Source : http://www.khan.co.kr/

# Korean nurses to Germany



A group of Korean nurses waved goodbye to families and friends at Yeouido Airport in the early 1960s.

They were called in Germany "Lotus-Blume", in English Lotus from the East.

Source : http://www.khan.co.kr/

# Korean miners to Germany

Korean miners worked at dangerous mines of West Germany where native Germans were reluctant to work.

"Glück Auf" was German miner's greeting, meaning good luck and wishing for safe return from the dangerous underground.

Source : http://www.khan.co.kr/

# Foreign migrant workers in search of "Korean Dream"



Foreign migrant workers began to enter South Korea in the late 1980s to seek better employment opportunities and higher wages in South Korea.

# Female marriage migrants to Korea

International marriage began in South Korea in the 1980s by the efforts of the Unification Church. It increased again since 1992 when ethnic Koreans in China began to marry South Korean men in rural areas. It increased rapidly in the early 2000s when marriage brokers arranged international marriages between Asian women and Korean men.

# Ethnic transition

- Ethnic composition of a society changes as a result of immigration of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Ethnic diversity is often an unintended consequence and once it occurs, it is irreversible.

- Ethnic transition follows the stages below
    1. Ethnically homogeneous society
    2. Society with visible minorities
    3. Multiethnic society

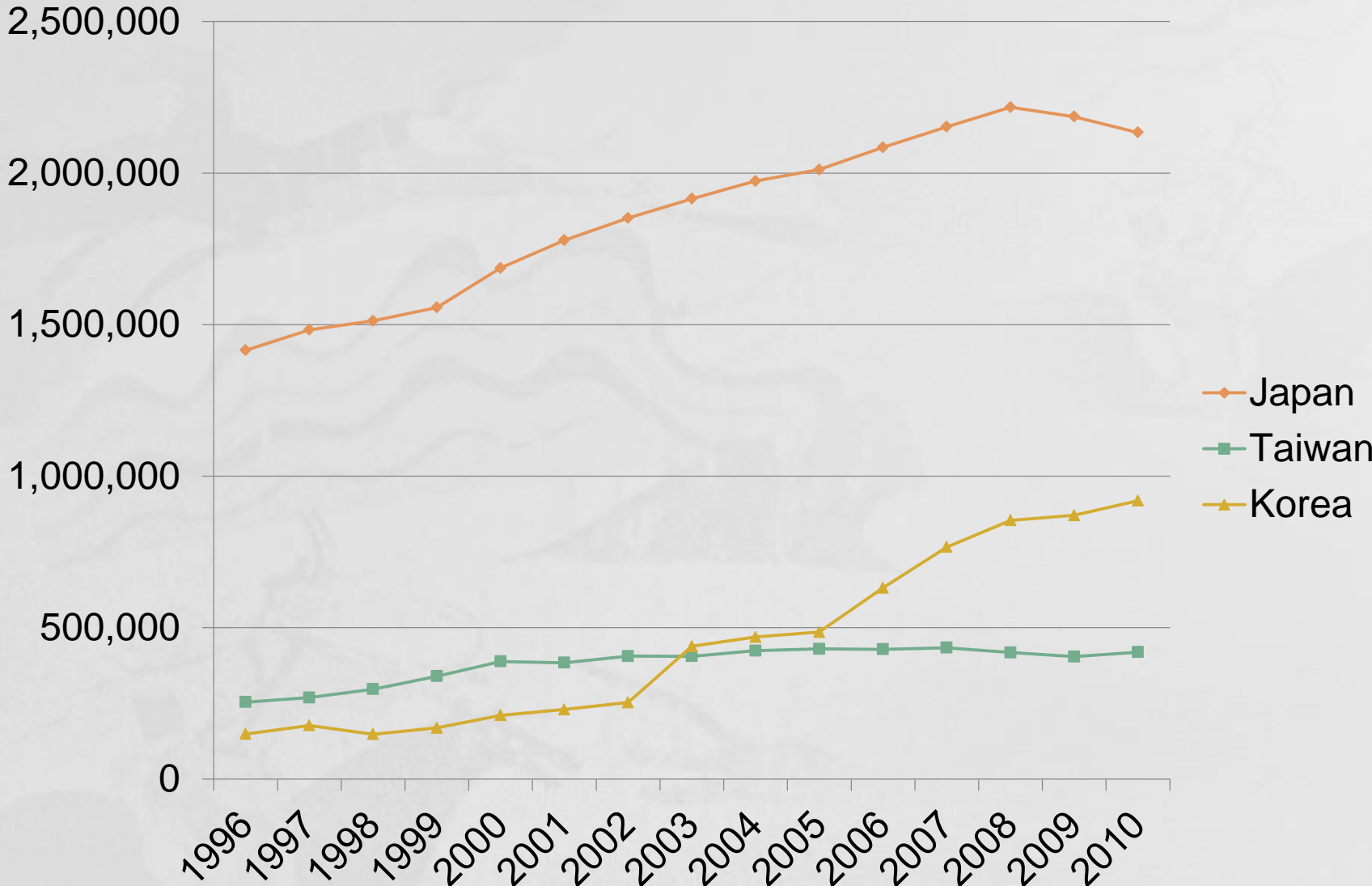# From a mono-ethnic society to a multiethnic society
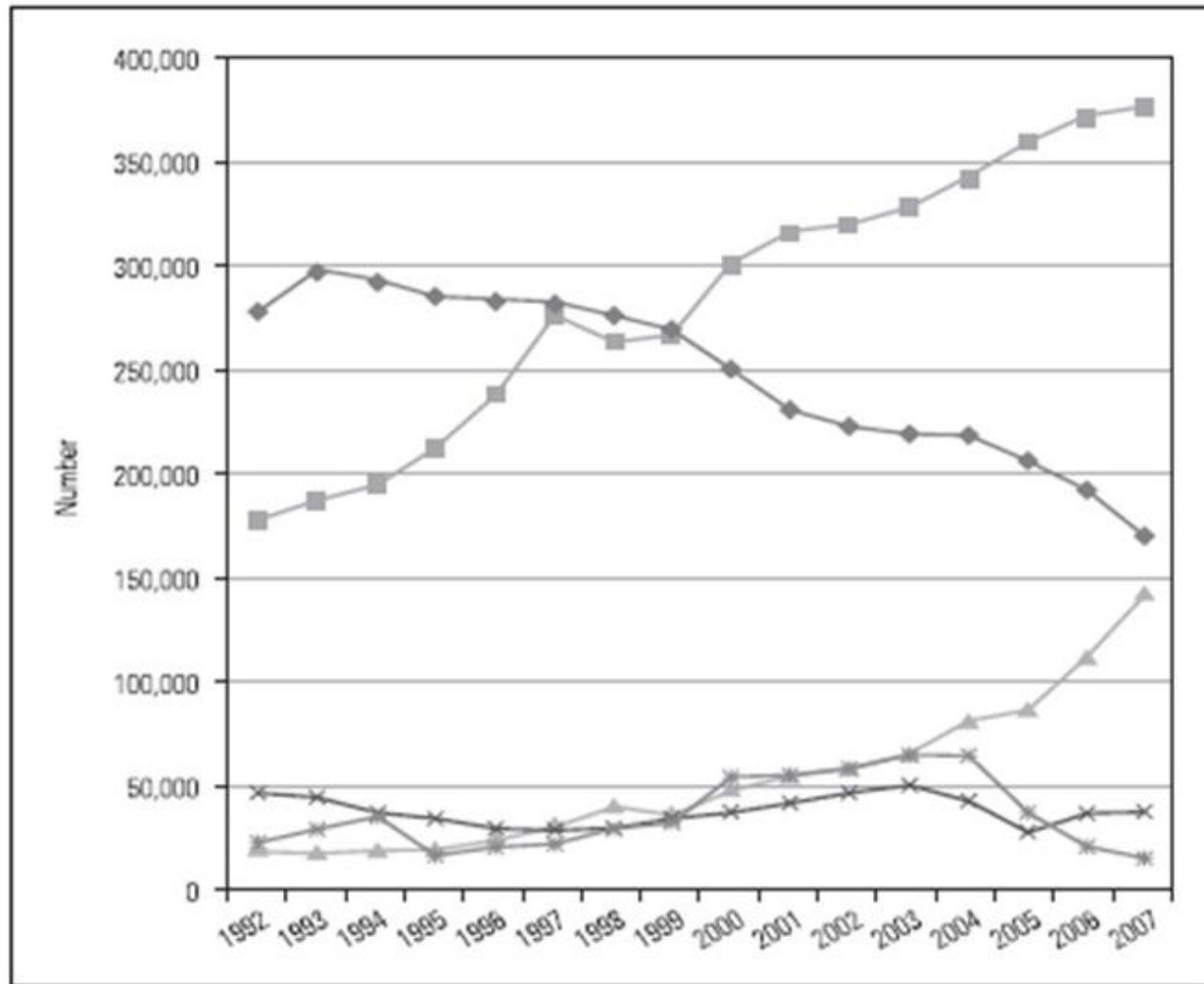


Korean children of the past
(1945~1965)



Korean children of the present
(2000s)

Source : http://www.chosun.com/

# Trends of registered Immigrants in Northeast Asia

# Migrant workers in Japan

# Migrant workers in Taiwan



Data labels (purple line — total migrant workers):
270,620 · 294,967 · 326,515 · 304,605 · 303,684 · 300,150 · 314,034 · 327,396 · 338,755 · 357,937 · 365,060 · 341,484

Data labels (blue line — missing migrant workers): 4,677 · 4,057 · 4,268 · 5,089 · 7,079 · 9,688 · 12,062 · 12,938 · 10,918 · 11,226 · 11,105 · 5,704

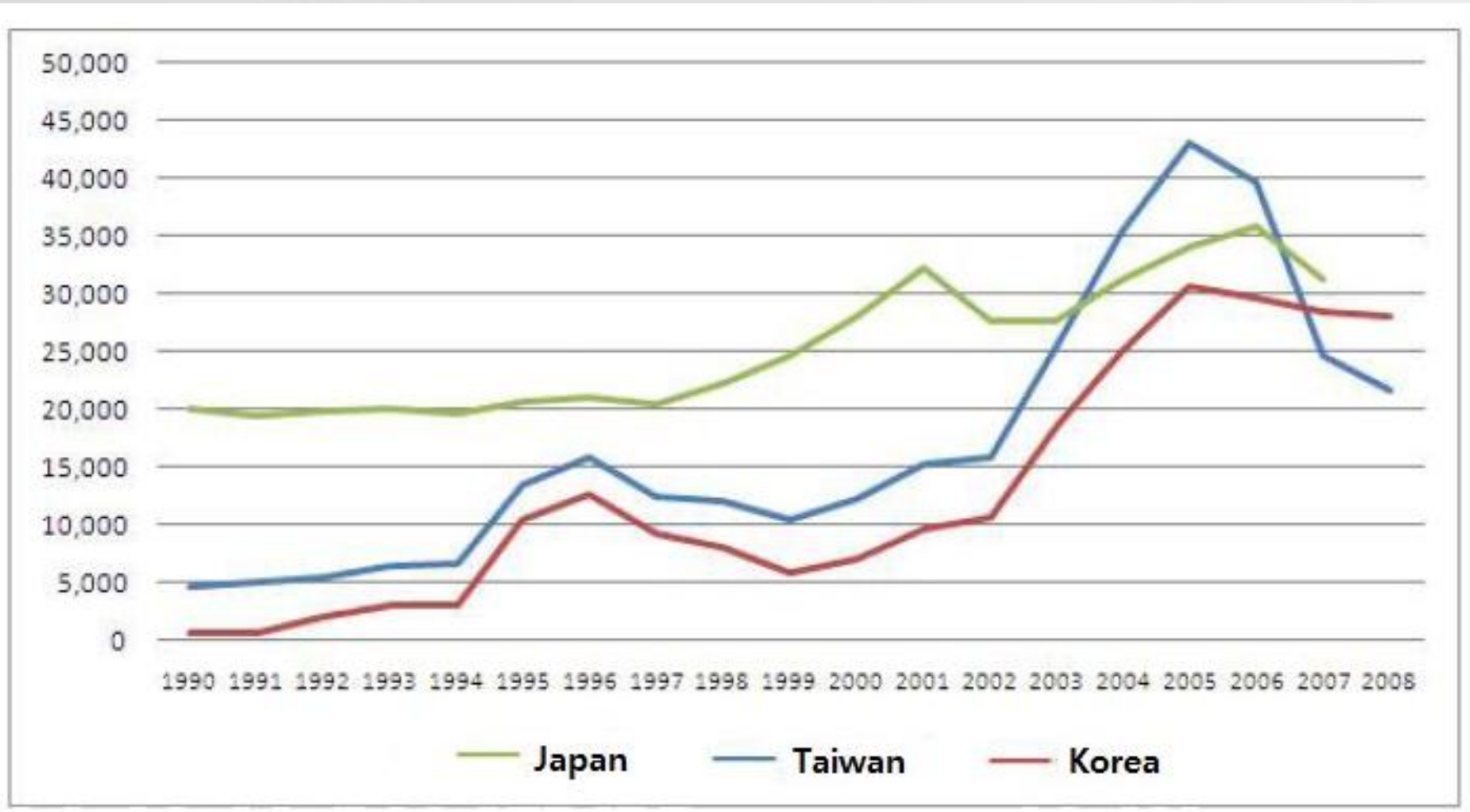Years: 1998 · 1999 · 2000 · 2001 · 2002 · 2003 · 2004 · 2005 · 2006 · 2007 · 2008 · 2009
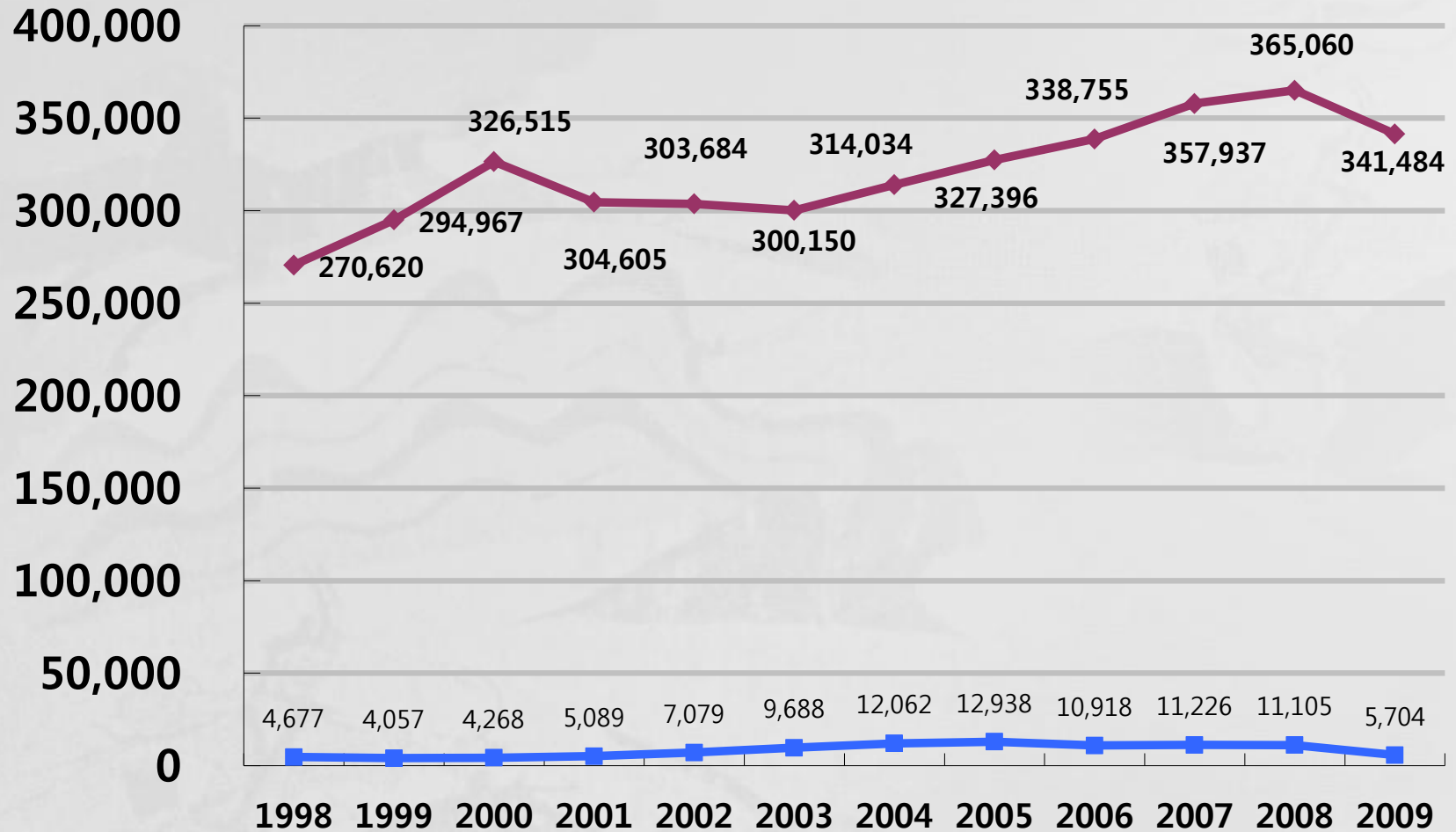
**Missing migrant workers (undocumented workers)**
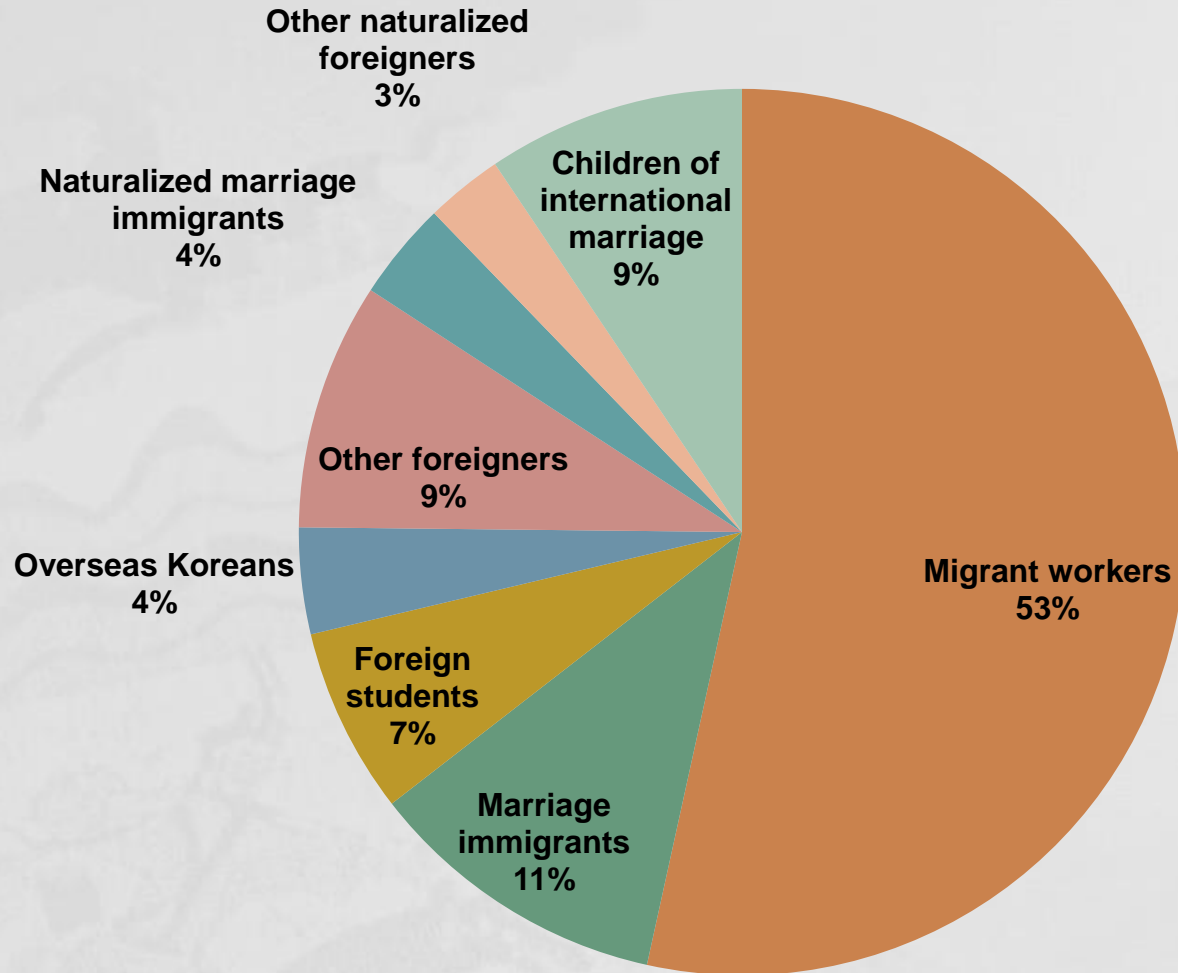
# Migrant workers in Korea
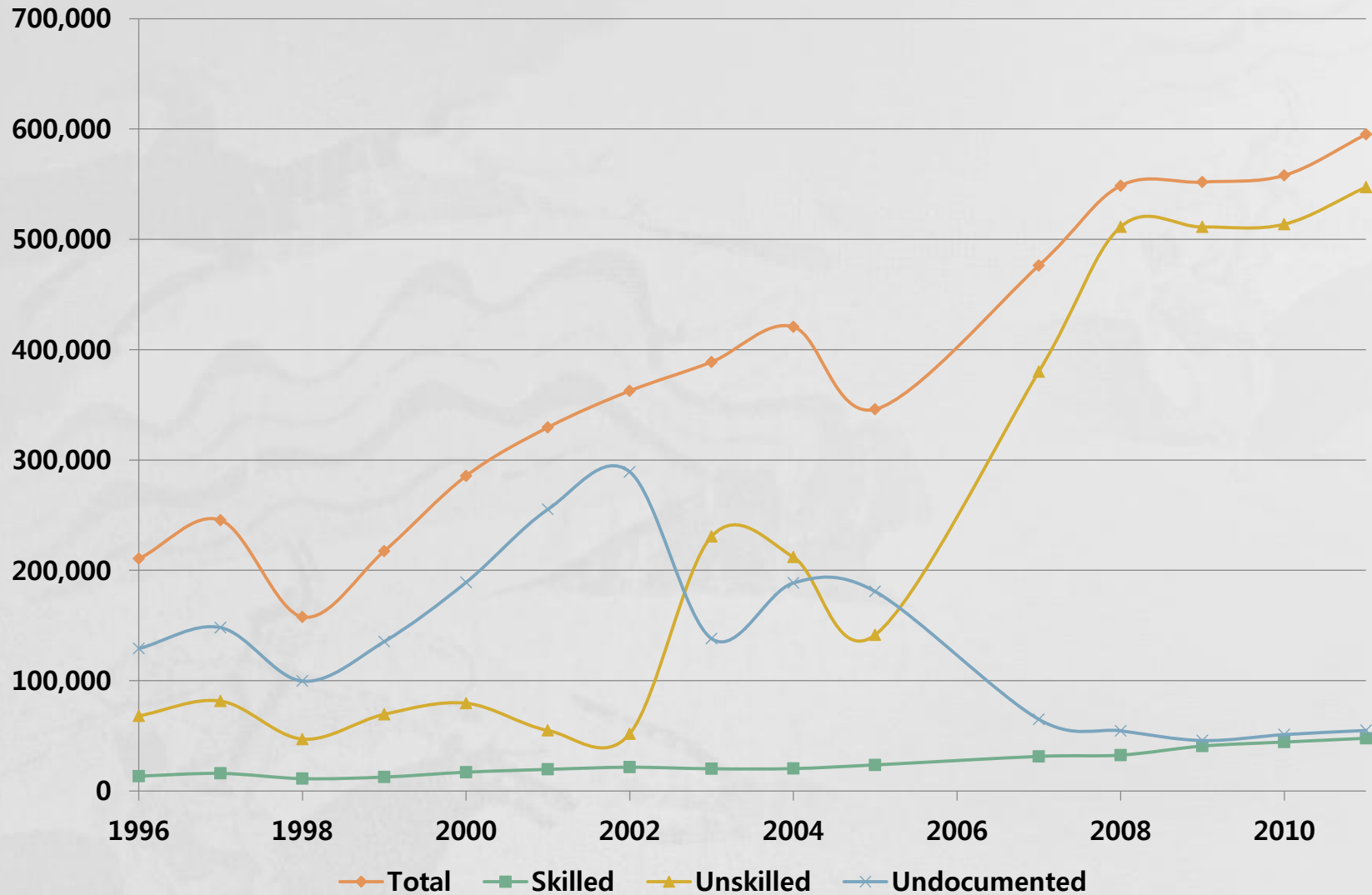
# International marriages in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea

# Causes of the increase of foreigners

- Foreign migrant workers: fourfold increase (140,000 in 1995 to 568,906 in 2009(March)

- Marriage immigrants: 240,000 foreign brides entered SK in the 1990-2005 period. In 2007, 146,508 marriage immigrants lived in South Korea.

- Children of multicultural family: In June 2008, 58,007 children of the family of international marriage, 33% of them are enrolled in primary and secondary schools.

- Naturalized Koreans: Naturalized Koreans increased fivefold from 1,800 to 17,000 in 2005.

# Foreign Residents in Korea, 2009



Pie chart: Foreign Residents in Korea, 2009
- Migrant workers 53%
- Marriage immigrants 11%
- Children of international marriage 9%
- Other foreigners 9%
- Foreign students 7%
- Overseas Koreans 4%
- Naturalized marriage immigrants 4%
- Other naturalized foreigners 3%

# Entering a multicultural society

○ Percent of foreigners in the total Korean population
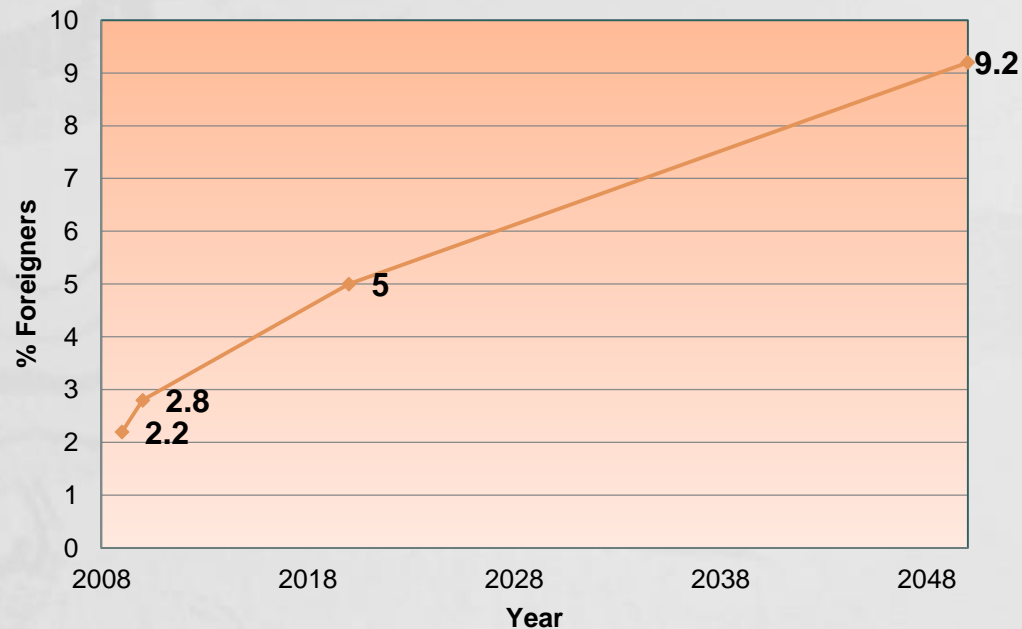


○ South Korea will become a multiethnic society in 2020 and an immigration country in 2050.

# Multicultural discourse and policy in South Korea

- **Growing interest in multiculturalism and multicultural society in South Korea since 2000**

- **Ethnic and racial diversity -> challenge to social solidarity based on ethnic and cultural homogeneity**

- **Adaptation problems and human rights issues of ethnic minorities, migrant workers, marriage immigrants, and children of multicultural families**

- **Social integration out of ethnic and cultural diversity**

# From migrant worker problem to social integration problem

- Initially migrant worker problems involved labor supply and human rights issues.
- Now other issues related with social integration became important: marriage, family, naturalization, citizenship, education, health and medical service, welfare, community, assimilation, and identity.

# Emergence of multiculturalism in the West

1. Low fertility and aging –> influx of migrant workers
2. Increased awareness of rights of minorities as a result of the civil rights movement of the 1960s
3. Decreased need for the control and suppression of racial minorities after the cold war
4. Widespread consensus and support for free democracy

# Was multicultural policy urgent in South Korea?

- Did South Korea face urgent demographic, social, economic, and political conditions that necessitate the adoption of multicultural policy?
- It seems that the Roh Moo-hyun government took proactive measures to the changing environment of immigration policy
    1. the reduction of the Korean labor force due to low fertility and aging
    2. competition for global talents (e.g., recruitment of professionals, investors, and foreign students)
    3. the increase of social costs due to the growth of immigrants and their children
    4. International norms emphasizing human rights of migrants

# Main factors of progressive immigration policy reforms in Korea

○ Korea implemented progressive immigration policy like the Employment Permit System, the Basic Rights of Foreigners, and the Multicultural Family Support Act

1. Strong political leadership with emphasis on human rights and global standards
2. Strong civil society advocating migrant workers and marriage immigrants
3. Policy alliance between progressive political leaders and civil society
4. Sympathetic public opinion toward human rights protection and multiculturalism

# Passive response of Japan to immigration issues

- Japan keeps the back-door policy like the trainee system and use of Nikkejin as low-skilled workers

- Japan does not allow voting rights at local elections for permanent immigrants

- Multicultural programs in Japan are local based and do not have comprehensive and systematic policy at the national level

# Main factors of passive immigration policy of Japan

- Lack of strong political leadership in the parliamentary system
- Strong influence of bureaucrats and weak policy network between the government and intellectuals/civil activists – difficult to go beyond conventional practice
- Weak and local-based civil organizations
- Strong resistance of the general public to accept migrants as members of Japanese society

# Main factors of multicultural policy in Taiwan

- The movement of indigenous people for recovering land in 1988

- The movement of Hakka people for the restoration of their original name

- The advocacy groups (Protestant churches)

- The Democratic Progressive Party adopted multicultural policy as the national policy in 2000

# Policy alliance between the government and civil society

- The Democratic Progressive Party, which has strong emphasis on the independence of Taiwan, forged alliance with multiculturalism

- President adopted multicultural policy as a way of integrating diverse groups and competing social groups

- Ethnic plurality, National unity – slogan in the 2004 president election

# Progressive multicultural policy in Taiwan

- The Basic Law of Indigenous People in 2005
- The Hakka people regained their rights to use their language
- Female marriage immigrants were acknowledged as "new immigrants" and were given assistance in social adjustment, health care, employment, education, and children's education
- The government established the "Foreign Spouse Care and Counseling Fund" in 2005 (National Immigration Agency, 2008) to provide 3 billion NTD over 10 years

# Role of civil organizations in Taiwan

- Civil organizations blocked the passage of laws unfavorable to immigrants, pressed representatives of political parties to sign the symbolic immigrant pact, and participate in the enactment of laws
- TASAT made efforts to advocate rights of female marriage migrants and improve people's perceptions
- The government work with civil organizations to provide service to immigrants

# Conclusion

- Early convergence due to urgent economic interests and the lack of experience – benching marking effect

- Later divergence due to human rights issues and the influence of civil society

- Future convergence? Due to global standards, democratization, and multiculturalization?

# SK government's response

- Reform of foreign labor policy (e.g., the employment permit system)
- Establishment of immigration policy and laws
- Establishment of organizations responsible for immigration and integration of foreigners
- Support NGOs to take care of migrant workers and international marriage women
- Multicultural education for the general population

# Multicultural policy during the Roh Moo-hyun government

- In April, 2006, two policies, "Plan for Social Integration of Mixed-bloods and Migrants" and "Plan for Social Integration of Marriage Immigrants," were adopted
- The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development's decision to modify contents of public school textbooks
- In November, 2006, "Foreigners Treatment Act" (재한외국인처우기본법) was legislated
- Immigration Policy Committee(외국인정책위원회) was established under the Prime Minister

# Nature of the SK government's policy

- It does not orient toward multiculturalism as we can find in Canada and other advanced western countries.

- It is more like multiculture-oriented policy and very assimilationist in essence.

- It is similar to Japanese policy of multicultural coexistence.

- It is more or less 'policy network' between the government and NGOs.

# State-led multiculturalism

- multicultural policies initiated by the government are referred to as official multiculturalism or state-sponsored multiculturalism.

# Citizen-led multiculturalism

- Citizen-led multiculturalism refers to multiculturalism that is initiated by minority groups such as aborigines or migrant groups and by scholars and the NGOs that support them.

- Citizen-led multiculturalism is regarded as "multiculturalism from below" and "grassroots multiculturalism" in a sense that it aims at protecting distinct cultures and identities of ethnic minorities who often become marginalized and disadvantaged by the state's unilateral policy.

# State-led vs. Citizen-led multiculturalism 1

|  | State–led multiculturalism | Citizen–led multiculturalism |
|---|---|---|
| Objective | To create an open society that peacefully co–exist with foreigners | To protect the migrants' rights to live and human rights and to coexist with South Korean nationals and migrants |
| Main actors | Government (Central and local governments) | NGOs and religious groups |
| Policies and program targets | Legal foreign residents | Legal and illegal foreign nationals |

# State-led vs. Citizen-led multiculturalism 2

|  | State‒led multiculturalism | Citizen‒led multiculturalism |
|---|---|---|
| Direction | 1. Protection of foreign nationals' human rights and social integration<br>2. Support the inflow of global manpower<br>3. Reformation of public consciousness | 1. Secure rights to live and human rights of foreigners<br>2. Increase cultural diversity and tolerance<br>3. Strengthen migrant laborers and marriage migrant families' capabilities |

# State-led vs. Citizen-led multiculturalism 3

|  | State–led multiculturalism | Citizen–led multiculturalism |
|---|---|---|
| Issues | 1. Excludes illegal foreigners<br>2. Inability to provide for various needs due to standardized and unilateral policies<br>3. Overlapping and short term support from government offices<br>4. Bound to pure blood and nationalistic ideologies | 1. Inability to conduct substantial and long term programs<br>2. Potential difficulties in operations from government surveillance and restrictions<br>3. Lack of public support due to assertions (i.e. legalization of all illegal foreigners) that are too progressive for the current time |

# Stages of multiculturalism

- 1$^{st}$ stage : Ethnic diversity and cultural tolerance

- 2$^{nd}$ stage : Social and economic equality and anti-discrimination policy

- 3$^{rd}$ stage : Protection of cultural rights

# Step-wise multicultural policy

- 1st stage: protection of human rights of foreigners and minorities, especially women, children and refugees, increase the multicultural acceptance

- 2$^{nd}$ stage: Permanent residency and Legalization of illegal foreigners, denizenship

- 3$^{rd}$ stage: Preparation for immigrant country and acknowledgment of cultural rights of ethnic groups and affirmative actions for minority groups