

SNUAC Asia Square Brown Bag Seminar Series, Spring 2026

**Negotiating Self and Homeland: The Korean Reverse
Diaspora Amid U.S.-China Rivalry and Geopolitical
Multiculturalism**

Tina Rosa Lee

This presentation explores the growing phenomenon of ethnic Korean reverse migration from Western countries to South Korea after 2020, focusing on the racial, geopolitical, and multicultural contexts shaping these migration experiences. While existing scholarship on ethnic return migration to South Korea has largely focused on Korean Chinese and post-Soviet Koreans in relation to labor migration and economic integration, less attention has been paid to diasporic Koreans from Western nations, particularly Korean Americans and other second- or later-generation overseas Koreans. This project seeks to examine how contemporary reverse migration is connected to broader global transformations today involving anti-Asian racism, geopolitical uncertainty, and changing forms of multicultural governance in East Asia.

Historically, South Korea transitioned from a migrant-sending nation after the Korean War to an increasingly important destination for co-ethnic return migration beginning in the 1990s. Since 2020, however, reverse migration appears to have taken on new meanings shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, rising anti-Asian hate in Western countries, U.S.-China Great Power rivalry, and shifting perceptions of opportunity, safety, and cultural belonging in the world. At the same time, South Korea has experienced growing demographic decline, labor shortages, and debates surrounding multiculturalism, migration governance, and national identity.

The project examines how ethnic Korean return migrants interpret their migration experiences within these broader contexts. It asks: 1) What factors contribute to ethnic returnees' decisions to migrate from Western countries to South Korea after 2020? 2) How do interactions with native Koreans and other social groups shape experiences of identity, belonging, and difference? 3) How do returnees understand their experiences in South Korea within broader racialization and geopolitical contexts?

The proposed study employs a qualitative, multi-stage analytic approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Approximately ten participants who migrated to South Korea during or after 2020 will be recruited for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The project draws on theoretical frameworks related to anti-Asian racialization, racial

triangulation, U.S.-China rivalry, and “geopolitical multiculturalism” to examine how migration policies and social hierarchies selectively incorporate different co-ethnic groups based on nationality, class, ethnicity, and geopolitical positioning.

The presentation argues that reverse migration among diasporic Koreans from Western countries reflects broader transformations in global power relations and challenges traditional assumptions about Koreanness, belonging, and multiculturalism in South Korea. By examining the lived experiences of ethnic return migrants, the project contributes to existing scholarship on migration, diaspora, race, and geopolitics while offering insights into the future of multicultural governance and social inclusion in contemporary Korea.

Tina Rosa Lee, Ph.D. (she/her) is a licensed clinical psychologist and interdisciplinary research scholar. She earned her Ph.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University in 2023. Her publications include book chapters and articles on the rise of right-wing extremism, social justice activism, forensic psychology, and bias in mental health evaluations in the United States. Dr. Lee currently runs a private practice and specializes in treating addiction, trauma, and multicultural concerns in diverse populations. At SNU Asia Center, Dr. Lee is collaborating on a project with the Center for Asian Migration Studies to explore the recent phenomenon of reverse migration among diasporic Koreans since 2020 and how current geopolitical dynamics are shaping the lived experiences of ethnic returnees.

Date& Time: Tuesday, 2nd June, 12:00-13:00

Place: SNUAC Room 304 (3rd Floor)