

# **An Analysis on the International Student Recruitment and Management Policies in South Korea**

Sohyeon Bae  
Master in Education,  
Department of Education, College of Education  
Chonnam National University  
77 Yongbong-ro, Buk-gu, Gwangju, South Korea  
Phone: +82-10-4222-7214  
E-mail: epgyo86@snu.ac.kr

## **Abstract**

This study is designed to analyze the international student policies of Korean higher education from 2001 to 2011. This period could be divided into two categories according to the purposes of policies implemented: the quantitative expansion period and the qualitative supervision period. During the quantitative expansion period (2001 to 2007), the Korean government started a policy to attract more international students for internationalization of higher education. In the qualitative supervision period (2008 to 2011), the internationalization policies were changed to strengthen the control over programs for international students. It was because of the uprising social problems related to international students due to the lack of proper supervision systems for them. Most of these matters originated from internationalization policies focusing only on quantitative expansion rather than on qualitative supervision. On the basis of the findings of the analysis, this study concludes with suggestions to improve the Korean internationalization policies in higher education.

## **Key Words**

*internationalization policy, international student recruitment, international student management, higher education*

## **1. Introduction**

Internationalization, defined as active cross border exchange in every single domain of societies, has been a worldwide trend. Since internationalization has also made great influence on education field, it is evident that significant changes might be expected to be brought in the domain of higher education. Knight (2004: 11) defines the internationalization in higher education as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education". Under the process of internationalization in education, the influence of a tertiary education institution in a nation might not be limited on its national territory but also exercised beyond borders. Now, higher education institutions are working with students and researchers from various countries and competing with other institutions all around the world. To survive in this unlimited competition, institutions have made efforts to promote international exchange in education and improve the quality of their education programs.

This changed environment in education resulting from internationalization has also influenced the higher education in South Korea. In the era of globalization in education, tertiary education institutions in South Korea are required to enhance the international competitiveness by meeting the global standards in education. Since intense competition among institutions is expected to exist in future, they have to make their special efforts to get international recognition in order to avoid facing a serious survival crisis in future. For these reasons, the Korean government, as well as the individual institutions, initiated policies to recruit and manage international students since 2001. These policies were designed to promote the internationalization of the Korean higher education by securing excellent human resources from overseas.

Recruitment and management of international students include all the support universities give for their

invited students from the students' first entrance to the graduation. Governmental agencies and universities all over the world are trying to recruit more international students and to improve the quality of education given to them by providing adequate support for them. The reason of these constant efforts to attract more international students lies in that the recruitment of international students might have positive effects on internationalization. More incoming students from overseas areas could be an impetus to establish an international reputation and improve the current education systems of each institute (Nellis & Slattery, 2013; Willkins, 2011).

Education policies for recruiting and managing international students implemented by the Korean government have brought significant changes in internationalization of the higher education in Korea. One of the most noticeable changes seems to be the enormous increase in the number of incoming international students in South Korea (from 11,646 in 2001 to 86,878 in 2011). As this rapid expansion of international student market caused various social problems, the government which promoted the recruitment of international students changed to enhance the supervision of the education systems and control over the excessive influx of students beyond each institution's capacity.

As the government's policies on international students have significant influences on the Korean higher education, some researches on the issues of the recruitment and management of international students have been conducted in Korea (Kim, 2011; Park, 2009; Park, 2011; Son, 2012; Oh, 2009). These studies include analyses of the current situation in international student education and suggestions on how to promote the recruitment. Although these approaches succeeded in describing the social problems related to international students, placing too much emphasis on how to solve those problems, they excluded specific analyses of the government's policies that having been exerted strong impacts on the international education.

To supplement the limitation of the previous studies, this paper aims to analyze the international student policies of the Korean government and to give suggestions on the ways to improve the policies for international students. This attempt to evaluate the performance and limitation of the policies is meaningful in that understanding both positive and negative sides of a policy should be the first steps to be taken to ameliorate the systems influenced by it. In this research, the following questions will be addressed: First, what were the policies for recruiting and managing international student implemented by the government in South Korea from 2001 to 2011? Second, what outcomes the policies have brought to the education and social domains in South Korea? Third, what should be done in future to improve the policies for international students carried out in South Korea?

The main research method used in this study is literature review, since most of the process and history of certain policies are well understood by close investigations on related articles such as statistics, journals, and policy guidelines. This study, therefore, examines multifaceted literature on the recruitment and management of international students including the Foreigner labor survey, Korean educational statistics, Annual report on immigration statistics, policy guidelines offered by the Ministry of Education and domestic journal articles on international students' issues.

## 2. Literature Review

Since the Korean government initiatively proposed policies to internationalize the higher education field, researchers from various academic domains including education, sociology, and public administration have conducted investigations on various issues related to international students in South Korea. These studies conducted previously can be classified into two different categories according to their focuses and purposes.

The first category consisting of a series of researches sharing many features in common with Park (2009) and Oh (2009) seems to focus on investigating precisely the present conditions of international students in South Korea. In these studies, the researchers tried to examine the various aspects of international students' lives such as their purposes of studying abroad, difficulties in living in Korea, levels of satisfaction, and quality of education through in-depth interviews and surveys done with international students. From the findings of their studies, it can be inferred that the motivations on choosing Korea as study destination might vary greatly and international students in Korea had difficulties in adjusting to living in a place quite different from countries of origin.

The second category can be defined as studies proposing plans on how to develop efficient ways to recruit international students to Korean universities. Kim (2011) and Park (2011) might be classified to this type, since their purposes of researches were solely concentrated on suggesting how to attract more international students and what to be done to improve the quality of education offered for the students. According to their

findings, it was recommended that the Korean government should make special efforts to enhance language education, to strengthen academic supervision, to provide job opportunities for students, and to develop proper methods of promoting Korean education.

To summarize the results of advanced studies on the issues related to international students, these studies might give us detailed descriptions of the situation of international students at that time and suggestions to resolve problems associated with the abrupt increase in the number of students. However, it is noticeable that most of the investigations on these issues were carried out around the year of 2009, only after the Korean government's efforts to invite international students resulted in a tremendous influx of international students to Korean universities. Since these studies were done to deal with the sudden occurrence of social problems on international students' issues, they failed to conduct critical evaluation on the policies proposed by the government and to describe the changed conditions in recruiting foreign students after 2010.

### **3. Policies for international Student from 2001 to 2011**

It was in the year of 2001 when the Korean government started its first education policy for recruiting international students, which can be considered as one of the most important initiatives for internationalization of the postsecondary education. In this study, educational policies implemented at the governmental level from 2001 to 2011 might be overviewed by being categorized by two separate periods: quantitative expansion period and qualitative supervision period.

#### **3.1 Quantitative Expansion Period from 2001 to 2007**

The Qualitative Expansion Period (QEP) is the seven-year period from the year of 2001 to 2007. The governmental policies presented during the QEP had close affinities with one another from the aspect of their purposes; the goals proposed to be achieved through the policies were limited to increasing the number of international students coming to Korea.

The General Plan for Promoting Recruitment of International Students (2001) was the first governmental policy established to invite foreign students to Korean higher education institutions. The government set a specific goal to increase the total number of international student from 6,000 to 50,000 by 2010. Several ways to attract international students such as "multiplying the number of courses offered in English," "expanding scholarships and housings," and "simplifying admissions process and establishing one-stop support systems" were suggested to achieve this goal. Although this plan is meaningful as the first governmental action to recruit students from overseas countries, it seems to fail to provide its long-term vision and arrange specific details on how to achieve the goal.

The Study Korea Project proposed in 2004 and implemented in 2005 was a more comprehensive and systematic approach toward increasing the number of international students in South Korea. This attempt can be seen as not only a supplementary action to give shape to the previous plan but also an innovative approach to set a new vision of the nation's being the northeast Asian hub through recruiting international students. To encourage the recruitment of international students, the government was planning to "expand student inviting programs," "build up social networks overseas," "advertise the Korean education," "improve the international students' quality of lives," "promote the Korean language and culture," and "provide efficient support systems for students." Similar to the General Plan as discussed earlier, this project was so exclusively focused on how to increase the number of students that the quality of education and service provided to the students were not managed accordingly by the government.

#### **3.2 Qualitative Supervision Period from 2008 to 2011**

Until 2007, most of the policies implemented by the Korean government concerning international students were solely concentrated on expanding its higher education market to students in other countries. As the government's eager efforts to attract students caused an unprecedented increase in the number of foreign students, the competences of each university required to manage and support them were called in question and various social problems related to international students were brought. These changes in the education environment made it necessary for the government to control and manage the quality of education offered to international students; new policies focusing on qualitative management had been implemented from 2008 to 2011. This period can be called the Qualitative Supervision Period (QSP).

The Development Plan for Study Korea Project (2008) was a supplementary policy to set up a new goal for

recruiting international students and make up for limitations of Study Korea Project (2004). It was necessary for the government to establish a new policy on international students since the number of international students exceeded the target number established in 2004 far faster than expected and the abrupt increase in the number of foreign students brought serious social problems. The government announced its plan to make more than 100,000 international students select Korea as their study destination by 2012 and to take more actions to regulate individual institutions' management on international students. This policy, though it shared the similar purpose of the previous policies implemented in the QEP, to invite more international students, could be deemed to be as initiative action to control and regulate the quality of education offered for international students for the first time.

In 2009, the Korean government announced the Plan to Improve Support and Supervision for International Students, whose purpose was to implement the agendas presented through the previous plan. Serious social problems provoked by an abrupt influx of international students such as dropouts and illegal employment seemed to hasten the realization of the supervision policy. This plan gave out four main focusing areas to accomplish the purpose of improving international education: recruitment, student selection, education, and governmental actions. Through this policy, the government tried to improve the information systems and education fairs and present an official suggestion on admission process and supervision of international students. Several measures to support international students were also proposed and governmental actions to control and regulate the institutions' education for them were put into practice. Now, the direction of policies for international students was changed completely. The government, which had been focusing on inviting more students from overseas, started to enhance the control over management systems for international students of each institution by giving official standards on international education to follow.

International Education Quality Assurance System (IEQAS) was developed by the Korean government in 2011, when the number of international students in Korea reached to around 90,000. The purpose of this new system was to prevent the public from having negative images on studying in Korea by adopting a standard for international education applied to all the higher education institutions in Korea. To evaluate an institution's competence for international education, the government set quantitative evaluation indicators as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Evaluation Indicators for IEQAS**

No.	Evaluation Indicators	Marks (100 in total)
1	Number and ratio of foreign faculty members	2.5
2	Number and ratio of enrolled students studying abroad	2.5
3	Number and ratio of exchange students from overseas	5
4	Number and ratio of enrolled international students	10
5	Dropout rates for international students	35
6	Diversity of international students' nationalities	15
7	Financial stability from recruiting international students	20
8	Ratio of providing campus housings for international students	10

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2011)

Under the IEQAS, all the higher education institutions educating international students were required to submit the indicators presented by the government annually showing their current status of supervising international students. Furthermore, institutions wishing to get accreditation from the government should hand in additional reports explaining the whole process of recruiting and supporting international students. After evaluating and screening the competence of each institution, the government gave accreditation to institutions satisfying the criteria and imposed sanctions for institutions ranked in the bottom 5 percent such as prohibition of visa issuance. After the implementation of the IEQAS, the governmental regulations over universities' international education started to be imposed with legal effects rather than being suggested as in the previous cases.

### 3.3 Features of Policies for International Students in South Korea

As we have seen in this chapter, the policies for recruiting and managing international students in South Korea from 2001 to 2011 can be classified into two different categories according to the purposes of them. From 2001 to 2007, the Korean government focused on expanding the international education market to students living in overseas countries by taking some measures to promote education in Korea. This period can be defined as the QEP, when the government tried to increase the number of international students and create the educational environment favorable for them.

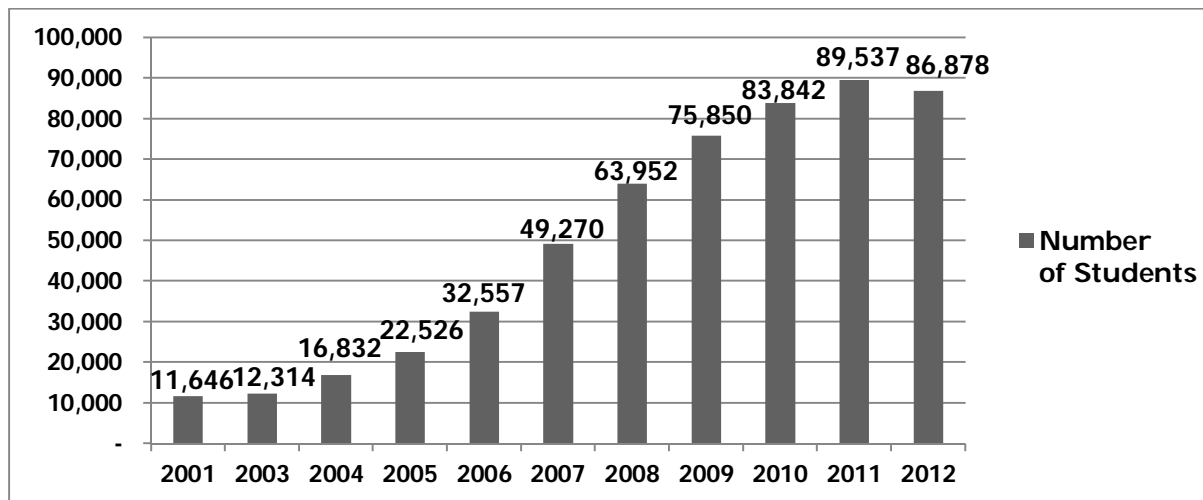
After the year of 2008, when various social problems due to the stiff increase in the number of international students, the government established new policies to strengthen the quality management of international education. This period can be called as the QSP, since the governmental policies for international students were concentrated on regulating and controlling the quality of education offered by each institution from 2008 to 2011. As a result, universities' autonomous recruitment and management of international students had to be managed and overseen by the government.

## 4. Current State of International Students in Korea

The vigorous efforts of the Korean government to attract more international students from various countries have directly affected the number of international students choosing Korea as their study destinations. Here, descriptions on the current state and issues of Korea's international education nationwide is going to be presented based on several statistics including student number, distribution of international students by nationality, rates of illegal immigrants with student VISAs, sentiment on Korea, and rates of employment in Korea.

### 4.1 Increase and Decrease of the Number of International Students

The number of international students in Korea, which was only 11,646 in 2001, had been increasing dramatically up to 89,537 until 2011. The number multiplied near eightfold for the ten years of period. The number, being increasing annually, reached an apex in 2011 and started to be in decline from 2012 (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Number of international students in Korea (2001 to 2012)**

Source: Education statistics (2001 to 2012)

This increase in the number of students seems to have a close relation with the government's effort to enhance quantitative expansion of international students. During the QEP (2001 to 2007), when various measures to attract foreign students were taken into practice, the number of international students grew a lot. On the other hand, since the beginning of the QSP, when the government started regulating the influx of international students, the rate of increase was slowing down by a great deal. In 2011, when the government regulations tightened, the rate of increase recorded -3 percent and the overall number of international students began to decrease.

If we closely look at the annual rates of increase in the number of international, it is possible to see the

noticeable difference between the increase rate of the QEP and that of the QSP. While the increase rates varied from 37 percent to 51 percent from 2004 to 2007, they were diminished greatly after the beginning of the QSP (Figure 2).

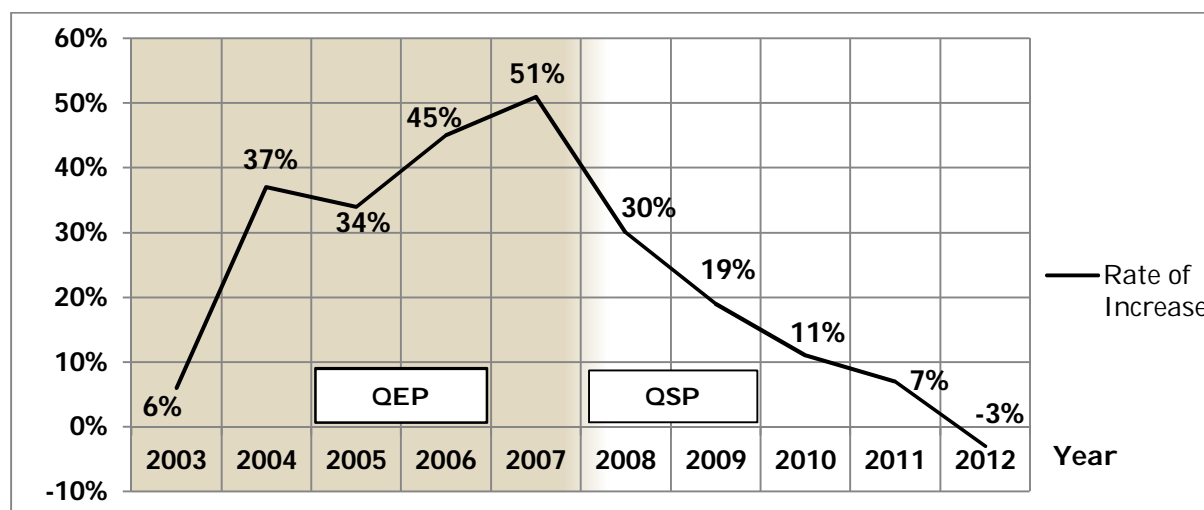


Figure 2. Rates of increase in number of international students in Korea (2003 to 2012)

Source: Education statistics (2003 to 2012)

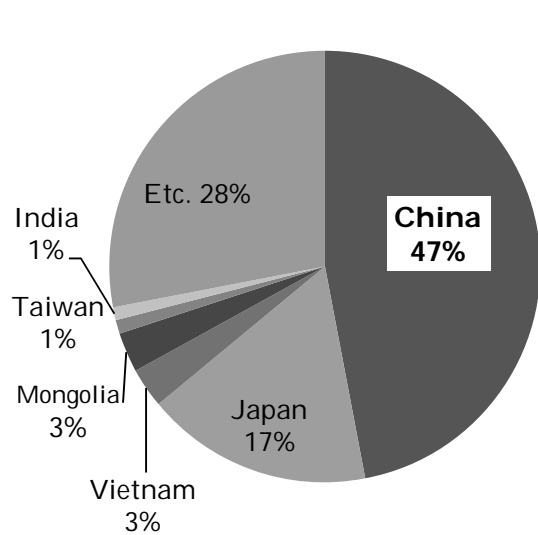
From these findings, it can be inferred that the number of international students in Korea has been showing regular tendencies according to the changes in the directions of the government policies on international students. Although there might be a number of other factors affecting each student decision on his or her study destination, the increase and decrease of the number of students coming from overseas seem to have been significantly influenced by the governmental policies.

#### 4.2 Distribution of International Students by Nationality

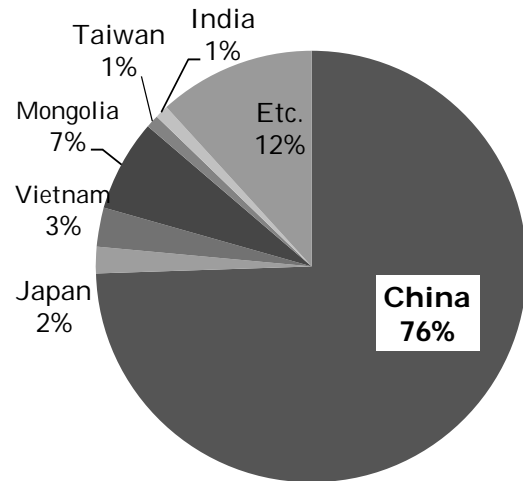
International students in Korea are mainly coming from the Asian countries such as mainland China, Mongolia, and Vietnam due to the geographical proximity. According to the Annual report on immigration statistics in 2001, 6,109 international students were from the Asian countries, accounting for 83 percent of 7,397 international students registered in the Korean immigration service. The portion of the Asian students taken in the whole number of international students in Korea enlarged to 89 percent in 2004, 96 percent in 2007, and 95 percent in 2010. Considering the stiff increase in the total number of international students during that period, the changes in the number of students were caused from the massive influx of Asian students.

If we look at the distribution of the student more closely by each country of origin, we can find out that the ratio of Chinese students was rising significantly year by year. As shown on Figure 3 and 4, the ratio of students from China was only 47 percent in 2001 but it was rising up to 76 percent in 2010. Based on that fact the total numbers of international students increased by more than 72,000, students from China are the key factor influencing the increase in the student number.



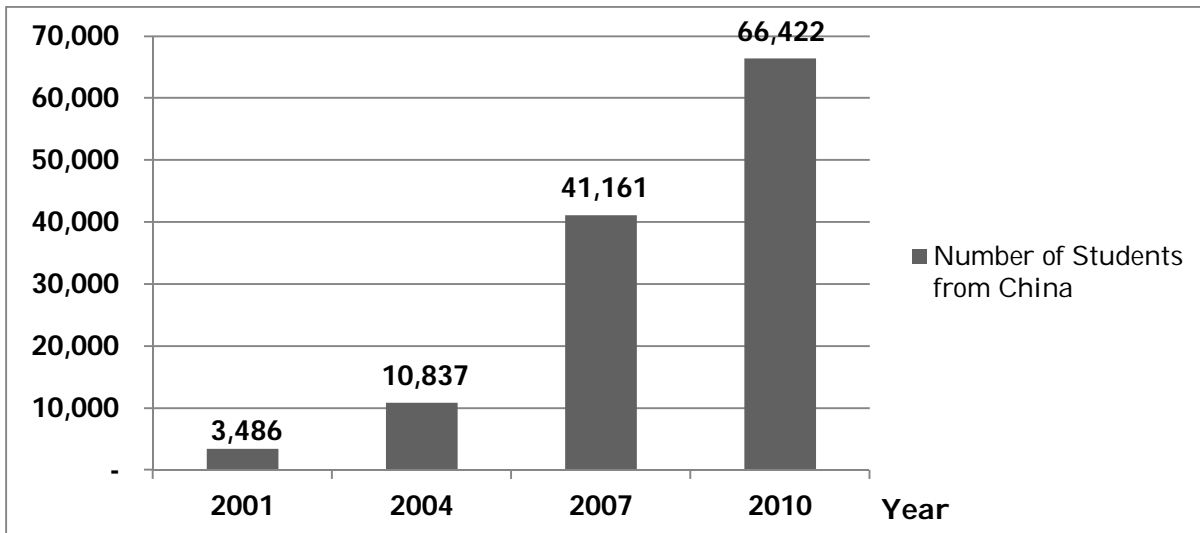


**Figure 3. Distribution of international students in Korea by nationality in 2001**  
Source: Immigration statistics (2001)



**Figure 4. Distribution of international students in Korea by nationality in 2010**  
Source: Immigration statistics (2010)

Figure 5 shows the impact of the number of Chinese students on the overall number of international students in Korea. The number of Chinese students was 3,486 in 2001 (accounting for 47 percent of total international students), rising to 10,837 in 2004 (accounting for 64 percent) and increased to 66,422 (accounting for 78 percent). Since the distribution of international students' countries of origin is completely concentrated on mainland China, the transition in education environment in China might bring significant changes toward Korea on the aspects of international education. If Chinese students do not prefer Korea as their study destinations in future, the number of international students in Korea might be inevitably in decline.



**Figure 5. Number of international students in Korea from China (2001 to 2010)**  
Source: Annual report on immigration statistics (2001, 2004, 2007, 2010)

## 5. Current Issues on International Students in Korea

### 5.1 Rates of Illegal International Students

Illegal international students are immigrants in Korea with student visas who violate the immigration laws of the Korean government. As the total number of students was rising greatly, the number of students who infringed the immigration laws was on an increasing trend. In 2001, the number of illegal international students was 310 (accounting for 6.1 percent of the total international students). This number inclined up to 4,061 in 2007, which accounted for 10.5 percent of the whole international students (Figure 6).

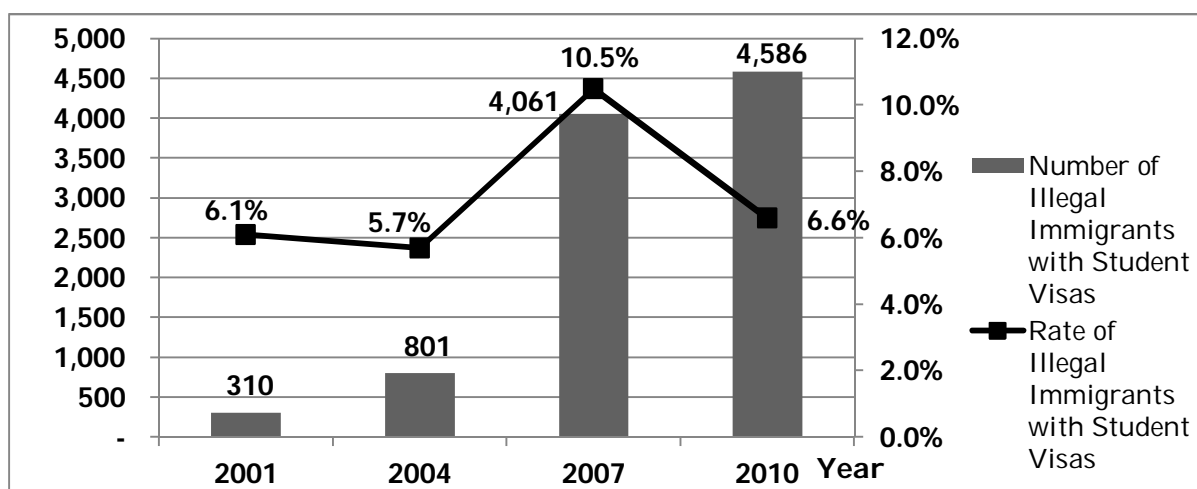


Figure 6. Rate and number of illegal immigrants with student visas in Korea (2001 to 2010)

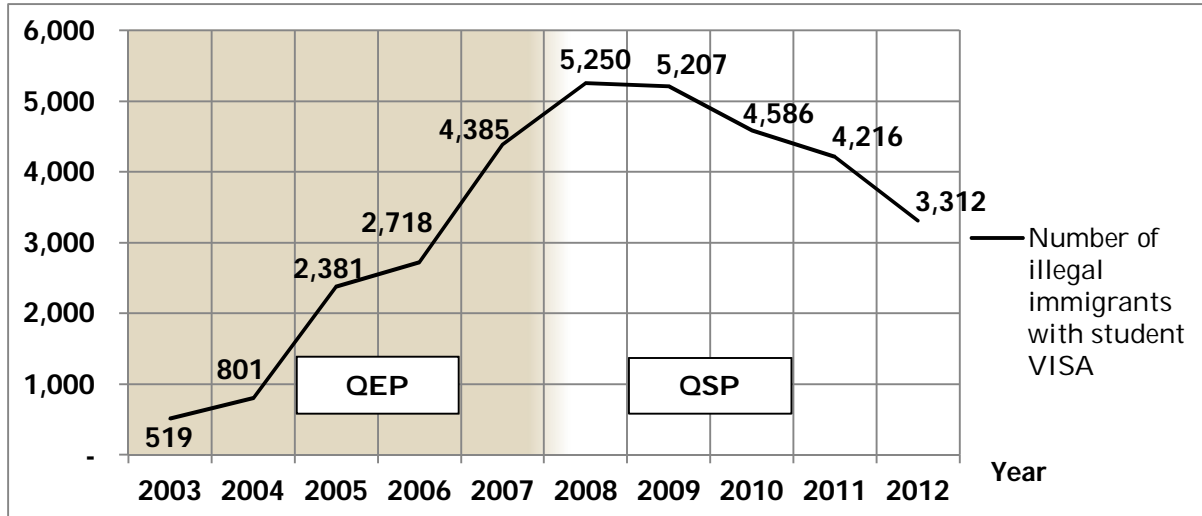
Source: Immigration statistics (2001, 2004, 2007, 2010)

Among various cases of international students violating the immigration laws, illegal employment of the students was considered to be one of the most serious threats to the society. In 2009, international students enrolled in 50 different universities were charged of working illegally more than 50 hours a week in work places (Jang, 2009). These students could find out jobs and universities to get student visas with the help of some agencies they paid for. Although they have student visas, they were never attending their enrolled schools. In another case, a college facing difficulties in recruiting students enough to fill the quota admitted international students who wanted to work in Korea and fabricated documents on the students' attendance and records as if they had attended classes (Heo, 2009). As it had become easier for students to get student visas with support from the government, some students often used this support for earning incomes illegally by working in Korea.

From the statistics and cases of illegal immigrants, it is important to notice that quantitative expansion in international students did not bring everything positive for internationalization of higher education in Korea. By a close scrutiny, it is not difficult to find out several cases showing that not all international students in Korea had selected to visit Korea for their academic experience. The governmental policies to attract more international students seem to fail in some aspects, since those policies did not include measures to manage the stiff increase in the number of students and to give appropriate support for the students.

One interesting point related to the issue of illegal international students is that the directions of the governmental policies have directly affected the matters of illegal immigrants. As shown on Figure 7, the number of illegal international students had been swelling, when the government focused on enlarging the international education market. In contrast, the number started to be in decline from the year of 2008, when the governmental policies were changed to enhancing supervision and management. It seems to be clear that the governmental policies to put regulations on recruiting and managing students have significant impacts on reducing the possibilities of undesirable cases in international education.





**Figure 7. Number of illegal immigrants with student visas in Korea (2003 to 2012)**

Source: Immigration statistics (2003 to 2012)

### 5.2 Anti-Korean Sentiment of International Students

A growing number of international students in Korea came to have hatred or dislike towards Korean people and culture; this was partly from the situations that international students studying in Korea could not get adequate aids from the institutions they belong to and experienced discriminations and unfriendly attitudes of Koreans. According to a research conducted by the National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences (2010) including 1,220 Chinese students in Korea as participants, 66 percent of the survey participants answered to be aware of the anti-Korean sentiment and 41 percent of them answered to have similar feelings towards Korea. After the statistical verification, 30 percent of students who had friendly attitudes towards Korea before they started their studying in Korea came to have hatred on Korea.

It seems that various cultural and social factors including discrimination, academic performance, maladjustment, uncertain future, and lack of student care might have lead the students to negative opinions on Korea. According to a news report by Kim (2011), six different factors were pointed out as causes of the anti-Korean sentiment among them: difficulty in understanding classes due to the limited language proficiency, a sense of distance and discrimination, institutions' attitudes to consider the recruitment as means to gain profits, poor welfare, illegal employment to cover tuitions, and lack of possibilities to get jobs in Korea. By a combination of all these factors, international students might have experienced hard times in their lives in Korea and their time in Korea only ended with aversion to the things related to Korea.

### 5.3 Uncertain Future for International Students

One of the most serious problems the international students in Korea face today might be their bare possibilities to start their careers in Korea after completing degree programs. We, Shin and Yoon (2013) reported that the number of international students who succeeded to get jobs in Korea was estimated to be less than 100 among 10,000 students graduating from Korean universities each year. Only a very small minority of international students seems to get chances to work in Korea. Furthermore, most statistics on what international students do after graduation are apocryphal and unofficial, since higher education institutions in Korea fail to conduct systematic management and support for their alumni (Seo, Kim, Kim, Chae & Yoon, 2012).

Despite the expectations of international students for staying in Korea after their graduation, most of Korean companies appear to be reluctant to hire international students. From the foreign labor force survey in 2013, 56.4 percent of international students participating in the survey answered that they would live in Korea, if possible, when they finish their degrees. Kim (2010), however, conducted a survey on 1,0003 companies in Korea and found out that only 11.8 percent of the companies employed foreign students and 10.4 percent of the participants were positively considering the employment of the students. Comparing it with the case of Japan, Kim pointed out that the rates of international students' getting jobs in Korea were far

smaller than those of Japan. The imbalance between job supply and demand for international students seems to be continued for a long time.

## 6. Future Suggestions on Establishing Policies on International Students

After examining the previous policies implemented and the effects of them on the international education in Korea, several suggestions on the policies might be helpful to improve the quality of education for international students.

First, the governmental policies for international students, having powerful impacts on the education environment, should be more discreetly designed, implemented, and examined. It is important to pay attention to the fact that the number of international students and illegal immigrants with student visas has been fluctuating in accordance with the directions of the governmental policies. Regardless of the strong influence of the policies in Korea, they have been too frequently modified and incoherently implemented for the past ten years to bring efficient and sustainable development of the international education. Now is the time to establish a long-term development plan for international education rather than focusing on short-term, noticeable goals like setting target number of international students.

Second, it is important to balance the two different purposes of international student policies, the qualitative expansion and the quantitative supervision, when designing a new initiative. The policies carried out from 2001 to 2011 seemed to have tendencies to concentrate on either the former or the latter. By combining the two purposes in a policy for international students, the government will be able to expand the extent of its international education and improve the quality of education at the same time.

Third, the government should make efforts to define the unique attributes of Korea as a study destination and take the advantages of them in recruiting international students. Most of the former measures taken by the government to recruit international students were analogous to those of other countries promoting cross-border education. New policies on improving international education are required to place emphasis on competitive advantages of Korea students might make use of through their studying in Korea.

Finally, the stakeholders should take it into consideration that Korea should unavoidably face certain limitations on the extent of impacts it has on international education due to its political, economic, cultural, geographic position in the world. It has been worldwide trends that most of international students have selected countries which can help them learn widely used languages and have powerful impacts on various areas both domestically and internationally. Considering these complex situations, it might be effective for the government to re-examine the current strategies for expand the international education and select target countries for recruiting international students.

## 7. Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to analyze the government policies for recruiting and managing international students in Korea and to propose suggestions to improve the policies for future. Through literature review, this study examines the international policies conducted by the Korean government from 2001 to 2011 and describes the changes occurred in higher education from the policies. After the assessment on the effectiveness of the plans, several propositions to improve the international education policies are presented on this paper.

The Korean government's will to internationalize the higher education in Korea has been embodied through implementing policies to promote exchange of human resources. The governmental policies for international students can be classified into two different categories: policies in the Quantitative Expansion Period (from 2001 to 2007) and in the Qualitative Supervision Period (from 2008 to 2011). During the QEP, when the government tried to attract international students to Korea, the number of international students in Korea sharply increased each year. After experiencing the stiff increase in the student number, the government started to regulate the institutions' recruitment of international students and emphasized the quality management on international education during the QSP. This was because the number of international students increased so dramatically that each institution had difficulty in offering adequate education. International students' illegal employment, anti-Korean sentiment, and uncertain career after graduation became major social problems in Korea, which might have threatened the education environment and the societies.

In order to improve the international education and strengthen the competitiveness of Korea as a study

destination, it is essential to broaden understanding on the history and current situation of international students in Korea. The government policies for international students should be examined more carefully and pursue the goals for expanding the education market and managing the quality of education at the same time. Also, it might be helpful to develop unique programs to maximize the advantages of studying in Korea and to work out a strategy to overcome the limitations Korea has in international education.

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