

POLITICS OF CULTURAL PROXIMITY:  
TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MAKING AMONG VIETNAMESE  
WOMEN AND SOUTH KOREAN MEN IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

Politics of Proximity: Transnational Marriage and Family Making among Vietnamese

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This dissertation examines how the idea of cultural proximity is constructed in commercialized marriage and transnational family making among Vietnamese women and South Korean men. Based on ethnographic work in Vietnam and South Korea, my dissertation theorizes cultural proximity in the context of regionalization among Asia-Pacific countries, ethnic identity formation, and social stratification in South Korea. The dissertation argues that the construction of cultural proximity involves disciplinary politics. I explore how the politics of cultural proximity is embedded in Korea's multicultural policies that aim to socially and culturally assimilate migrant women and children of transnational families. In addition, I analyze the everyday politics of cultural proximity articulated by Koreans who are involved in brokered marriages, cultural assimilation programs, and transnational family making. This study highlights the new transnational formations of social, ideological, economic, and interpersonal relations in South Korea where Vietnamese wives negotiate patriarchal gender roles, ethnic identity, and social stratification. The study extends the theory of cultural proximity to assess the

multifaceted regionalization processes in the Asia-Pacific region. It contributes to the study of race and ethnicity in the region by examining immigration, multicultural policies, and cultural assimilation programs in South Korea that are based on the hierarchy of Korean and non-Korean identities. In addition, the study sheds new light on masculinity studies by arguing for more nuanced understandings of Korean men who are involved in unconventional marriage and family making. My analysis of Vietnamese women's rural-to-rural migration attests to the on-going gender scholarship that critiques women's upward mobility via transnational marriage. My study confirms that Vietnamese women struggle to find ways to empower themselves in the host country. Lastly, my study of the role of international matchmaking agencies in Vietnamese women's settlement processes suggests that both the South Korean and Vietnamese government ought to consider the promulgation and enforcement of laws related to matchmaking services that better protect the Vietnamese women.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Oksun Shin.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Assessing Proximites: Han-Viet Marriage Migration

On a cloudy day in July, 2008, I was sitting in a van with two Korean brokers and two newlywed couples. It had been a long day because we had been up since 6:00 a.m. It had been exhausting, especially for Yǒng-su who had arrived in Vietnam the previous evening and searched for his bride until midnight. Yǒng-su, 39 years old, was a factory worker; the other groom, Sǒk-hŭi was a 38-year-old farmer. Sǒk-hŭi had arrived in Vietnam two days earlier, found a bride right away, and left on his honeymoon the day before. Today both men looked content, smiling and affectionately touching their wives who were blankly staring through the windows. Everybody was quiet.

Mr. Lee, one of the brokers, broke the ice. “Do you guys know a child of a Vietnamese mother and a Korean father looks exactly like a Korean? Well, the child is even cuter.” Sǒk-hŭi added, “I’ve heard mixed children are smarter.”

Mr. Lee promptly responded, “Of course. You’re right. Think about this scenario. You probably would have married a Korean woman in her mid-thirties if you didn’t come here. That’s not good for your child. An old woman’s pregnancy will affect her child’s intelligence. Hong is only 22. Your child will be so bright.”

Sǒk-hŭi interrupted Mr. Lee, “My child will not be bullied at school?”

Mr. Lee said, “Your child will look exactly like Korean. Let me tell you this. A long time ago in Silla [57 BC-935 AD], a princess was sent to marry a Vietnamese prince.<sup>1</sup> That is why some Vietnamese women look like Koreans. We are very close

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lee’s explanation is not correct. When the Lý Dynasty (1009-1225) fell, a brother of the king fled from Vietnam with a group of the Lýs, arrived by boat and settled in Hwasan of



culturally and genetically. By the way, don't you think Vietnam reminds us of Korea in the 1960s when we were so poor? Vietnamese brides are very traditional, like our mothers who sacrificed their lives only for family.”

Ho Chi Minh City, called Saigon by many Vietnamese, is the economic mecca of Vietnam, home to economic processing zones and industrial parks. It is also well known for tourism; 3 million international tourists visited the city in 2007. There are many tourist attractions in the city, including historic French colonial buildings, Ben Thanh Market, restaurants, street vendors, and the Cu Ci tunnels. No wonder many tourists are attracted to the city for its fascinating history, cultural attractions, and shopping.

What is less known about the city is its illegal matchmaking industry.<sup>2</sup> For the past 10 years, thousands of Taiwanese and Korean men (also Singaporean, Malay and Vietnamese from diaspora) have visited Ho Chi Minh City to find a bride through commercial marriage agencies. In their provision of intimate services, matchmaking agencies benefit from the city's tourism infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants, night markets, and tourist agencies. It can be said that they have contributed to the city's tourist economy. It is common to see Vietnamese women standing in line in front of the Taiwanese or South Korean embassy waiting for visa interviews. In city parks like Dam Sen Park, groups of Vietnamese brides in colorful wedding dresses and Korean or Taiwanese men in business suits are frequently seen awkwardly posing for video

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Hwanghae Province of Korea. After rendering the distinguished services for the Koryo Dynasty fighting Mongols in 1226, the Lys became the founder of the lineage of Hwasan Lee.

<sup>2</sup> In Vietnam, individuals and organizations have been legally forbidden to broker marriages for fees. Matchmaking can be only conducted by non-profit centers run by provincial women's associations and charities.

cameras.<sup>3</sup> In December 2007 and again in July-August 2008, I went to Ho Chi Minh City to learn about these matchmaking processes. Observing Korean men and Vietnamese women on a five-day marriage trip organized by matchmaking agencies, I wondered what made the commercially-arranged marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women imaginable and possible.

During the matchmaking process, I noted the meanings of sameness and difference between Korean and Vietnamese were often measured and contested in the conversation. Yŏng-su and Sŏk-hŭi's concerns about interethnic children reflect Korean social anxiety about being ethnically different. The idea of cultural and physical similarity is discursively constructed, as Mr. Lee tries to reassure the men by referring to eugenics, history, and modernity. Vietnamese women embody cultural, ethnic, geo-spatial, and genetic proximity that Korean men imagine being "almost the same." In the minds of Korean men, Vietnam is imagined or viewed as South Korea was in the 1960s, implying an image of underdevelopment that conjures up a nostalgia. In Mr. Lee's search for a continuum between South Korea and Vietnam in terms of history and modernity, Vietnamese women embody tradition and culture. Korean men concretize these notions of cultural proximity when they have intimate relations with Vietnamese women who (un)purposefully perform conventional gender roles. The men's intimate politics of cultural proximity locates Vietnamese women's sexual value and cultural roles within the family, which encompasses both the private and public spheres where Vietnamese women negotiate the roles of a foreign bride, daughter-in-law, and immigrant woman.

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Times* published the stories of brokered marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women. See, S. Lee (2008) and Onish (2007).

This dissertation examines the politics of cultural proximity that structures the cross-border marriage migration and influences the social integration of immigrant women in the host country. This study interrogates the aspects of cultural politics in the construction of the Vietnamese bride, daughter-in-law, and immigrant woman. My empirical study shows that the meanings and practice of cultural proximity are contested and reworked amidst the power relations of gender, ethnicity, and class. I examine the politics of cultural proximity in Vietnamese women's intimate encounters with various actors of South Korea, such as husbands, mothers-in-law, brokers, and senior Korean women. What I mean by intimate politics is not limited to the mutual recognition between two related individuals (Giddens 1992). The intimate encounters that I present are sites of struggles reflecting broader socio-political contexts.

This chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, I discuss the political and economic relations between post-Cold War South Korea and Vietnam. I discuss regional labor migration in relation to South Korea's globalization project and Vietnam's economic restructuring. I examine the gendered effects of the regional economic development on rural areas of both countries that initially facilitated commercially arranged marriages. In the second section, I begin with a review of the theories of marriage migration in East Asia, highlighting the gendered aspects of the cross-border marriage migration. I theorize the exclusionary politics that is embedded in multiculturalism in the assimilation of foreign wives and their children in South Korea. Next, I put forward a theory of cultural proximity bridging the theoretical frameworks. I finish the chapter with an overview of my dissertation.

## From Cold War Enemies to Regional Economic Partners

South Korea and Vietnam normalized diplomatic relations in 1993. Although the two countries did not have any direct political ties during the Cold War, the prosperity of postwar South Korea is not unrelated to the Vietnam War. As Lie (2002) explains, the U.S. intervention in Vietnam in company with the recovery of Japanese economy was one of the foundations in the transformation of the South Korean economy. South Korea was the largest U.S. allied force besides South Vietnam, and 300,000 Korean troops fought against North Vietnam from 1964 to 1973, allegedly killing thousands of Vietnamese civilians (H. Kim 2001). South Korean soldiers were infamous for their audacity and viciousness. South Korean soldiers and entrepreneurs were widely disliked by South Vietnamese during the war. South Korea probably benefited the most from the U.S. intervention in Indochina, compared to U.S. allies (Lie 2002). U.S. support for Pak Chông-hũi, in response to South Korea's military aid, generated demand for South Korean products and stimulated exports and industrialization.

South Korea and Vietnam remained bitter foes during the Cold War era. However, South Korea's *seggyewha* (globalization) and Vietnam's *doi moi* (renovation or reconstruction) in the 1990s transformed the political antagonism into an economic alliance. Both countries attempted to leave the scars of war behind to strengthen economic ties.<sup>4</sup> For instance, during his official visit to Hanoi in 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung expressed regret but did not apologize for the massacres done by Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War (H. Kim 2001). The war issue was subsumed

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<sup>4</sup> South Korean anti-communism influences Korean husbands and family members' negative views on Vietnamese women. They characterized Vietnamese women's stubbornness as tenacious and cruel Viet Cong. See Chapter 3 and 4.

by the economic integration of socialist Vietnam and capitalist South Korea as both states were aggressively seeking economic growth and integration into the global market. The increasing flow of Vietnamese labor was one consequence of the economic integration. Vietnamese women's marriage migration to South Korea can be also explained within these regional economic and political contexts.

### *South Korea' Segyehwa and Inbound Labor Migration*

Since the devastating Korean War (25 June 1950-27 July 1953), South Korea has experienced political upheavals marked by corruption, military dictatorships, political repression, and massive labor and democratic movements. Despite the political turbulence, South Korea established an export-fueled economy—the Miracle on the Han River—transforming from one of the poorest countries in Asia after the war to an Asian tiger in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> South Korea's rapid industrialization was executed by the two successive military regimes that justified their oppressive rules with economic growth. Another characteristic of Korea's explosive economic growth is the development of the *chaebŏl* groups (family-based business conglomerates) sanctioned by the military regimes led by Pak Chŏng-hŭi (1963-1979) and Chŏn Du-hwan (1980-1986). The alliance of the authoritarian developmental state and business conglomerates promoted the export-led economy, which was buttressed by exploitation of cheap labor and low-interest loans for the *chaebŏls*. As Kyung-Sup Chang (1999) describes, Korea's economic growth produced “compressed modernity,” an economic-oriented approach to

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<sup>5</sup> The term, the Miracle of Han River, refers to South Korea's postwar export-oriented economic development and growth.

modernity. The authoritarian regimes used their political and economic propaganda as a sacred national project calling for national unity and loyalty to the state.

After the military regimes were ended by popular democratic movements, Kim Yŏng-sam (1993-1998), the first civilian president since the 1945 liberation, changed the previous developmental strategy to *segyehwa* (globalization) giving the *chaebŏls* access to the global market, for instance achieving membership in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996 (Kalinowski and H. Cho 2009). Kim's globalization embraced neoliberal market ideology of deregulation and privatization. However, South Korea's economy depended upon *chaebŏls* and debt capital, and the state protection was too immature for neoliberal global economic competition (Alford 1999; S. Kim 2000). Kim's ambitious and premature globalization project suffered with the Asian financial crisis in 1997. In the middle of the economic crisis, Kim Dae-jung, the first democratic-party president since 1945, won the presidential election in December 2007. Kim Dae-jung's government accepted the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) restructuring measures in exchange for a financial bailout. His vision of a democratic market economy was to move away from an authoritarian and *chaebŏl*-centered economy. Yet, Kim's vision was short-lived because of the entrenched *chaebŏl* business practices and the growing public anxiety about economic stagnation (Kalinowski and H. Cho 1999). The financial crisis ended in 2001.

South Korea's economic prosperity has attracted migrant workers from China and Southeast Asia since the early 1990s (K. Moon 2000). The South Korean government regulated international migration flow by screening unskilled labor migrants until the early 2000s. In the 1990s South Korea's small and mid-sized manufacturing firms

suffered a labor shortage. The growth of labor force slowed as the rural labor surplus was depleted, youth participation in the labor force decreased because of increased schooling duration, and the housing construction industry boomed. Korean workers left relatively low-paying factory jobs for the higher-paying construction industry (A. Kim 2009).

In response to the labor shortage, South Korea imported labor, for example, through the industrial trainee program in 1992. Initially ethnic Koreans from China and then migrant workers from Southeast Asian countries were imported. The Asian financial crisis did not affect the influx of migrants. In fact the number of migrant workers soared from 19,000 in 1990 to 391,000 in 2005, of whom 78 percent were unauthorized workers (A. Kim 2009). By 2010, South Korea had more than 1.5 million documented and undocumented foreign residents (H. Kim and I. Oh 2011).

The South Korean government encouraged Korean *chaböls* to trade with and invest in Vietnam. This produced a trade surplus that reached US \$1.68 billion in 2002 (H. Kim 2001). Along with the economic investment in Vietnam, South Korea allowed Vietnamese workers into trainee programs through service companies. South Korea introduced the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2004 to reduce pre-departure cost and to control the Vietnamese employees' work contract in South Korea. Eighty-five percent of Vietnamese applications to work in South Korea were granted, the highest rate among the 15 sending countries. In 2010, 51,785 Vietnamese workers were working in South Korea. Most were unskilled workers holding E-9 visas and an estimated 1,259 were illegal residents (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2012). The EPS required

migrant workers to pass a Korean language test before being listed online for recruitment by employers.

About 87 percent of the Vietnamese migrant workers in South Korea were concentrated in industrial factories, and the rest were in agriculture, construction, and fishing. Dang (2008) observes that Vietnamese workers in South Korea have a higher percentage (35 percent) of job changing among overseas workers, than do Indonesian workers (11.7 percent), Filipino workers (10.1 percent), and Thai workers (8 percent). Requests to change jobs often stem from personal needs or disappointment with benefits, leading to dissatisfaction among South Korean employers and prompting them to look for labor from abroad. South Korea's economic investment in Vietnam and Vietnamese labor migration were closely related to Vietnam's economic reform and its labor migration policies.

### *Vietnam's Doi Moi and Outbound Labor Migration*

The contemporary history of Vietnam is known for a series of war and revolution. As Duiker (1995) speculated the transition in the Vietnamese revolution between the socialist state ideology and the capitalist market, Vietnam is still "in a state of transition" (227). One of the landmarks in Vietnam's political and economic transformations was its *doi moi* (renovation) policy, enacted in December 1986. The policy was aimed at the socialist-oriented market economy, adapting it to private enterprise and capitalist market forces by encouraging foreign investment and expanding political and economic relationships with non-socialist countries. Under the volatile political situations of the late 1980s, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the



Soviet Bloc between 1989 and 1991, the Communist Party of Vietnam embraced renovation to improve economic growth and to keep the Communist Party in power (Corfield 2008). In its efforts to attract foreign investment, Vietnam had to normalize its relations with non-socialist countries. Through its “multilateral foreign policy” (Thayer 1999), Vietnam first sought membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, founded in 1967) that requested Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia, which Vietnam had invaded in 1978 and occupied until 1989.

After the peace settlement in Cambodia, Vietnam rapidly normalized its relations with the states in Southeast and East Asia. In addition, Vietnam normalized relations with China in 1991, Japan in 1992, South Korea in 1993, and the United States in 1995. Vietnam officially became the seventh member of the ASEAN in 1995. The investment of the ASEAN states in Vietnam grew enormously. Thayer’s study (1999) on Vietnam’s foreign policy after *doi moi* shows the economic transformation of Vietnam during its integration into the ASEAN in ways that:

ASEAN investment [in Vietnam] increased tenfold in just three years (1991-1994) . . . made up 15 percent of total direct foreign investment. . . . ASEAN states become involved in over 147 projects with a paid-up US\$1.4 billion by the first half of 1994. . . . On the eve of ASEAN membership, 60 percent of Vietnam’s foreign trade was with ASEAN states. In 1994, Singapore overtook Japan in its effect to become Vietnam’s biggest trading partner. Four of the ASEAN countries ranked among the top 15 foreign investors in Vietnam. Singapore and Malaysia ranked sixth and seventh, respectively, after Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia and France. (4)

At the same time, the Vietnamese government had encouraged and organized overseas migration to more economically advanced countries. Vietnam is one of the top 10 labor-sending countries in Asia. It is estimated that there are almost 3 million Viet

Kieu (Vietnamese people living abroad) (IOM 2011).<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that there are 500,000 temporary Vietnamese migrant workers in more than 40 countries around the world. Each year, 80,000 Vietnamese workers leave Vietnam through public and private labor export agencies and trainee programs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2012). Most of the destination countries for labor migration are in East Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Remittances from Viet Kieu and migrant workers have played an important role in Vietnam's economic development. The Vietnamese government has renewed Decree 370 (first issued in 1991 to regulate labor migration) to promote labor migration abroad and remittances. Vietnam was ranked second among Southeast Asian remittance receiving countries, following the Philippines (USD 21.3 billion) (World Bank 2011).<sup>8</sup>

The economic and political relations between South Korea and Vietnam show the rapidly growing economic integration in Southeast/East Asia. Both states' efforts at economic development have gender-differential effects, particularly in underdeveloped rural areas. The gender gap in rural areas can explain the emergence of the commercially arranged marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women.

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<sup>6</sup> Viet Kieu also includes the South Vietnamese who fled Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975. The number of emigrants for work, study, or residence was estimated at 2,226,400 in 2010, which was 2.5 percent of the national population.

<sup>7</sup> The total number of Vietnamese workers under contract-based employment between 2000 and 2010 sent to the top four destinations in East Asia are Malaysia (184,614); Japan (42,299); South Korea (90,744); Taiwan (237,643) (General Statistics Office (GSO) 2011). In 2010, 62.8 percent of the total Vietnamese workers were sent to those four countries.

<sup>8</sup> According to the World Bank Report (2011), the total remittances in 2010 were USD 7.1 billion, seven percent of the country's GDP, an enormous increase from 2.7 billion in 2003 and 1 billion in 1999. The amount would be higher if it included unofficial routes. For example, overseas Vietnamese bring a large amount of cash during their visits home to Vietnam. Labor migrants annually send US\$2 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2012) through commercial banking systems, brokerage agencies, sending companies, and individual network of relatives, friends, or migrant workers themselves.

### *Bachelor Farmers in Rural Korea*

International marriage in South Korea is partially attributable to the uneven development of rural areas. South Korea's rapid industrialization and urbanization since the 1970s have sent rural youth, both men and women, flocking to urban industrial centers, depopulating the rural areas. According to Chang (1999), the farm population shrank from 58.2 percent in 1960 to 11.6 percent in 1994. The cities offered more educational, employment and marital opportunities. Patriarchal tradition and the devalued rural life forced young people, especially young women, to migrate to urban areas. The nation's globalization efforts since the early 1990s did not protect the agricultural market (M. Kim 2008). The agricultural sectors were declining, and the rural population was growing both smaller and older. Rural areas suffered from labor shortages, economic and socio-cultural marginalization, and increasing labor responsibility falling upon elderly women. Among the rural issues, the bride deficit became the most serious national problem.<sup>9</sup>

The suicides of several bachelor farmers in the early 1980s captured media attention, and in response local politicians proposed that the central government enact policies to assist bachelor farmers to get married. Several organizations and influential people recruited young women for arranged meetings with single farmers. The Committee to Find Brides for Bachelor Farmers was founded in 1990 and launched a two-year national campaign.<sup>10</sup> However, young women were not interested in living in the countryside, where there were few schools for children, jobs, health or cultural

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<sup>9</sup> According to Shin Gills (1999), the Rural Economies Institute (1993) reported the sex ratio in the 25-29 age group was 3.4 men to 1 woman; in the 30-35 age group it was 5 to 1.

<sup>10</sup> According to M. Kim's study (2008), four hundred farmers signed up but only 44 marriages resulted.

facilities. Women were less obligated than men to stay with their parents in the patrilineal tradition. Nor were young women attracted to life in rural areas that they assumed more conservative and patriarchal than the cities. After the national campaign to recruit local women for rural bachelors failed, its founders turned their attention to ethnic Koreans, the Chosŏnjok, in northeastern China.

Rural governments implemented a new project—Getting Rural Bachelors Married—which subsidized the expenses of commercial international marriages for single or divorced men, 35-50 years old, living in the agricultural and fishing areas. Men who met these criteria were eligible for financial support equivalent to US\$5000. According to Seol (2006), 60 local governments implemented a similar act, with budgets of 2.85 billion Korean won. The local governments depended upon marriage agencies to recruit men and women, arrange meetings, travel, wedding, and visa documentation. In addition to local governments, agricultural associations and the Research Association for the Welfare of Farm and Fishing Villages recruited rural bachelors to join marriage tours to China (H. Lee 2003).

In December 1990, the first marriage between a Korean farmer and a Chosunjak woman was arranged by a politician from Kyŏnggi Province. In February 1993 a mass wedding of 40 Korean farmers and Chosŏnjok women was held in Seoul. Chosŏnjok women were chosen because of the same culture, language, and physical appearance as Koreans. As Freeman (2005) explains, the exodus of Chosŏnjok brides to South Korea began, as women imagined South Korea held the prosperity, middle-class lifestyle, and individual freedom.

In the mid-1990s, foreign female spouses, mostly Chosŏnjok and Chinese, outnumbered Chinese male migrant workers.<sup>11</sup> As the international marriage business in China became competitive and stories of runaway Chosŏnjok/Chinese brides and fake marriages began to emerge, some agencies looked for an alternative marriage market in Southeast Asian countries where South Korean conglomerates began to invest. In addition to recruiting farmers and fishermen, the agencies began to recruit blue-collar men who were less attractive marriage partners than their middle class counterparts who had a college education and held white-collar jobs. Between 1990 and 2005, 160,000 Korean men married foreign women mostly from China and Southeast Asia. In 2006, international marriage constituted 13.6 percent of all Korean marriages, and 41 percent of the men who were employed in agriculture, married foreign women through brokerages (KNSO 2009).<sup>12</sup> Despite the public's growing suspicion of international marriages, more men than ever have been drawn into international marriages in the past two decades. It is estimated that 70 percent of international marriages are between Korean men and foreign women (J. Kim 2011).

Commercial marriages account for the rising number of Vietnamese spouses since 2005. Seventy-seven Vietnamese brides came to South Korea in 2000; 10,128 came six years later. Vietnamese women became the second largest group of foreign brides in 2007.<sup>13</sup> In 2009, statistics showed that 47 percent of foreign wives in rural Korea were Vietnamese; 26 percent were Chinese; 10 percent were Cambodian; 17 percent were from

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<sup>11</sup> Prior to the 1990s, Korean women followed their foreign husbands abroad, mostly to Japan (44 percent) and the United States (24 percent); only 600 Korean men married non-Korean women (Korean National Statistical Office 2009). National statistics indicate that cross-border marriages made up only 0.2 percent of all new marriages in 1990.

<sup>12</sup> For the national and international marriage trends 2003-2013, see Table 3.

<sup>13</sup> For the numbers of international marriage registration by nationalities of foreign wives 2003-2013, see Table 1 in Appendix 1.

other countries. Most Han-Viet (Korea and Vietnam) marriages are arranged through brokerage agencies. Many Vietnamese women are from provinces in the Mekong Delta which is Vietnam's most productive agricultural and aqua-cultural region. The population growth in the Mekong Delta region is one of the slowest, with a low fertility rate of 2 children per woman in 2005 (GSO 2011). Outbound migration in the region, both industrial cities and foreign destination, is one of the hallmarks of slow population growth.

### *Women in Rural Vietnam*

Gender equity was promoted in Vietnam's turbulent modern history. It was an important political priority for the Indochina Communist Party in the 1930s. The Party implemented property rights and monogamy to protect women's rights in 1959. During the Vietnam War, women were encouraged to replace men in the labor force. In North Vietnam during the communist era, almost all women between 15 and 55 were in the workforce. In South Vietnam, women's labor participation was 80 percent in the early 1980s (Eisen 1984). Before 1975, women were 32 percent of National Assembly members and nearly 80 percent of the agricultural labor force (Goodkind 1995). Vietnam was known for its gender equality (Mackerras, Cribb, and Healy 1988).

Vietnam's economic reform has had mixed results, however. According to the World Bank, the average annual economic growth rate was 6.9 percent between 1986 and 2011. The poverty rate has plunged from 58.1 percent in 1993 to 16.9 percent in 2008 (World Bank 2009). The Vietnamese government encouraged rural-to-urban migration to redress the imbalances in population density, as it formulated policies for labor

relocation to establish “New Economic Zones” where female labor migration has fueled the country’s export drive.

In contrast, economic reforms have widened the socio-economic disparities among regions. As economic reform advances, the labor market becomes more gendered, and women’s labor has been concentrated in low-wage jobs. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2011), women constituted 90 percent of the domestic service labor force, 69.8 percent of food service, and 50.9 percent of agriculture. Under the economic reform, the Vietnamese state eliminated the socialist welfare programs such as free universal education, public kindergarten and communal kitchens. The gender gap in education widened, and created a wage disparity between men and women.

The economic reform has brought uneven development between urban and rural areas in economic attainment and living standards (Pierre 2000). Seventy-four percent of direct foreign investment goes to five cities that are home to 15 percent of the national population, and the income differential is twice as large between urban and rural sectors (H. Kim 2012). The Mekong Delta region accounted for 23.4 percent of the country’s poverty in 2002, although this was an improvement from 47 percent in 1993 (Nguyen and Tran 2010). The region has the lowest rate of primary education attainment, the lowest rate of women’s labor participation, and the largest gender gap in labor participation (H. Kim 2012). According to Nguyen and Tran’s study (2010), 33.6 percent of women in the region are unemployed, the highest rate in the nation.<sup>14</sup> Under these circumstances, young Vietnamese women in the region are likely to seek alternatives, if available, to

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<sup>14</sup> In my interviews, 14 out of 36 Vietnamese women answered they had paid jobs in Vietnam. However, it should be noted that the statistics or my data did not include the informal sector where many of the women were contributing to different forms of labor in household, agriculture and aqua-culture.

attain economic security. International marriage migration is a feasible option, offered through international marriage brokers and social networks.

Between 2005 and 2010, 133,289 Vietnamese women either married or registered for marriage with foreign men, according to the Ministry of Justice of Vietnam (2011).<sup>15</sup> Most of the women married Taiwanese and South Korean men, and the highest percentages of those marriages are through matchmaking companies. For instance, in Can Tho, between 1995 and 2002, 90 percent of registered marriages were between Vietnamese women and men from Taiwan or Korea. About 80,000 Vietnamese women had married Taiwanese men by 2010. The number of Han-Viet marriages has greatly increased from 560 in 2005 to 35,000 in 2009 (Ministry of Justice of Vietnam 2011). By 2012, around 40,000 Vietnamese women had gone to live in South Korea through marriage, accounting for approximately 20 percent of Vietnamese marriage migration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2012).

### *Commercial Marriages between Vietnam and South Korea*

Scholars have suggested a variety of factors that explain the rapid increase in the number of commercial marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women. Cultural studies scholars argue that Korea's economic status and the prosperity of *hanryu* (Korean Wave) have produced a fantasy about Korea in other Asian countries, including Vietnam, which increased mobility of labor and marriage migration into Korea (Bang, Han, and Pak 2007; Le 2007; H. Lee 2002; Shim 2006). The deregulation of matchmaking companies in South Korea and the matchmaking market developed by Taiwanese account

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<sup>15</sup> On average 18,000 Vietnamese marry foreigners each year, with 78 percent of them coming from Ho Chi Minh City and the province of Can Tho in the Mekong Delta region.



for the soaring numbers of Vietnamese women (H. Lee 2008; Wang and Chang 2002). From a demographic perspective, the deficit of male parttern Vietnam is attributed to the exodus of Vietnamese women (Goodkind 1997). This cross-border marriage phenomenon contributes to a surplus of Vietnamese men.

Like other cross-border marriages, Han-Viet marriages have been highly commercialized. Korean matchmaking agencies have played an important role in the international marriage phenomenon since the state-sponsored marriage campaign for bachelor farmers began. At first, the marriage agencies targeted Korean ethnic women in China. When the marriage market in China became competitive and the negative images of Chosunjök women began to emerge, the agencies were looking for another country. The number of Filipina wives was growing, and these marriages were arranged by the Unification Church. Matchmaking businesses in the Philippines were prohibited, and men were reluctant to marry Filipinas because of their darker complexion and physical differences. The Vietnamese matchmaking brokerage has been developed by Taiwanese matchmaking agencies since the early 1990s. The brokerage system made it easy for Korean matchmaking agencies to open for business in Vietnam. Matchmaking agencies could make more profit since men paid US\$5,000 to marry a Korean ethnic or Chinese woman, US\$7000 for a Filipina, and US\$10,000 for a Vietnamese woman (Seol, H. Lee, and S. Cho 2006). In 2006, 80.4 percent of Korean-owned international marriage agencies moved to Vietnam. There were fewer than 200 Vietnamese wives in South Korea until 2000. Vietnamese women became the second largest group of foreign wives in Korea, after Chinese in 2003.

According to Seol et al. (2005), matchmaking businesses are concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City, and recruit women from the poor rural communities in the Mekong Delta region. Eighty percent of Vietnamese women who married Korean men are from rural areas in the Mekong Delta (Seol et al. 2006; H. Kim 2007). Until the early 2000s, Vietnamese women from the region married Taiwanese men, but in 2003 more of them married Korean men than Taiwanese men. According to the surveys conducted in Korea, the average age of Vietnamese wife at the time of the survey was 24. Moreover, 65 percent of the respondents completed primary or lower secondary school, 30 percent were unemployed in Vietnam, and 69 percent of those who worked in Vietnam were in farming or factories (Seol et al. 2006). My data is consistent with the survey data in regards to Vietnamese women's average age at the time of marriage, education attainment, and employment type.

The brokerage system in Vietnam consists of a network of three groups: Big Madame (interpretation, meetings, wedding banquet, and accommodation), Small Madame (recruitment), and individual agents (documentation). Some Vietnamese brokers work exclusively for Taiwanese or Korean matchmakers, and some have multiple business partners. As the matchmaking business became popular, the agencies developed business strategies to expedite marriages. The Vietnamese state legally prohibits matchmaking. Decree No. 68 in family law (revised in 2003) bans any international marriage that is conducive to human trafficking, labor exploitation, rape, and other types of exploitation. Profit-oriented matchmaking, group-based matchmaking meetings, and group-based accommodations for international matchmaking are likewise illegal (Seol et al. 2006). Instead, the Vietnamese state designates the Women's Union to help women

who want marry foreign men. An employee in the Women's Union in Ho Chi Minh City told me that a Korean man meets five Vietnamese women at a time through online chatting before he decides to come to Vietnam to meet the women he has selected. On site he meets the women one at a time. The Women's Union also provides a house for the Vietnamese women who marry through the Women's Union. The women take Korean language and cooking classes in the house. A marriage agency run by a Vietnamese wife in Taejŏn, South Korea, recruits Korean men for the Women's Union. It seems that the Women's Union makes the marriage process more transparent and provides better conditions for Vietnamese women. In spite of the Union's efforts, the profit-oriented matchmaking business is still thriving even though H. Kim and I. Oh (2011) argue that the future marriage trend is unclear since Korea does not have high rates of international marriages any more.<sup>16</sup>

A matchmaking agency sets up a five-day marriage trip for a Korean man who is recruited by themselves or individual matchmakers.<sup>17</sup> Before the trip, the agency contacts Big Madame to prepare a group of Vietnamese women. On the first day, the man is introduced to the women, selects a bride, and signs the marriage contract that has been prepared by the agency. According to my observation, one man selected his wife within five minutes of being introduced to a group of five women at a hotel. In general, men, pressured by brokers or desperate, selected their wives within the first two days. Once a man has chosen his bride, they are allowed to sleep together.<sup>18</sup> For the rest of the

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<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Bélanger (2010) expects the foreign bride phenomenon is likely to intensify when Korean men who were born in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s enter the marriage market.

<sup>17</sup> For a marriage trip itinerary, see Appendix 3.

<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to judge that it is a form of forced prostitution, especially from the perspectives of men and women who are involved in commercial marriages. Most couples believed they were married when they signed a marriage contract with a broker. A few Vietnamese women told me

trip, the couple goes through medical examination, wedding banquet, outdoor wedding photos, and honeymoon, all of which are used for documentation for the bride's spousal visa. After the groom returns to Korea, the bride stays in Big Madame's house (called the dormitory by brides and brokers) for one or two days until she goes to her native village. Usually within two months, the groom, bringing his marriage license registered in his town, visits his bride for an interview with a local government official in her hometown, and the bride must pass a basic Korean language test.

To make more profit, a marriage agency waits until it has a group of 3-5 men, depending on the season. The Love Agency that I contacted for my research had a record of matching 17 couples on a single trip in 2007. Since the agency usually keeps 50-60 percent of its US\$10,000 fee that it charges, the agency made US\$85,000 out of the trip.<sup>19</sup> Even though the number of marriage agencies has declined, the international matchmaking business is still highly profitable.

I have explained the emergence of commercial marriages between South Korea and Vietnam in the contexts of the regional economic development and its gendered effects on rural areas. Gender scholarship has an influence on theorizing the structure of cross-border marriage migration and the emergence of multiculturalism in the receiving countries. In the next section, I review gender-focused studies on cross-border marriage migration, the transformation of national identity, and cultural proximity.

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that they felt pressured by brokers to have sex with their husbands. However, they did not consider conjugal sex as prostitution.

<sup>19</sup> The rest goes to Korean marriage brokers and Vietnamese brokers. According to my interviews, Vietnamese brides' families expected to receive \$300.00 from brokers.

## Theories of Marriage Migration

### *Marriage Migration or Labor Migration?*

Macro-level migration theorists view the global economic structure as the major influence on distinctive migration patterns and people's reasons for migrating. World-systems theories suggest the global migration patterns are shaped by the global capitalist system that creates and deepens economic inequality among countries. According to these theories, multinational corporations and powerful international economic institutions, both located in the global North, reinforce the global capitalist system. Multinational corporations searching for cheaper labor, natural resources, and new markets and powerful international economic institutions force the South to restructure its economy, exacerbating the South's unequal development and economic exploitation (Massey et al. 1999; Portes and Walton 1981). Yet, these theories ignore the ways in which gender, as a structural element, significantly influences the process and experience of transnational migration.

Sassen (1988, 2002) extended world-systems theory to a gendered structure embedded in international division of labor. Economic globalization shows a structural pattern in which manufacturing and heavy industrial production is concentrated in the global South; the headquarters of most multinational corporations and legal-financial services are in the global North. This global structural pattern is buttressed by the feminization of labor concentrated in the export-oriented economies of the developing countries and service or manufacturing sectors of the developed countries (Sassen 2002). Feminist scholars use gender politics to suggest a better understanding of the relations between the politics of reproductive labor and the structure of migration flows

(Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Piper and Roces 2003). The gendered structure of the global economy and feminization of international labor migration are closely related to the cultural ideology of patriarchy that reinforces heterosexual gender roles, justifies women's low wages, and thus legitimizes gender inequality (Gramuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 2003; Parreñas 2001).

In traditional (im)migration studies, male migrants are assumed to be the decision makers with their wives following. Yet, in the past two decades, the gender focus on transnational migration has revealed migration as the complex dynamics of gender, class, race and nationality which shape women's and men's migration experiences differently (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pessar and Mahler 2003). This gender analysis of (im)migration has re-conceptualized the immigrant family, household, and the effects of social networks. For example, feminist scholars have revealed generational hierarchies and unequal benefits in the immigrant households as contested sites (Grammuck and Pessar 1991), the immigrant family as a site of power relations fraught with conflicts and cooperation (Kibria 1993), and making available resources and emotional supports to female (im)migrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Scholars have analyzed cross-border marriage migration of Asian women within a framework of the gendered structure of international migration in early studies and women's agency in recent studies. Because of the structural pattern in which women move from less developed countries to more advanced ones, the socio-economic conditions of receiving countries are assumed to be a source of upward mobility for migrant women. In addition to the economic upward mobility, early scholarly works on transnational marriages, especially brokered marriages, indicted human trafficking and

the international matchmaking industry's cultural stereotypes of Asian women as docile and exotic (Belleau 2003; Cunneen and Stubbes 1997; Glodava and Onizuka 1994).

Structural inequalities among the nation-states due to global capitalism and profit-oriented international marriage industries invited anti-trafficking discourses in assessing East-West cross-border marriages. International human rights discourse treated these marriages as a form of illicit sex trafficking in which poor women become victims of the transnational matchmaking industry and later, of domestic violence in the host societies. Marie-Clarie Belleau (2003) describes the legal framework in the US and Canada that promotes mail-order brides (MOB), positioning the brides as the victims of the global political economy and the examples of global sexism. As she puts it, “mail-order brides actually become merchandise or objects of bilateral sexism. They are victims of sexism both in their countries of origin and in the countries where they settle” (607). Belleau’s examination of the MOB industry and biased North American laws may reveal some commonality in gendered global structural inequalities.<sup>20</sup>

Recent studies criticize the early views on marriage migrant women arguing that women’s economic motivations or men’s orientalist perception of brides do not necessarily explain complex dynamics in marriage migration processes. International marriage migration may involve an aspiration to achieve and take advantage of a better position in the global economy. Constable (2003) critiques the studies of women’s (and

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<sup>20</sup> International trafficking discourse focusing on women’s victimhood may reproduce, as Mohanty (1991, 2003) critiques, imperial practices in Western feminist knowledge production. Such practices usually silence the voices of the oppressed, misrepresent the thoughts of the unknown other, disallow agency of the non-western other, and impose their own understanding and solutions upon non-western women. The dominant regimes of gender, class, and race may not have the same effects on women in third world countries. Rather feminists need to focus on complex relationality that shape women’s social and political lives which cannot be reduced to the binary power relations of the dominant and the dominated.

men's) motivations for cross-border marriages having a focus on economic and geographic mobility and gendered subjectivities. Constable's discussion of correspondence relationship between Asian women and white American men shows that the Western notion of marriage based on romantic love has been disseminated and reinforced by global media and literature, which dismisses arranged marriage as lacking love or demoralizing. In this frame, women are imagined either as opportunists or as victims of the sex industry or of abusive husbands. By examining the decisions of professionally successful Asian women who chose correspondence marriages, Constable interrogates what global hypergamy (marrying up) means and by whose standards.

Some scholars argue for various motivations that marriage migrants have in search of finding foreign partners, such as having life adventure, traveling abroad, experiencing a different world, failing in romantic relationship or career, supporting family and escaping from family pressures and hardships (Nakamatsu 2003; Piper and Roces 2003). These studies challenge the dominant notions of global hypergamy, romance and marriage, and agency.

Interrogating the theoretical disjunction in the category of woman between labor migrant and marriage migrant, Piper and Roces (2003) point out the lack of theories and experiential studies on the complex connections among marriage, migration, and labor. Labor migration and marriage migration are generally treated separately in research, but in reality, they are intertwined and related (Lan 2008). For example, a foreign bride becomes a labor migrant when she joins the workforce in the host country. After marriage migration, a woman's roles are shifting as wife, mother, and/or worker.



Immigrant spouses are paid and unpaid workers in the host countries, and some contract workers permanently settle through subsequent marriage to a national of the host country.

The studies of Asian women's marriage migration have challenged geographical and economic mobility that women are assumed to desire or achieve. Case studies in the East Asian contexts similarly address women's agency and critique the gendered logic of marriage mobility. The studies of women's settlement in host countries have examined Confucian gender roles imposed on the marriage migrant women and the strong legacy of ethnic nationalism in the state-oriented multiculturalism. Marriage migration in the region contests ethnically homogeneous national identity in East Asian host societies, for example Taiwan and South Korea. Both countries have similarly mobilized nationalist discourse based on ethnic purity to advance economic developments and to appease political insecurities due to their historical and geo-political vulnerabilities. Recent demographic changes due to marriage migration contest ethno-nationalism. The myth of ethno-nationalism no longer holds a common ground for the changing national identity. Scholarship on marriage migration in East Asia has rigorously critiqued ethno-nationalism and the state rhetoric of multiculturalism in relation to the social integration of marriage migrant women.

### *Marriage Migration, Ethno-nationalism, and Multiculturalism in East Asia*

East Asian countries show similar social and demographic patterns that facilitate marriage migration. They have a very low rate of fertility, rapid population aging, high rates of female singlehood, and the rapid increase in marriage immigration (Bélanger 2010). Foreign wives are usually from China and Southeast Asia. In both Taiwan and

South Korea, Chinese women are the largest immigrant women's group, followed by Vietnamese women. The international matchmaking industry has played an important role in the marriage migration phenomenon in both countries. Its profit-oriented system has contributed to negative images of cross-border marriages. The language of the media coverage on commercialized cross-border marriages is similar to that of the "mail-order bride" industry in the West. For instance, an article describes a Taiwanese man's marriage tour:

In the past 10 years, more than 80,000 Taiwanese men have traveled to Vietnam to buy their brides. Brokers can usually arrange a wedding three days after a man selects from a nearly endless supply of young women. In their desperate hope to escape poverty, the women chosen are considered the lucky ones ("In the Market" 2005).

According to the article, a Taiwanese man travels to Vietnam to shop for a bride who is described as a supply. The article reveals the profit-oriented matchmaking business, but it also reflects the focus of the general media coverage that reproduces the popular ideas about marriage, romance, and economic mobility.

In contrast to the sensational media coverage of matchmaking, scholars of inter-Asian marriage migration have examined the cross-border marriage phenomenon and its consequences in the host countries within their historical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts. Early studies examined the characteristics of the international marriage phenomenon and its social and demographic impact on the host societies. Wang and Chang (2002) uncover the matchmaking industrial structure between Taiwan and Vietnam detailing the social and population factors that resulted in the matchmaking industry, the intermediary agencies that recruit Vietnamese brides, and the social impact of the increasing marriage migration. Their study is critical of the matchmaking industry

that takes advantage of poor women. Although both authors become cautious about the issues of women's agency in their later works, this article attests to public ideas about problematic international marriages. According to their interviews with 55 Vietnamese wives, they emphasize that 16.5 percent are not satisfied with their marriage and 10 percent seriously consider divorce. It is a very small number to generalize the overall dissatisfaction with marriage, but it is still questionable how the majority (74.5 percent) answered the question.<sup>21</sup> However, the recent studies emphasize women's agency leading to gender-focused studies (Bélanger, H. Lee, and Wang 2010; Constable 2009; Faier 2009; Freeman 2011; Newendorp 2008; Piper and Roces 2003; Robinson 2007; Thai 2008). These studies similarly reveal the strong legacy of patriarchal family in East Asian countries, and pay attention to the ways marriage migrant women bargain with local patriarchy.

### *Ethno-nationalism and the rhetoric of multiculturalism*

There is a distinctive tendency in the research, particularly in Taiwan and South Korea, to critically analyze ethno-nationalism and the rhetoric of multiculturalism. In both countries the states use the rhetoric to socially integrate labor migrants, foreign wives and interethnic children. The deployment of migrants can be considered a reflection of South Korea's (and Taiwan's) economic miracle buttressing ethno-nationalism (S. Cheng 2011). However, the influx of migrant workers, foreign wives, and interethnic/interracial children has also challenged the prevailing ideology of ethnic and national purity prevailing in East Asia (Bélanger 2010; Parreñas and J. Kim 2011).

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<sup>21</sup> In their study, they did not discuss how the majority responded to the question related to their satisfaction with marriage. Their unknown data on satisfaction with marriage might be useful to challenge the negative assumptions about commercially arranged marriages.

Meanwhile, many scholars have critiqued the state-oriented multicultural policies towards foreign residents and interethnic/interracial children. The anthology on multiculturalism in East Asia edited by Parreñas and Kim (2011) succinctly shows the ways that East Asian states respond to and manage the cultural and social challenges in the inevitable emergence of multiculturalism, as a process of nation-building in the middle of the unmaking of national boundaries.

Marriage migration adds another layer of complexity to homogeneous national identity. Marriage migrants intend to settle in the host societies as permanent residents and citizens. The citizen-making of foreign wives in East Asia shows the salience of gender, ethnicity, and class. Lan (2008) examines political and colonialist discourse in Taiwan that seeks to control and govern foreign wives' cultural roles as wives and daughters-in-law and reproductive roles as mothers and caregivers. Foreign wives are expected to adapt to the patriarchal rules and they are accepted as cultural bearers at the cost of their individuality. Their citizenship is conditioned upon those cultural and reproductive roles. For foreign spouses, reproductive roles are their gendered path to citizenship (S. Cheng 2011). However, their cultural and reproductive roles are continuously contested. For example, Hsia (2007) shows how the Taiwanese media constructs foreign brides coming from poorer countries as a social problem, a threat to Taiwan miracle, and the deterioration of the quality of Taiwanese.

The patriarchal underpinnings of multicultural policies reinforce gender inequalities and ethnic hierarchy. Multicultural approaches to socially integrate foreign wives have been framed by a family issue, not an immigration issue (Bélanger 2010). Ethnic politics is historically contingent; for example, Taiwanese nationalism shows

unfavorable attitudes towards women from China because of political antagonism towards the one China policy. Such ethnic politics reinforces “differential citizenship” (Bélanger and Wang 2008) towards Chinese spouses who are denied of the right to work and required to stay eight years if they want to attain permanent residency. Nationalism and homogeneity compete with the emerging discourse around multiculturalism (Bélanger and Wang 2008; Wang 2007). They are difficult to be reconciled and lead to contradiction. Korea’s favorable treatment towards the overseas ethnic Koreans over other foreigners and Taiwan’s discriminatory policy against Chinese wives reflect the ways that “hierarchical nationhood” (Seol and Skrenty 2009) is constructed.

The social integration of foreign wives and the children from the internationally married family has been an increasingly important issue.<sup>22</sup> Bélanger et al.’s comparative study (2010) analyzes the contents of governmental surveys that assessed the status of foreign wives in Taiwan and South Korea. They argue that the surveys categorize the immigrant spouse narrowly and primarily in a patriarchal and family order and thus fail in recognizing the women as new citizens in their own right. Because their husbands are assumed to be lower-class and with the suspicion of international marriages, mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian foreign brides become both racial and classed others. Moreover, the government surveys label children as different because of the mother’s origin, flagging both the mother and her child as potentially problematic in regards to the quality of population (Bélanger 2010). These assumptions underlie survey questions measuring a child’s mental and physical (under)development in the Taiwan’s survey and

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<sup>22</sup> In Korea it is estimated that nearly a third of all children born in 2020 will be children of interethnic/racial parents and some scholars predict that one in five children will be interethnic/racial children (A. Kim 2009; S. Lee 2012). However, the percentage of foreign born residents is very small. For example it was 2.2 percent in 2010.

the learning (dis)ability in the Korea's survey. For the host societies, successful assimilation of foreign brides means to erase ethnic and class difference by inscribing normative Taiwanese (or Korean) identity in the women's bodies and minds (Lan 2008). The exclusive politics of ethnicity can be particularly pronounced in the state rhetoric of multiculturalism.

### *Hierarchy of ethnicities in multicultural South Korea*

Scholarly debates on multiculturalism and ethno-nationalism in Korea have been productive (Ahn 2012; H. Choe 2007; G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013; G. Han 2007; K. Han 2007; A. Kim 2009; H. Kim 2007; J. Kim 2011; N. Kim 2007; S. Lee 2012). The Korean government is still reluctant to provide foreign residents with genuine multicultural care (H. Kim and I. Oh 2011; S. Kim and Y. Shin 2008; H. Lee 2003; Seol 2006; Seol et al. 2006). S. Lee (2012) argues that South Korea's multicultural policies selectively accept migrants and codify the social hierarchy between Koreans and non-Koreans.<sup>23</sup> Thus, multicultural policies become a political rhetoric (G. Han 2007; S. Lee 2012). Similarly, Ahn (2012) argues that South Korean multiculturalism lacks recognition of difference and excludes migrant workers in her analysis of the state-led multicultural policies, such as Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Migrant Women, Biracial, and Immigrants (April 2006). As Ahn (2012) puts it, South Korea abruptly imported multiculturalism because it was in demand in order to mediate current demographic and

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<sup>23</sup> North Korean settlers in South Korea are often excluded from South Korean multiculturalism. North Korean is ethnicized in terms of modernity, which is similar to Southeast Asia migrant workers and foreign wives in South Korea. For North Korean settlers' negotiation with citizen making processes in South Korea, see H. Choo (2006).

social transformations, as it is shown by the frequency of using the word soaring since 2005.

G. Chung and J. Yoo (2013) reviewed The Multicultural Family Support Act (2008) that provides free services and programs for foreign spouses and interethnic/interracial families. The number of Multicultural Family Centers has been rapidly increasing since 2008. It is estimated that 170 centers offer Korean language classes, job training, counseling, support groups, family life education, and information about legal, economic, and social systems in Korea at no or minimal cost (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013).<sup>24</sup> By 2007, the support centers assisted over 256,000 people (J. Kim 2011). Currently, five basic centers serve as bridges between the regional centers. G. Chung and J. Yoo (2013) conclude that the curriculum in the centers has an implicit intention to impose Korean cultural values on foreign brides, although the centers can be valuable resources for them.

J. Kim (2011) is highly critical of the multicultural support centers in South Korea. He argues that multi-cultural centers and programs (re)produce, rather than reduce, the cultural hierarchy between Koreans and non-Koreans, especially those coming from less developed countries. According to him, the top-down, or paternalistic approaches to multiculturalism and limited conceptualization of cultural diversity merely emphasize an expressive aspect of cultures. The abrupt importation of multiculturalism makes the centers incompetent and problematic because of conceptual shortcomings (Ahn 2012). In the scheme of cultural paternalism, non-Korean cultural groups become objects to be studied rather than active agents of social change. The idea of cultural diversity means

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<sup>24</sup> According to the most current data from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, there were 205 centers nationwide in 2012.

mere tolerance of cultural difference for Korean, which avoids critical consideration of structural inequality (J. Kim 2011). Moreover, South Korea's middle man position in the global economy has privileged the cultures of powerful countries while implicitly and explicitly dismissing those of the less powerful. J. Kim (2011) critiques such material conditions of South Korea:

The introduction of cultures from less-developed nations, via multicultural education and cultural festivals, fosters the extant negative stereotypes about them as interesting and exotic, but backward, primitive, and inferior. Cultural performativity, therefore, refers to society's intuitive knowledge that calls upon the abstract and habitual ways in which the hierarchy of cultures is concretized conceptualized and acted upon (1600).

In conclusion, he calls for re-conceptualization of multiculturalism for multicultural educators and activists in South Korea, so as to not unwittingly reinforce paternalistic attitudes towards cultural minorities.

The term referring to the children of interethnic/racial children in Korea shows the construction of ethnic hierarchy. The children of interethnic/racial couples were once called *Kosians*. The origin of the word, with the prefix of *Ko-* deriving from the term Korean and the suffix *-sians* from the term Asians. S. Lee (2012) criticizes the term as politically incorrect and derogatory since it emphasizes being not entirely Korean and therefore marginalizes non-Koreans and part-Koreans. The new political rhetoric of global talents aims to socially integrate inter-ethnic children, which only delineates who is worthy as a multicultural citizen. As H. Kim (2007) argues, Korean multiculturalism is based on mono-cultural imagination.

In summary, the scholarship on cross-border marriages in East Asia, although it is a small body of work, has been growing since the 2000s. Studies examined global structural factors, for example, the feminization of migration referring to both migration



patterns and international division of labor, that shape the cross-border marriage migration patterns and marital or migratory motivations. Empirical research has uncovered varying and changing matchmaking practices mediated by matchmaking agencies, social and demographic changes in the receiving countries that facilitate cross-border marriages. In comparison to the studies on women's marriage migration in the West, Asia-focused studies show that commercially arranged marriages are tolerated in Asia, the lines between the traditional and modern forms of marriages are blurry (Palriwala and Uberio 2008), and the state's policies play an important role in cross-border marriages and transnational families. Recent empirical studies have revealed the ways in which marriage migrant women circumvent the policy constraints and resist the stereotypes of foreign brides and further develop strategies to mobilize available resources beyond national borders. The most recent studies have critiqued multi-cultural policies towards foreign wives and their children which construct ethnic hierarchies in the receiving society.

### *Politics of Cultural Proximity*

There is an underlying idea that transnational migration is more prominent within Asia because of "geographical proximity and cultural similarities" between the migrant-sending and receiving countries (A. Kim 2009, 87). This raises several questions. How do cultural similarities shape and influence marriage migration? How is cultural similarity understood and articulated in those who are involved in cross-border marriage migration in the region? Does the notion of cultural proximity always entail power relations? Are their intimate aspects of cultural proximity that enable new forms of

transnational intimacies? To engage with these questions, I first present the theory of cultural proximity.

The theory of cultural proximity is used to explain the increasing counter-global cultural flow in the international media and the growing popularity of regional media (Straubhaar 1991; Thussu 2000). Cultural globalization has been debated within three theoretical frameworks: homogenization, heterogeneity, and hybridity. Many scholars argue that it is overly simplistic to view Americanization as a homogenizing force that subjugates weaker cultural and national identities (Chadha and Kavoori 2000; Moreley and Robbins 1995). Post-modern theorists view cultural globalization as plural, arguing that two contradictory forces, local-global, homogenization-heterogenization, and sameness-diversity, operate simultaneously and interpenetrate each other (Appadurai 1997; Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson 2005; Harnnerz 1996). Hybridity theory shows the ways that natives and minorities strike back at imperial domination by appropriating and inscribing their everyday meaning into global goods, conventions, and styles (Bhaba 1994). The emergence of regional media markets is one of the examples that argue against the unidirectional cultural flow of Americanization. For example, Straubhaar's study (1991) of Brazilian and Mexican TV shows the ways that the two countries indigenize American influences and produce and export TV programs to their regional markets. The regionalization of media results from the audience's search for cultural proximity, more culturally similar than media programs of US. The theory of cultural proximity explains the general tendency that the audience shows preference for local media imported from countries with similar cultural elements.

The theory of cultural proximity has been uncritical of the political aspects of culture, however. Iwabuchi (2001) argues that the notion of culture in the theory of cultural proximity is perceived as static and essentialized. In his analysis of popular Japanese television programs in Taiwan, he emphasizes the ways that cultural similarities are reconstructed in particular historical and social contexts. For example, Taiwan's democratization and liberalization in the late 80s propelled the development of media industries, especially cable TV networks that began to air Japanese television programs. Otmazgin (2011) argues that a region-wide cultural production system unintentionally spurs "feelings of Asian sameness" within the cultural geography of East Asia (260), feelings of belonging to the same cultural space, and feelings of affinity being in the same culturally constructed realm. However, the shared characteristics of the East Asian region are not natural. They are socio-historically constructed and politically contested (S. Kim 2004).

The uneven media circulation in the East Asian region shows the dynamic interactions among states. The rise of East Asian media cultures generates de-Westernization of global medial cultural flows, de-Asianization of the East Asian media products, re-Asianization, and the exclusionary politics including cross-boundary disparity, division, antagonism, and marginalization (Iwabuchi 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2010).<sup>25</sup> Historical and social construction of cultural proximity in East Asia shows how non-western countries are "reworking modernities" (Ong 1996). The dynamic

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<sup>25</sup> Iwabuchi (2010) and Chen (2000) analyze the emergence of the rising powers in East Asia in their discussion of brand nationalism (political strategy for boosting soft power and cultural diplomacy) and subempires (lower-level empires that are dependent on the larger structure of imperialism) respectively.

interactions among non-western countries should be further explored to reorient the western notion of power.

The commercialization of cross-border marriage migration between Vietnam and Korea is a product of historical conjunctures and regional economic development where the idea of cultural proximity between Korea and Vietnam is (re)constructed. I argue that the notion is imbued with exclusionary and disciplinary politics of culture that encompass both public and private spheres of marriage migrant women's settlement in South Korea. I theorize cultural proximity in the ways that South Koreans aspire to cultural hegemony through locating Vietnam in the regional order and racializing Vietnamese women. I show the politics of cultural proximity in multiple aspects of political economy, ideologies, racializing process, and interpersonal relationships. During Vietnamese women's settlement, the politics of cultural proximity marks the women's gender roles, symbolizes women's ethnic identities with pre-modernity, and masks structural inequalities. While I discuss the economic and political factors that shape the commercialized marriage migration between Korea and Vietnam, I examine how cultural proximity is articulated by those who are involved in commercially arranged marriages and the citizen-making of Vietnamese women.

## **Chapter Overviews**

In Chapter 2, I discuss the rationale for my ethnographic study and research sites. I describe participant observation, in-depth interviews with research respondents, data analysis, research sites, and the research respondents. I reflect the fieldwork and my encounters with Korean men, Vietnamese women, and senior Korean women.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the discursive construction of Korean manhood involved with brokered international marriages and later analyze men's subjective narratives of their arranged marriages to Vietnamese women. By analyzing media portrayals of Korean men and international marriages, I argue that the proposal of international marriages since the 1980s as a national remedy for solving rural bachelors' marriage problems constructed deficient manhood associated with socially and economically marginalized farmers. In the late 1990s, the emerging human rights discourse intertwined with public images of brokered transnational intimacy and marriage, coming to characterize the men as hypersexual and replacing the earlier notion of deficient manhood. To provide a more nuanced account of manhood, international marriage, and family making, I examine Korean men's narratives, including their ideas about *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon* (Chosŏn dynasty-style marriage), giving up on marrying a white bride, and modern projects, all of which are associated with men's desires and struggles to become a normal man in Korean society. Concomitantly, men's imagination of and intimate encounters with Vietnamese women lead the men to aspire to regain patriarchal privileges in marriage and family, thus replicating the dominant masculine ideology of domestic patriarchy. The men expect Vietnamese brides to be traditional but to become selectively modern, which reflects the men's contradictory views of Korean cultural similarities with Vietnamese women. In their actual marriages, not every man succeeds in fulfilling his plans and dreams of becoming a normal man. In the end, I tell a story of a failed marriage.

Chapter 4 examines the changing dynamics of gender and generation in rural Korean family to discuss the rural household that Vietnamese women settle in. Under the

gender and generational dynamics in the three-generational households of rural areas, a mother was in control of her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's settlement and cultural adaptation. My analysis of the mother's narratives showed how Korean maternal citizenship in relation to post-marriage migration of a Vietnamese bride reconfigures patriarchal ideology that limits women's roles within family. The patriarchal discourses exemplify the mother's disciplinary practices shown in the narratives of "Once married out, a daughter is a stranger" and "A married woman should live in her husband's shadow." By conforming to the patriarchal rules, giving birth to children, performing reproductive labor, Vietnamese women may gain the trust of their Korean in-laws. However, the trust is easily questioned when the women express a desire to work. Vietnamese women craft ways to negotiate with patriarchal gender roles reinforced by Korean mothers-in-law to gain access to resources for their own migration agendas.

Chapter 5 examines the ways that gendered social membership is reproduced through the micro-negotiation between senior Korean women and Vietnamese women in a cultural assimilation program. I discuss the effects of the state policies in assisting foreign brides and to empower senior citizens through the creation of jobs. The welfare policies gender senior citizens; a local community center maximizes senior Korean women's care labor to acculturate Vietnamese wives. The center, aided by the state, aims to intersect the senior women's labor with cultural assimilation of Vietnamese wives. Senior Korean women and Vietnamese wives, with similar or different agendas, enter the center that genders social membership. In the gendering process, senior Korean women are trained to become grandmother-managers and Vietnamese brides are the objects of the management in which they are transformed from foreign brides to become immigrant

women. On the one hand, senior Korean women train themselves as managers by professionalizing middle-class caring and educating unfit mothers. On the other hand, Vietnamese women find ways to take advantage of the cultural assimilation program, even if they are under management of the senior women. Lastly this chapter contemplates a possibility and limitation of alliance among these women who are located differently along the lines of class, ethnicity, and generation.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of marriage agencies in Vietnamese women's settlement in Korea. By examining the business tactics of the marriage agency to create its own disciplinary mechanism, I argue that the making of fictive kinship enables the brokers to justify parental protection for Vietnamese brides. By imposing the idea of parental protection on both Korean men and Vietnamese women, the brokers attempt to control women's reproduction and take advantage of women's domestic labor in the name of parents. In addition, the chapter discusses the ways that Vietnamese women manipulate the fictive kinship ties for their own interests. The women individually or collectively perform a child's role to demand caring parental responsibilities from the marriage brokers. Vietnamese women maintain the fictive kinship ties with the marriage brokers until they gain access to resources and form their own social network. The competition for limited resources prevents the women from becoming a political collective group that might help them more effectively maneuver and disrupt the disciplinary mechanism. I argue that the women are able to move beyond the marriage agency once they learn how to seek more opportunities.

Chapter 7 summarizes the key issues of this study, suggests governmental policies, and proposes directions for future research on marriage migration and immigrant women.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Research Design**

This dissertation examines the cultural politics of commercially mediated marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women and the women's settlement process in South Korea. I collected data to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What national and international factors encourage Vietnamese women and Korean men to engage in brokered marriages?
- 2) During the marriage migration processes, in what ways are Vietnamese women exposed to different forms of subject-making in the host society?
- 3) How do Vietnamese women develop daily coping strategies to negotiate cultural politics and social membership imposed by different social groups in their communities?

In order to answer these questions, I designed a qualitative study composed of in-depth interviews and participant observation. In my project, I wanted to think of the women's agency in the web of the roles of the state, international matchmaking agencies, and communities in shaping cross-border marriage migration. During the marriage and settlement process, Vietnamese women encounter different Korean people who may locate them with hierarchically defined notions of gender and ethnicity. I wanted to capture the everyday dynamics of cultural encounters between Vietnamese women and Koreans in a range of national, communal, and familial settings. I wanted to capture these intimate politics from the viewpoint of interpersonal and historical cultural encounters (Faier 2009). I employed ethnographic research to obtain detailed narratives

(Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994) of Vietnamese women and Korean people who participate in the marriage migration and settlement processes. Interviews can provide useful information but they are limited by informants' subjective perceptions and memories. Participant observation can encapsulate subtle and implicit ways that people communicate and interact in a particular social and cultural setting. This study explicates the interpersonal dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and class in the ongoing process of cross-border marriage migration and Vietnamese women's settlement in South Korea.

### **Research Sites**

To respond to the rapidly increasing numbers of marriage migrant women and to adopt policies and campaigns to support a multicultural society, the Korean government sponsored large-scale surveys on the lives of married migrant women in Korea (D. Seol, H. Lee, and S. Cho 2006). Since then, there have been many short-term scholarly works and media accounts of the impact of marriage migration on Korean society. A few long-term studies, published in the United States, shed new light on Chinese and Filipina wives in Korea (Freeman 2005, 2011; M. Kim 2008). Vietnamese brides became the second-largest group behind Chinese who married Korean men since 2003. My study aims to contribute to a long-term study of Vietnamese brides in South Korea. Building on the statistical information about Vietnamese brides and contacts with Korean marriage brokers, I chose two research sites to examine commercially arranged marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women and the women's assimilation process in South Korea.

### *Happy City in South Korea*

Happy City (pseudonym) is located in southeast Kyōngbuk Province, a province of 10 cities and 13 counties. According to Korean National Statistical Office (2009), Kyōngbuk had Korea's second largest population of Vietnamese marriage migrant women in 2005. In the mid-1990s, the administrations of the counties were merged with those of cities. Happy City and rural districts (*ŭp, myŏn, li*) of Happy County were combined under the administration of Happy City. The old Happy City is still the central district, a site of main public facilities, government offices, and civic organizations. Tourism, sub-contracted factories, and agriculture contribute to the city's economy. The outskirts of the city were filled with sub-contracted factories and rice fields. The heavy industries in the adjacent metropolitan cities and real estate development were encroaching on the countryside of Happy City. Most outskirts of the city were within an hour's drive of the old city. According to my data, many Vietnamese brides enter the countryside of the city, and their husbands work at sub-contracted factories. The city government is actively implementing policies and programs to assist foreign wives' settlement in Korea.

### *Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam*

The role of matchmaking agencies is not limited to recruiting men and women for arranged marriages; it is heavily involved in women's settlement in South Korea. According to the preliminary research, most Vietnamese brides, coming from the Mekong Delta, met their spouses through matchmaking services in Ho Chi Minh City. As far as I know, as of 2006 when I embarked my dissertation research, there was no

extensive research on matchmaking agencies although the media focused on profit-oriented matchmaking agencies, marriage tours, and trafficking.

I chose Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as Saigon), located in the southeast of Vietnam, as a secondary research site to comprehend the roles of matchmaking agencies and matchmaking processes. This metropolitan city is the largest city in Vietnam and is home to more than 9 million people. It is the economic hub of Vietnam, known for its export processing and other industrial zones. The city has 24 administrative districts. Pusan in Korea is the sister city of Ho Chi Minh City.

The matchmaking system between Korea and Vietnam is modeled on the brokerage system between Taiwan and Vietnam. The Korean matchmaking companies work with Vietnamese agencies that have vast networks of individual agents. In 2009, 900 international matchmaking agencies were licensed by the South Korean government (Ministry of Welfare and Health 2009). Korean matchmaking services are dedicated to matchmaking while Taiwanese agencies include labor migration. According to the official records, it is difficult to know precisely how many Korean marriage agencies recruit only Vietnamese women. However, according to the brokers interviewed by the government agency, more than 100 marriage brokers in Ho Chi Minh City and 12 in Hanoi were active as of 2005 (Seol et al. 2006).

The marriage broker I interviewed explained to me that there were about 90 marriage brokers in Ho Chi Minh City as of 2008, which was consistent with Seol et al.'s calculation (2006). Marriage agencies have close ties with the owners of hotels, wedding halls, restaurants, and travel companies in Ho Chi Minh City. According to the Korean

embassy in Ho Chi Minh City, only 83 spousal visas were issued in Ho Chi Minh City in 2000. The numbers of spousal visas in the city soared to 8,282 in 2006.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

During my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews. My initial participant observation in a Senior Citizen Center (pseudonym) began in June 2007. Based on my research on cultural assimilation programs in Happy City, I found the program at the Senior Citizen Center was more established than the others, so I contacted the director of its cultural assimilation program. I described to her my research interest in her program and requested a formal introduction to the senior Korean women and Vietnamese women in the program. She suggested I enter the program as one of the student volunteers in the Sociology department from a nearby university. In 2007, Vietnamese women were the largest group of marriage migrant women in the program. There were 15 foreign wives in total: two Filipinas, one Chinese woman, and 12 Vietnamese women. My job was to tend the children of the women during class, to prepare snacks for the participants, and to rearrange the tables and chairs after class. I observed senior Korean women and Vietnamese wives in classes on Korean language and culture. I also attended cooking lessons and field trips. During my visits to the center, I began my participant observation and the recruitment of contacts.

In July 2008, I re-entered the Senior Citizen Center for participant observation. There were a few new Vietnamese women in the program, but the remaining participants were the same ones that I had met in 2007. There were 23 Vietnamese women in total. Ten senior Korean women newly joined the program in 2008. The program had the same

curriculum but different textbooks and fieldtrips. I observed the interaction between senior Korean women and Vietnamese wives who attended weekly classes, field trips, and social gatherings.

To observe the matchmaking process in Vietnam, I contacted seven marriage agencies in Happy City requesting permission to join Korean men's marriage trips to Ho Chi Minh City. Only Love Agency (pseudonym) allowed me to participate in a five-day marriage trip and visit the agency during my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009. Initially in December 2007 and January 2008, with a group of Korean men and marriage brokers, I went to Ho Chi Minh City where I observed matchmaking meetings, wedding ceremonies, a banquet, city tour, and honeymoon. I saw interactions between Korean men and Vietnamese women in markets, restaurants, hotels, and tourist sites. The Korean men and marriage brokers I met during my first visit became my key respondents for my interviews.

In Vietnam, I observed marriage brokers continuously made an attempt at controlling men's sexual desire and performance. Every morning at breakfast, Korean brokers asked Korean men, "Did you have sex?" or "How many times?" The brokers used different sexual protocols to discourage or enhance sexually problematic male clients. To a newlywed groom who was about to go to his room, Mr. Lee told, "Have it [sex] once a day. Do a normal position. Vietnamese brides will think you are pervert if you do something pornographic. Vietnamese brides have told me Korean men are too lustful. Remember that your Vietnamese bride is virgin." Another morning, I overheard that a groom proudly reporting to Mr. Chin (72, marriage broker), "The pills [generic Viagra] worked out for me last night. I did it three times." Mr. Chin was chuckling out,

“Great! I will give you more [pills] tonight.” My observation of these kinds of interactions between the brokers and Korean men later helped me develop a chapter on Korean masculinities.

In Ho Chi Minh City, I was also able to grasp how Korean people viewed the political and economic transitions in Vietnam in reference to North Korea. For instance, Yǒng-su, who married a Vietnamese woman in 2008, had visited Vietnam for his business trip in 1996. He remembered there were armed military personnel in the airport in 1996, which reminded him of Vietnam as a communist country like North Korea. During marriage trips, Korean brokers and men often expressed the ways that the Vietnamese socialist state was controlling people’s lives. Out of curiosity, some Korean men wanted to go to a North Korean restaurant in the city. In the restaurant, I observed the ways that Korean men were attracted to North Korean waitresses and the men realized that Vietnam was a communist country. The South Korean men’s perceptions of Vietnam and North Korea in terms of ideological proximity indicate the on-going racialization process in global South Korea.

In June 2008, I regularly visited the Senior Citizen Center and Love Agency. At this time, I contacted senior Korean women, Vietnamese women, and Korean men, and I refined my interview questions. I was invited to the weddings of four of the Korean men whom I met in Vietnam. Love Agency asked me to teach Korean to Vietnamese brides at their office. I observed Vietnamese women while teaching. Through my visits to the marriage agency, I was introduced to more Korean men and Vietnamese women.

I made another research trip to Ho Cho Minh City in July and August 2008. On this trip, I attended four weddings and met six Korean men who visited their brides’

home villages to register their marriages. I accompanied one broker to a bride's hometown in a rural area of Can Tho and met her family. The bride became one of my key informants. I met her relatives in her home village. At dinner, her aunt on her mother's side half-jokingly asked me if I came to Vietnam to find a Vietnamese groom. Her question helped me to think about the ways that the Han-Viet marriage migration influenced the local people's views on a reversed gender order in relation to the regional economic order and global hypergamy.

In Ho Chi Minh City, I went to the Korean embassy to observe Vietnamese women's visa application and interviews. I visited women's organizations in the city, and interviewed the director of one organization. I visited the sociology departments of two universities in order to learn their perspectives on Han-Viet marriages. I was able to explore the city and meet local people who were in businesses related to commercial matchmaking agencies. Meeting them gave me a better understanding of the local and national mechanisms of the commercial matchmaking industry in Ho Chi Minh City. I interviewed Korean men, with their consent, in the hotel lobby, and their wives agreed to be interviewed after they joined their husbands in a few months.

I continued visiting Love Agency and Senior Citizen Center until May 2009. I attended weddings and social gatherings, and I attended cultural events for marriage migrant women in Happy City. Some couples and Vietnamese women invited me to their homes, where I could see the family dynamics between a Vietnamese woman and her in-laws. Sometimes I was unexpectedly invited to social gatherings. For example, a group of Vietnamese women asked me to join their trip to *jimjilbang* (public bathhouse) where we found a bride with a tattoo near her pelvis. I later found that her husband had



her get the tattoo of a black rose on a specific place, which made me contemplate the ways that they were building their intimate relationship. Overall, my visits to Love Agency and Senior Center, in conjunction with public events relevant to multicultural family and marriage migrant women, gave me opportunities to observe and record the women's assimilation in communal settings.

Interviews were conducted through personal contacts from December 2007 to May 2009. The primary sets of interviews fall into four categories: Vietnamese women, Korean men, marriage brokers; and senior Korean women. I used snowball sampling to recruit Vietnamese and Korean respondents. The secondary sets of data included formal interviews with brides' mothers-in-law, staff in the cultural organization, and a director of women's organizations in Vietnam.

By using the network of Vietnamese women in Happy City, I was able to interview Vietnamese women outside Love Agency. Several couples invited me to their homes where I met the rest of their family. Fifteen couples who married through Love Agency in 2008 and 2009 had a monthly get-together, which I always attended. During my participant observation in the center, I contacted the senior women in person to request interviews. Most respondents did not use the internet, so I called them to continue my conversations with them. My relationships with my respondents during my fieldwork grew close enough to gain their trust and they shared their personal stories with me.

I conducted 66 interviews, with 36 Vietnamese women, 14 Korean men, four marriage brokers, five senior Korean women, two staff members in the Senior Citizen Center, four mothers-in-law, and one director from a Vietnamese women's organization.

Formal interviews were pre-arranged and respondents signed consent forms. The interviews with Koreans were conducted in person, and I hired an interpreter to interview some Vietnamese women who did not speak Korean fluently. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to two hours. Not all interviews were taped because some respondents were reluctant to be recorded. For example, Min-hŭi (21) did not answer most of my questions during an audio-taped interview. Instead she kept smiling awkwardly. Later she explained to me that she felt uncomfortable with being recorded. Thus, I took extensive notes during interviews with those who were uncomfortable being audio-taped, and rewrote them with full sentences after the interviews.<sup>26</sup>

Each interview consisted of semi-structured and open-ended questions, and was conducted in a place where a respondent felt comfortable. I briefly explained my interest in listening to their experiences in regards to cross-border marriage and/or assimilation programs. This introduction was meant to express my seriousness in learning about their thoughts and experiences in cross-border marriages and assimilation process. Then, I asked detailed, factual questions: for instance, for Vietnamese women, the name of their hometown, age, the size of their families in Vietnam and Korea, jobs in Vietnam, and years of marriage. I then asked open-ended questions: for example, why Korean men and Vietnamese women had chosen an international marriage; why senior Korean women decided to participate in the cultural assimilation program, and how the marriage agency thought about the matchmaking conditions in Vietnam. Interviews with Vietnamese women were conducted at their homes, in coffee shops, and in the lounge of the grocery store owned by Love Agency. For Korean men, interviews were conducted wherever

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<sup>26</sup> For interview guidelines and questions, see Appendix 2.

they were comfortable; in coffee shops, a hotel lobby, the marriage agency office, homes, and restaurants. Senior Korean respondents preferred *dabang* (a traditional coffee house) to western-style coffee shops downtown. The added privacy made them feel safe confiding in me.

Some interview data was collected during participant observation. In Vietnam, data was collected from conversations with brokers, Korean men, and Vietnamese interpreters in hotel lobbies, restaurants, airplanes, busses, rental cars, taxis, and on boats. Some data emerged from informal conversations and unexpected meetings. I rigorously took notes when I attended meetings in which groups of couples having conversations about their marital life, parenthood, settlement, legal procedures for naturalization, and family conflict. Meeting notes were complemented by subsequent journal entries.

There was supplementary interview data from my casual conversations with numerous respondents. They were interested in my research and wanted to share their opinions and experiences with me. I came across people who had something of value to offer but who did not fit into one of my categories. Among them were Filipina and Chinese wives in the Senior Citizen Center, Vietnamese women I met in downtown Happy City, family members I met at Love Agency, acquaintances whom I met through a colleague in Ho Cho Minh City, and relatives of Vietnamese brides in Vietnam and in Korea. For example, through an acquaintance, I was introduced to a group of upper-middle class young women in Ho Chi Minh City. Their candid conversation about inter-racial relationships, cross-border marriage, and sexuality helped me to view Vietnamese modernity through the lens of gender and class. I saved the field notes that I took when I met them and I used the field notes as supplementary information.

Besides participant observation and interviews, I collected government documents, reports from organizations and centers for marriage migrant women, Korean textbooks for foreign wives, education materials for Vietnamese women from Korean embassy in Ho Chi Minh City, pamphlets and brochures from local events for multi-cultural families, local newspapers reporting on international marriages, official meeting materials for marriage agencies in Kyöngbuk Province, marriage certificates and divorce decrees, and personal letters. The collected data demonstrates manifold aspects of international marriage migration. Data collection was completed in 16 months.

I followed grounded theory to analyze my data and generate a theory. My data consists of field notes, interview transcripts, and primary and secondary research materials about the issues relevant to cross-border marriages between Vietnamese women and Korean men and the women's settlement process in South Korea. Grounded theory helps the researcher to generate a theory by systemically collecting and analyzing data (Strauss and Corbin 1994). It prepares the researcher to prepare for changing research conditions that may affect her study. For example, I did not include Korean mothers-in-law as informants in my original research plan. However, during my fieldwork, I found they were influential in a Korean man's decision to marry a foreign woman and a Vietnamese woman's settlement in rural areas. Changing research conditions were possible by tracing and analyzing the influence of power relations, such as gender, race, and class on the social conditions under study. Positionality guided me to be skeptical of my own interpretations and to systematically seek multiple perspectives of informants at every stage of my study. My conceptual interpretation of multiple perspectives involved coding procedures that categorized and sorted data through comparison, theoretical

questions and samples, and concept development (Emerson 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1994).

My coding involved several procedures. In the beginning, I read my transcripts several times to grasp overall themes, which helped me re-tool my theoretical focus and led me to the first formal coding. To conceptualize the first step of abstraction, I carefully examined every sentence in transcripts. I used a different highlight to code small themes in the transcripts. I wrote the themes of each coding block on the margins. Next, I read the codes comprehensively to identify any relationship among them. I took notes and short memos on the conditions, interactions, and consequences of the coding blocks, reflecting the research focus and theoretical questions in correspondence to each code. Accordingly broader themes emerged as I combined and ranked the codes. I summarized life stories of some interviews in relation to the cross-border marriage and settlement processes. In the final phase of coding, I categorized codes following main and sub-themes to construct analytical frameworks. I continued to write memos when they were relevant to any theoretical categories. I later cut and pasted some of the memos under relevant theoretical categories.

### **Research Respondents**

Appendix 2 shows the Vietnamese women and Korean men who agreed to in-depth interviews. There are four respondent groups in my interview. The names of all respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms.

### *Vietnamese Wives*

The in-depth interviews involved 36 Vietnamese wives. The average age of Vietnamese women at the time of marriage was 23 years old, compared to 40 of their Korean spouses. They had an average of seven years of formal education; their Korean spouses had an average of 12. Fourteen women responded they had paid jobs in Vietnam, working at factories, the garment industry, or hair salons. Although the rest of the women did not have paid jobs in Vietnam, they contributed to domestic labor and farming. Eight women had paid jobs in Korea, working in factories except one woman who was a helper in a restaurant. Eight women did not have any children whereas 28 women had given birth to a child or were pregnant at the time of the interview. Eight women were living in one generation (wife and husband) household, and there was a tendency that they were living in urban areas. Twenty-eight women were living in joint households, and 20 women of the joint households were living on the outskirts of Happy City. There was a tendency that they became pregnant within a year after they joined their husbands. Three women said they achieved Korean citizenship.

### *Korean Husbands*

The in-depth interviews involved 14 Korean husbands between the ages of 34 and 53. Table 2 in Appendix 2 shows the average age of Korean men at the time of marriage was 41 whereas that of their Vietnamese spouses' was 23.<sup>27</sup> The age and educational

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<sup>27</sup> A big age difference between Korean men and Vietnamese women has reproduced the media stereotypical images of controlling husbands in the media. In the interviews, some Korean men did not like a big age difference between spouses, especially as they were getting older. Meanwhile, some Vietnamese women did not mind a big age difference between spouses. They said that older men were more financially responsible and mature than younger men.

attainment reflect the similar patterns of the Vietnamese respondents' husbands. The average of the men's educational attainment was 12 years, which was five years more than that of Vietnamese women. According to the interviews, Korean husbands were not unfavorable to the age difference and/or the lower educational attainment of their Vietnamese wives. The men's response to their wives' age and education reflects social expectations of gendered hypergamy and women's obedience to the familial and age order. However, it is difficult to generalize the patterns because some men preferred older and/or more educated brides. Four out of five couple-only-households were living in urban areas. Six out of nine joint households were residing on the outskirts of the city. Overall the patterns of age, educational attainment, and household types are very similar to those of the Vietnamese respondents' husbands.

With the exception of two men in their fifties, the generation of the men can belong to somewhere between 386 generation<sup>28</sup> and the Generation X.<sup>29</sup> All the men whom I met during my research married Vietnamese women and participated in marriage trips to Vietnam through Love Agency between 2007 and 2008. So the lengths of their marriage were less than a year at the time of the interview. Of 14 with whom I conducted in-depth interviews, except two men, the men's jobs fit the occupational stereotypes for blue-collar and other laborers, including factory workers (n=6), truck driver (n=1), farmers (n=2), construction worker (n=2), and an entertainer bar manager (n=1).

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<sup>28</sup> S. Cheng (2000) defines the 386 generation in Korea as "those who have gone through as *students* the tumultuous changes of democratization and internationalization in 1980s" (45, italics in original). In general, the 386 generation refers to those who were thirties in 1990s, went to school in 1980s, and were born in 1960s and 1970s. The term was created when this generation entered into socio-political fields in 1990s and the numbers also referring to the 386 computer that came out in 1990s.

<sup>29</sup> The term is from Douglass Coupland's novel *Generation X* (1991) refers to those who were born in 1960s and 1970s in western industrial countries.

### *Senior Korean Women*

I had in-depth interviews with five senior Korean women at the cultural center. The senior women ranged in age from 65 to 72. All of them were living in Happy City and identified themselves as upper middle-class. During my fieldwork, I met 20 senior Korean women at the center, and found that most of them never held paid jobs. Four women previously had jobs, as an elementary school teacher, a government officer, a kindergarten director, and a social worker.

The senior Korean women I met were born into the post-Korean War generation — they grew up under the tumultuous political and economic changes in the wake of the division of Korea. Korea was a poverty-stricken nation after the war, and underwent a remarkable economic recovery under the military dictatorships of Pak Chŏng-hŭi in the 1970s and Chŏn Du-hwan in the 1980s. The national projects sponsored by the two regimes, shaped that generation's preference for conservative, disciplinary nationalist politics. This generation is also opposed to communism and takes tremendous pride in Korea's economic miracle (Jagger 2003). They were raised to believe in individual sacrifice for the sake of national economic development. The age group of the senior Korean women was similar to that of the Vietnamese women's mothers-in-law.

### *Marriage brokers, Program staff, and Korean Mothers-in-law*

I conducted in-depth interviews with four marriage brokers. Mr. Lee, 50, and Ms. Choi, 51, were the co-owners of Love Agency. Mr. Jin, 72, and Ms. Bang, 50, were marriage brokers who had contracts with Love Agency. I conducted interviews with the staff in the cultural assimilation program. Ms. Min, 35, was the program director and Ms.



Kim, 27, was the program coordinator. Ms. Min and Ms. Kim shared with me their experiences running cultural assimilation programs and senior projects at the Senior Citizen Center. Originally, I had not included the Vietnamese women's Korean in-laws as respondents. However, during my fieldwork, I realized that Korean in-laws were important to understanding family dynamics. I therefore conducted in-depth interviews with four Korean mothers-in-law. Table 9 lists the marriage brokers, senior women, program staff, and mothers-in-law who participated in interviews.

### **Reflection on Data Collection**

In Vietnam, group matchmaking for profit is illegal. During the marriage trip in Vietnam, this illegality made it difficult for me to gather information and to reveal myself as a researcher. I was able to observe matchmaking scenes in a hotel lobby and in the homes of several Vietnamese brokers. However, because of the illegality of group matchmaking, I was not allowed to take photos or to talk to the brides on the scene.<sup>30</sup> Since the brokers did not want outsiders to know what they were doing, I was never introduced as a researcher to the Vietnamese brokers. I never knew exactly where I was because the brokers intentionally changed motorbikes several times to get to the brokers' houses. At the scene, the Vietnamese brokers and brides assumed that I was a relative of the Korean groom, a marriage broker, or a sister or girlfriend of Mr. Lee.<sup>31</sup> I believe that having to conceal my real purpose sometimes interfered with my data gathering in some

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<sup>30</sup> The Vietnamese police came to the hotel where we were staying in July 2008. The brides were hidden in a secret room until the next morning. The police came to my room and I was briefly interrogated about the purpose of my trip to Vietnam.

<sup>31</sup> I found these assumptions when I had interviews with Vietnamese brides and interpreters. At a wedding banquet in Vietnam, the main emcee, who personally knew the Korean broker's wife, called me *samonim*, which is a respectful term for a man's wife or mistress.

cases but at the same time it had unexpected results. For example, Si-ho's wife, Bung, 21, thought that I was an important person from Love Agency and expressed interest in getting to know me. However, she lost interest in me after she came to Korea because she learned that I was not employed by the marriage agency.

My position as a middle-class Korean single woman was both difficult and easy in building trust and conducting interviews with Korean men. My class privilege along with my affiliation with a university in the United States gave the impression that I was an assertive and independent Korean woman. Some men expressed their frustration with Korean women based on their experiences in the domestic marriage market and were reluctant to have interviews with me. In contrast, my gender and age did not affect the male privilege of talking about sex in male homosocial contexts. During the marriage trips, I found that Korean men, including grooms and brokers, frequently talked about sex. They were not put off by my presence or by Vietnamese wives who did not understand what they were saying. I did not participate in these conversations, which however, as I think, reinforced the cultural stereotype that unmarried women did not engage in sex talk. Interestingly, since I was known to have lived in the U.S. for a long time, I was assumed to be more open to talking about sex. Some men were comfortable confiding in me about their sexual fantasies and sexual encounters with Vietnamese women during their interviews. Although talking about their sexual experiences to a single Korean woman may be considered ungentlemanly, the men, in a face-to-face interview, were eager to share their sexual experiences with Vietnamese women.

Some men expressed appreciation of my research and hoped that I would "correct" people's prejudices against international marriages. Wu-hyŏn, 42, an

entertainment bar manager chose his wife, Noc, 22, within 20 minutes of his arrival in the hotel. When I met him again in Korea six months later, Noc was three months pregnant. In the interview, he suggested that Korean men's experiences during the marriage trip should be heard more and that those marriages could be successful for many men. He even insisted that I use his real name. However, I cannot generalize his favorable experiences in international marriages or unpleasant experience of another man. Sang-kyōng, 45, a tour business owner, had the most negative views on Han-Viet marriages; his wife had run away, returned, and ran away again. His marriage had not lasted six months.

I wanted to contribute to the recent feminist studies on cross-border marriages that have revealed various reasons—not solely economic—why women choose to internationally marry. In Vietnam, my rapport with Vietnamese women was limited because of my inability to speak Vietnamese fluently. However, I fulfilled my role as an observer. Whenever there was an opportunity, I did my best to interact with them by using an interpreter or my limited Vietnamese language skills. Mr. Lee generously allowed me to see the elements of his business that he did not make public. However, he was displeased when I took the initiative to contact Vietnamese brides. In addition to gaining the broker's permission, I had to ask Korean men for permission to talk to their Vietnamese wives. Most men allowed me to meet them and their wives again in Korea.

In Korea, I regularly visited Love Agency to pursue relationships with Vietnamese women. At first, they were conscious of my presence at their gatherings in the basement of the agency. Some women showed their interest in me and tried to speak Korean. However, others were suspicious and avoided me. The women I met in

Vietnam, those to whom I taught Korean at the agency, and those I met in social gatherings for Han-Viet couples, tried to include me in their communication at the agency. However, some women still felt uncomfortable with my presence at their gatherings because they did not want an outsider being privy to matters that they considered private. The marriage brokers treated me as a guest, which sometimes made Vietnamese women even more suspicious of my interest in getting to know them. In the beginning, it was very difficult for me to meet them individually outside the agency because they came to the agency in the afternoon and stayed there until they returned home to prepare dinner. It was easier for those who worked to meet with me outside the agency because they had less surveillance from their in-laws and marriage brokers.

My social location influenced my interaction with Vietnamese women. Some Vietnamese women expressed their interest in getting to know me because I was an outsider in their Vietnamese network. Some women approached me out of curiosity. They felt safe when they found I was temporarily staying in Korea. They claimed that I was different from other Koreans they knew, like their family members or marriage brokers. It was because I listened to their everyday struggles to settle in Korea, rather than telling them what they should be or do. Some women, particularly those who lived only with their husbands, treated me like their big sister. Many women had few opportunities to form relationships with Koreans outside of their family or the workplace. My efforts to learn Vietnamese language and culture also impressed them, since not many Korean in-laws did so. When I could, I tried to assist those who asked me. However, some women saw me solely as a means of gaining access to resources.

My position, temporarily staying in Happy City and coming from the United States, drew Vietnamese women's attention. Some Vietnamese used a few English words they knew when conversing with me. One of the women asked me if I could teach her both English and Korean. According to what they believed about the United States, I was wealthy and had access to many resources. When I explained to them I was not a U.S. citizen and that life for non-immigrant people in the United States was not easy, they suggested I marry an American man. I assumed they envisioned the United States as a land of wealth that may provide more opportunities than South Korea does.

My relationships with Han-Viet couples grew during my fieldwork. On many occasions, I was expected to be a mediator between Vietnamese wives and Korean husbands. Some husbands asked me to visit their homes to teach Korean to their Vietnamese wives, and others asked me to take their wives downtown for lunch or shopping when they were at work. Vietnamese women were more talkative when they met me alone than they were in social gatherings where their Korean husbands tended to dominate the conversation.

In my relationship with couples, my being Korean, occasionally prevented Vietnamese wives from confiding in me. Some Vietnamese women felt I was closer to their husbands than to themselves because the guests at social gatherings usually spoke in Korean. Some women were uncomfortable with the ways that their husbands discussed intimate details and familial conflicts with me and other couples. At one get-together, So-ra (24) interrupted her husband who was telling me about one of their spats. So-ra said, "Stop acting like *ajumma* [a married woman]. Why do you have to tell everything to anyone?" After that incident, my relationship with them grew distant.

Most respondents were married so that they treated me as socially inferior because I was single. Most Koreans expressed their concerns about my single status, advising me to find a spouse first and then study. Some felt sorry for me, and others advised me to “lower my standards for a spouse.” Vietnamese women often asked me if I had an American boyfriend or planned to marry soon. Some women thought I was lying, and some did not understand how some people choose not to marry. At a social gathering, a Vietnamese woman joked she was more mature than I was because she was married and had a child. Another woman insisted that marriage and motherhood were the only paths to becoming a full-fledged adult woman.

The senior women I met identified me as a socially and economically privileged middle class woman like themselves, because I was earning a PhD in the United States. In South Korea, studying abroad, especially in western countries, is associated with social and economic privilege. The senior women assumed I was from a wealthy family. On many occasions, the senior women respected me as a teacher and researcher. A few women even tried to report to me on their performance in the program, their issues with Vietnamese brides, and the program management. In general, they were proud of the program and believed it should be a model for other assimilation programs. At the same time, my marital status and my being the same age as their youngest children led them to treat me as a child, as if I did not know cooking or etiquette as married women did.

During interviews, some senior women tacitly criticized me by emphasizing a woman's biological, social, and filial obligation to marry and have a child. Some women compared me with Korean men who married foreign brides based on the conventional Korean notion of marrying up for women. They assumed the Korean men were too

socially and economically marginalized to be able to marry Korean women, but I was so overeducated that there was little possibility of a woman like me being able to marry up. They felt sorry for my parents because I was single. The women agreed the only way for me to get married was to “lower my standards,” as Korean men advised. None of their children were internationally married. However, they seemed accepting of interracial marriage. In the words of one respondent, it was unavoidable since “we are living in a global era.”

During interviews with senior women, more stories, experiences, and details came to light. In public settings when they were in a group, some senior women openly talked about the bad husbands and in-laws of Vietnamese women. In private, some women told me about their thoughts on international marriages, Vietnamese women’s husbands, and in-laws. The senior women were aware of the domestic violence or abuse that Vietnamese women might encounter at home, and although they expressed sympathy for the women they did not want to intervene in any family conflicts. Instead, they described such treatment as characteristic of rural and uneducated people. They often used the term, destiny, when Vietnamese women complained to them about problems at home.

Because of the public nature of the program, direct research into the relationships between senior women and Vietnamese women outside the citizen center was minimal. I came closest to observing them outside the center when I was invited to a *dol* (a child’s first birthday party). However, I was always invited on excursions, such as to a center for children with learning disabilities, on day tours to nearby historical sites, and to restaurants where the Vietnamese women were taught Korean table manners.

Overall, I was differently positioned in the views of my research respondents, and this complicated my relationship and interaction with them. Gender, class, nationality, age, marital status, and educational attainment distinguished insiders from outsiders in the minds of my informants. The positions of insider and outsider can generate difficult issues, including (dis)trust among different groups of informants. I tried to build productive and meaningful relationships with my research respondents, by reducing any chance of misunderstanding and by enhancing the opportunities to gain trust from my informants. My experiences of being an insider, outsider, or in-between in my social relationships with my respondents explain my incomplete understanding of their experiences in the Vietnamese women's marriage migration and settlement process. I tried to be cognizant of my social position which might influence the research, the relationship and interaction with my respondents, and my interpretations.

There were some limitations that affected my research process. The first limitation in the fieldwork resulted from my entry into research sites in Vietnam through marriage brokers. Love Agency allowed me to observe the entire matchmaking process and to talk with Korean men and Vietnamese women. However, marriage brokers limited the times and places for my observation and conversation with respondents. Marriage brokers were protective of their safety, so brokers or interpreters always accompanied the married couples and me. During my stay in Vietnam, there was a police raid on my hotel to arrest anyone involved in illegal matchmaking. Robbers on motorcycles attacked and injured the marriage brokers. These incidents made Korean men and Vietnamese women (and myself) fearful for our safety, and marriage brokers were stricter about my contact with Vietnamese women, and prevented me from meeting



any customers outside of their presence. However I tried to communicate with my respondents as much as I could whenever possible.

The second limitation in my field research pertains to language proficiency. I spoke minimal Vietnamese, so my conversations with the Vietnamese wives were through interpreters employed by the Love Agency. I had to skip questions that might make women uncomfortable about being candid about the matchmaking process because the interpreters might report them to the marriage brokers. Sometimes interpreters added their subjective perspectives to my questions rather than literally translating what the women were saying. For example, I had a question about the women's motivations. Interpreters opined that the women from southern Vietnam were trying to escape poverty by marrying Korean men, which was typical of the assumptions about women's motivation for cross-border marriage. Although many of the women expressed their concerns about families in Vietnam, their motivations for cross-border marriages should not be reduced to the economic. When I asked the Vietnamese women about monetary compensation after marriage, the interpreters would interject that a woman's family would receive a small amount of money, when in actuality the family received a small gift that the brokers purchased out of the Korean husband's payment. In Korea, when I interviewed Vietnamese women who spoke Korean fluently, I found that intermediary brokers usually kept the money that marriage brokers promised to pay their families. Generally, the presence of the interpreters during the interviews in Vietnam prevented women from expressing honest opinions about the marriage process.

The third limitation pertains to the issue of objectivity stemming from my focus on relationships between Vietnamese women and Korean people. In family conflicts, a

Vietnamese woman, her Korean husband, his family, and marriage brokers each had a different version of what had happened. I tended to side with the Vietnamese woman, since she was the most vulnerable and the most likely to be blamed. I was able to reconcile the different accounts through participant observation. However, when I was not able to listen to or observe all the sides, I tried to cross-check with other sources and circumstances to set up data for plausible interpretation and analysis.

Taken as a whole, my extensive fieldwork, interviews, and the research sources I collected in Vietnam and Korea enabled me to generate rich data. Through careful analysis, I developed and elaborated concepts of micro-negotiated marriage migration process and social membership formation.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Korean Men and Brokered Cross-border Marriage:**

#### **Narratives of Becoming a Normal Man**

The cross-border marriage phenomenon in Korea can be situated within the context of globalizing Asia and women's migration, illuminating social and economic change at local and transnational levels. Similar to other more economically advanced Asian countries, Korea has faced rapid industrialization and young people's migration to urban industrial sectors since the 1970s. These processes have decreased the population of young people, especially young women, in underdeveloped rural areas, leading to bride shortage problems.<sup>32</sup> In the 1980s, rural bachelors were unable to attract marriageable Korean women, who desired to migrate to the cities for educational, working, and marital opportunities. Local politicians and the Korean media publicized the bride shortage as a national issue, resulting in the expansion of the commercialized matchmaking market into China and Southeast Asian countries in order to facilitate transnational marriages. In the early 1980s, local governments in areas facing bride shortages implemented a campaign called "Getting Rural Bachelors Married." The campaign subsidized the expenses of commercial international marriages for rural bachelors between 35 and 50 years old, who worked in the agricultural and fishing industries. Since the 1990s, matchmaking agencies also recruited men in industrial sectors, who were assumed to be less competitive on the domestic marriage market than their middle-class counterparts who had completed higher education and held office jobs.

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<sup>32</sup> An unmarried woman is expected to move to her husband's household after marriage in a patrilineal family. She is less obligated to stay with her parents than her brothers.

Despite increasingly negative public views about international marriages, during the past two decades more and more men have chosen international marriages as an alternative way to marry.

In Korea, popular and academic debates have focused on issues related to marriage-migrant women's assimilation process, relevant government policies, and the emergence of multicultural families in Korean society (K. Han 2006; M. Kim et al. 2006; Y. Kim, M. Kim, and G. Han 2006; Seol, Kim, and G. Han 2005). Commercialized marriage routes organized by profit-oriented marriage brokerages, maladjustment of foreign brides, domestic violence committed by Korean husbands, and increasing divorce rates among international couples have also drawn both scholarly and media attention (G. Han and Seol 2006). Pointing to the ineffective policies regulating marriage agencies' attempts to incite men to rush into marriages by providing false information to their clients, Korean scholars have argued that the commercialization of international marriages may cause more problems than it solves. Hastening the marriage process in order to make more profit, marriage agencies may foster unions troubled by difficulties in communication, cultural conflict, domestic violence, and women's limited access to the workforce (S. Yi 2006; S. Yi 2004). Some scholars argue that Korean men are unaware of or choose to ignore cultural differences between themselves and their foreign wives, with husbands in some cases resorting to domestic violence when their brides fail to live up to the demand that they fulfill traditional Korean gender roles (Yun 2005).

Korean scholarly work on international marriages specifically between Korean men and Vietnamese women takes a similar approach, focusing on the assimilation of Vietnamese marriage-migrant women in rural Korea, while the public media tends to

emphasize the highly commercialized marriage brokering between Korea and Vietnam, sexual trafficking, and marriage failures. Media images of the Korean men and Vietnamese women who are engaged in brokered cross-border marriages are fairly stereotypical, resting on assumptions about the marriage intentions of Korean men and Vietnamese women and about the maltreatment of Vietnamese brides in Korea, and the media often questions the practice of getting married during a five-day trip to Vietnam. The popular stereotypes subscribe to the dominant sexual trafficking discourse on brokered cross-border encounters between a woman from a poorer country and a man from a wealthier one.<sup>33</sup> Correspondingly, the public assumption about men and women engaged in cross-border sexual encounters through commodified routes are shaped by this discourse's gendered geography of power, which maps a relation between a sexual perpetrator and a victim, thus overestimating men's sexual agency while women's agency is dismissed.

The Korean public's suspicion and the sexual trafficking discourse on cross-border relationships in Asia replicate the understanding of relationships between Asian women and Western men. As Constable (2003) points out, the correspondence relationships between Asian women and U.S. men, conflated with the "mail-order bride" phenomenon in the public imagination, are reduced to gendered, sexualized, and economic relations of power, which then influences how other cross-border relationships are interpreted. U.S. scholars of cross-border marriage migration have challenged the stereotypical representations of third world women embedded in the traditional human trafficking discourse. These scholars have engaged diverse strategies to disclose

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<sup>33</sup> I find the word "encounter" appropriate to describe a meeting that happens by chance or a sexual encounter with someone they have not met before.

marriage-migrant women's subjectivities and agency. The feminist scholarly work on Korean contexts has had similar approaches to debunking stereotypical representations of foreign brides in Korea, focusing on the brides' agency and subjectivities (Abelmann and Kim 2005; Freeman 2005; H. Kim 2007; M. Kim 2008).

In comparison to the increasing studies of marriage migrant women, the men's agency and subjectivities are rarely discussed, thus resulting in a dismissal of men (Cottrell 1990; Holt 1996; Suzuki 2003, 2005). If the man question is discussed, the men's personal desires for and in cross-border marriage and their individual situations within culturally and historically specific contexts are mostly overlooked (Suzuki 2005). In her ethnographic study of mail-order marriages between Asian women and American men, Constable (2003) debunks the hegemonic image of western male domination and the exploitation of their foreign wives engaged in cross-border marriages, by articulating subtle and complex relations of power embedded in immigration and citizenship. Meanwhile, Suzuki (2003) delineates the ways that Japanese men, married to Filipina women, struggle for social mobility and hegemonic masculinity embedded in Japan's marriage market.

The Korean men I interviewed fell into the occupational category of blue collar workers, and my analysis of Korean manhood extended beyond observations of marriage trips. Oftentimes, marriage brokers sexually categorized Korean men, either deficient or hypersexual, with different criteria, such as age, salary, previous marriage, and education attainment. The brokers both pitied and encouraged the elite man among men to unleash their sexual desire whereas they looked down and tried to control less qualified men's sexual behaviors. On the other hand, that Korean men chose brokered marriage to a

Vietnamese woman was not only because of their sexual pleasure. They speculated that they were not able to marry a local woman, whether it was arranged or love marriage, because of their blue collar job, age, rural residence and/or extended family type. Korean men struggle with dominant forms of masculine identities rooted in the heterosexual gender regime, and this hegemonic masculinity is historically contextual, producing different subordinate masculinities as a form of control of other men (Connell 1987, 1995).

In this chapter, I trace the discursive construction of Korean manhood involved with brokered international marriages and later analyze men's subjective narratives of their arranged marriages to Vietnamese women. By analyzing media portrayals of Korean men and international marriages, I argue that the proposal of international marriages since the 1980s as a national remedy for solving rural bachelors' marriage problems constructed deficient manhood associated with socially and economically marginalized farmers. On the other hand, it resulted in inviting various groups of men, especially those who engage in the industrial labor force to enter more varied, internationally commercialized marriage routes. In the late 1990s, the emerging human rights discourse intertwined with existing public images of brokered transnational intimacy and marriage, coming to characterize the men as hypersexual and replacing the earlier notion of deficient manhood.

This chapter presents Korean men's experiences. The narratives of the Korean men who choose brokered marriages to Vietnamese women provide a more nuanced account of manhood, international marriage, and family making. In this chapter, I examine Korean men's narratives, including their ideas about *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*

(Chosŏn dynasty–style marriage), “giving up on marrying a white bride,” and “modern projects,” all of which are associated with men’s desires and struggles to become a normal<sup>34</sup> man in Korean society. Concomitantly, men’s imagination of and intimate encounters with Vietnamese women lead the men to aspire to regain patriarchal privileges in marriage and family, thus replicating the dominant masculine ideology of domestic patriarchy. The men expect Vietnamese brides to be traditional but to become selectively modern, which reflects the men’s contradicting views of cultural similarities of Vietnamese women. The men’s desires and struggles to become a normal man through marrying a Vietnamese woman show how regionalization, part of global processes, intersects with the construction of Korean masculinity. In reality, patriarchal prerogatives are not automatically given to the men. In their actual marriages, not every man succeeds in fulfilling his plans and dreams of becoming a normal man. In some cases men fail in negotiating with their Vietnamese wives, ending up in a divorce.

### **Deficient Manhood: Saving Pitiful Rural Bachelors**

“Since the 1990s Korean women avoid marrying rural bachelors. Even rural women avoid marrying the bachelors unless the men leave their village and live in a city. In their marriage process, many rural bachelors had to leave their villages, and as a result few bachelors who had to preserve their land and support elderly parents stayed in the rural areas. For these men, Korean brides or rural maids were ‘pie in the sky’ so they did not have a choice but to marry a foreign bride.”  
—Chong-kyu Yi, Sang-chun Yi, and Gyŏng-tae Ma (*Maeilsinmun*, February 22, 2005)

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<sup>34</sup> I use normal in my translation of *potong*. Critical theories, adopting Foucauldian critique of normalization, have increased the caution to power relations at work in the determination of what counts as normal that depends on particular socio-historical contexts. These men do not want to stand out due to their brokered marriages and inter-ethnic/racial children in Korean society, which constructs what is hetero-normative in terms of marriage and family.



In the 1980s, rural farming bachelors faced obstacles to finding brides and were pitied by the public. In her discussion of Korean weddings as a window to understanding twentieth-century Korean history and the lives and identities of men and women who shaped that history, Kendall (1996) explains the cultural sentiment that “those who cannot afford to marry engender pity” (4). During the 1980s, three hundred bachelors allegedly killed themselves after having become discouraged over their inability to marry (“Chungchǒng chibang” 1989). For instance, a farming bachelor, 35, a day laborer, after moving to Seoul to find a bride, jumped into the Han River after experiencing a few rejections from women he met in arranged meetings (“Kyŏrhon gomin” 1989). Two brothers in a rural village in Kyŏngnam Province committed suicide after 10 failed arranged meetings over the course of eight years (“Nongchon chonggak” 1990). Increasing numbers of suicides were publicized by the media and gradually mobilized politicians and civil organizations to save the pitiful bachelors of the rural areas.

In response, various civic organizations, churches, and governmental branches initiated programs to matchmake farming bachelors with local women. *Nongchon chonggak changga ponaegi undong* (Movement for getting farming bachelors married) was organized in 1983 by Kyŏng-su Pak, an assemblyman representing Kangwŏn Province. Pak was surprised to see that, in one village of 53 households, no man had married in seven years, which motivated him to initiate the movement. Pak proposed a policy to the central government that would provide financial aid to rural bachelor farmers to attract local women. For instance, the “Marriage and Living Expense Aid”

program proposed giving 10,000,000 won (approximately USD 8,000) to each bachelor farmer (K. Yi 1989).<sup>35</sup>

In the beginning of the marriage movement, civil and local governmental organizations organized social events for arranged meetings between farming bachelors and women living near metropolitan areas. They primarily targeted women working at factories in urban industrial areas. For instance, *Nonguhoe* (Rural Village Friendship Association) distributed one thousand leaflets aimed at female workers at Kuro industrial complex to help address the problems that bachelor farmers faced (B. Kim 1987).<sup>36</sup> A local government in Southern Chungch'ong Province addressed the serious gender imbalance in people between 26 and 35 years old.<sup>37</sup> Responding to the rural bachelors' demand to "let us import brides, too," which mocked the central government's open policy toward agricultural imports, the local government organized "A Delegate for Attracting Urban Ladies to the Rural Areas" to visit large-scale industrial complexes to recruit female workers to marry rural bachelors. Other civil organizations participated in promoting the matchmaking movement. For instance, *Ch'onguk nongchon sarang kungmin undong hy'ob'uihoe* (Council of National Movement of Care for Farming and Fishing Villages) organized a painting exhibition to promote the movement in June 1993; the Sinsegye (New World) department store of Y'ongd'ungpo gu in Seoul opened food

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<sup>35</sup> Pak proposed different plans to economically aid village bachelors in Kangw'ŏn Province, such as giving a calf to a newly married farmer and providing hospital expenses to those rural bachelors who delivered a girl.

<sup>36</sup> The Kuro industrial complex is located in the southwestern Seoul. It played a pivotal role in South Korea's economic growth until the 1990s, contributing 10 percent of national exports in the 1970s. It consisted of textile manufacturing, dressmaking, and other labor-intensive production processes. It has been transformed into a central information technology industrial complex during the last two decades.

<sup>37</sup> According to a 1989 government report, in the rural areas of Southern Chungch'ong Province there were 8,571 unmarried men compared to 961 women. For more details, see S. Pak 1989.

stands for bachelor farmers to sell agricultural produce they grew in October 1992; and *Chǒnguk nongchon chonggak kyōrhon taechaek wiwōnhoe* (National Council for Getting Bachelor Farmers Married) organized a one-day restaurant event to arrange meetings between bachelor farmers and urban women in December 1991. Nongovernmental organizers, like Sŭng-ok Roh from the Institute for Family Welfare, Jǒng-su Kim, the publisher of *Kagyo*, and Mu-dŭk Chin from the Institute for Studies of Farm Villages, publicly volunteered as international matchmakers to recruit women for pitiful bachelor farmers (Seo 1992).

These rural problems appeared in election pledges, too. As Pak had done, politicians in other provinces placed the issue of pitiful rural bachelors in their political pledges made during elections in the 1990s. For instance, during the election year in 1995, three politicians in Northern Kyōngsang Province had a debate on the issue of unmarried bachelor farmers. Ŭi-kŭn Yi pledged to increase the number of marriages between Chosŏnjok women and bachelor farmers, which he framed as embracing a global era; Pan-sŏk Yi argued that rural bachelors' marriage to foreign brides might cause numerous social problems in the future and did not correspond to Korean cultural sentiment, suggesting instead ways to promote domestic marriages for the bachelors; and Sun-hong Pak expected the problems would be naturally solved if the state would initiate more welfare policies for those who live in rural areas.<sup>38</sup>

The public pity for rural bachelors is a response of national anxiety about the underdevelopment of the rural sector in contrast to the fast-paced industrialization and urbanization associated with the Han River Miracle of the 1970s and 1980s. Not

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<sup>38</sup> For details, see T. Pak 1995.

benefiting from the national economic prosperity, the rural bachelors were nostalgically imagined to be good-hearted men keeping up the Korean cultural backbone by preserving the homeland and taking care of elderly parents. They were also imagined as lacking manhood, deprived of economic prosperity and thus rejected by local women in late-twentieth-century Korea. The public pity was thus a response to culturally prescribed norms of manhood embedded in marriage and family. Similar to Suzuki (2003)'s explanation of how full-fledged adulthood is granted to married men in Japanese society, in Korea getting married symbolically means individual men (and women) have entered socially confident, complete, and responsible adulthood (J. Cho 2009; Kendall 1996). Regardless of rural bachelors' goodwill in preserving Korean tradition and the home villages of those who migrated to cities for economic and educational opportunities, they were not able to gain socially granted full-fledged manhood unless they were married. Rural bachelors were even more pitied by the Korean public when stories of fake marriages and runaway Chosŏnjok or Chinese brides began to emerge in the mid-1990s. On the other hand, an expansion of the highly commercialized international marriage market between Korea and Southeast Asian countries invited sex trafficking discourses, which turned the public attention to the figure of the hypersexual man, away from pitiful and victimized bachelor farmers.

### **Hypersexual Manhood: Disgracing the Nation**

“Police Monday burst into a house in Ho Chi Minh City only five meters from a police station and found 66 young Vietnamese girls being ‘carefully’ and ‘thoroughly’ scrutinized by two South Korean suitors.”  
—Dam Huy (*Thanh Nien*, April 23, 2007)

“National Disgrace: “Ugly Korean” (English in original) Searched ‘Naked Vietnamese Brides’ in Vietnam.”  
—*Hangukilbo* (April 27, 2007)

In the late 1990s, when many men in the industrial labor force were drawn into commercial cross-border marriages, the image of the pitied farmer dovetailed with stereotypes of unattractive, hypersexual, uneducated, old men who were rejected by local women and therefore buying a bride from a poorer country. The commercialization of international marriage and diversification in foreign brides’ nationalities drove the media attention toward the negative sides of international marriages, such as runaway brides, fake marriages, sex trafficking, and mal-adjustment of foreign brides. As a result, the public perception of Korean men using commercialized matchmaking services not only invalidated their marriages but also exaggerated their sexual agency.

Among different groups of international marriages, those between Korean men and Vietnamese women have been the most negatively portrayed by the media because their marriages are highly commercialized and because group-based brokered marriage is illegal in Vietnam. The existing marriage brokering network which was systematized by marriages between Taiwanese men and Vietnamese women (Wang and Chang 2002) spurred the number of Korean marriage agencies in Vietnam. In order to make more profit, marriage brokers set up arranged meetings favorable to Korean men who pay all marriage expenses. Usually, Korean men marry a Vietnamese woman during a five-day trip to Vietnam, a practice that drew public attention both from domestic and international news media.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in 2007 the *New York Times* carried a story of the courtship between Korean men and Vietnamese women. Covering the men’s five-

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<sup>39</sup> See, “Korean Men Use Brokers to Find Brides in Vietnam” (Onish 2007) and “Wed to Strangers, Vietnamese Wives Build Korean Lives” (S. Lee 2008).

day trip to Vietnam, the report suggested that both grooms and brides would soon encounter unexpected cultural and language barriers in their marriages. However, a Korean reader, a former intern at Women's Hotline in Seoul Korea, promptly sent a letter to the editor criticizing the article (N. Choi 2007). According to the author, the picture of the marriage tour in the article was "too optimistic," characterizing the marriage tour as similar to a "slave trade." Such a response reflected the general negative view on brokered international marriages as sex-industry, locating Korean men and Vietnamese women into the relationships between perpetrators and victims.

The idea of marriage as a commercial transaction invites associations with the sex industry, and specific marriage routes that follow economic orders in Asia produce assumptions about the men and women marrying through brokers: men are figured as motivated by sexual appetites and the women as seeking economic mobility. The advertisements for Vietnamese women, such as "Marry Vietnamese Virgins," "We Guarantee Vietnamese Brides Never Run Away," "Vietnamese Virgins: 100 percent Recall Service," were prevalent in rural areas and small cities until the early 2000s. They raised public concerns around profit-oriented marriage agencies and produced images of Korean men who objectified young Vietnamese women for their sexual needs. Although Korean law now prohibits such advertisements, marriage agencies continue to advertise Vietnamese women as being physiologically similar to Koreans and as coming from rural areas and thus willing to assimilate into village life in Korea. By comparing them to negative images of Chinese women as runaway brides or fake marriages, Vietnamese women are portrayed as traditional and innocent by marriage agencies when they recruit Korean men.

According to my observation of matchmaking scenes, the meeting settings usually accede to men's demands because only men pay for the marriage services and consequently men are able to select a bride. In the matchmaking meeting, a man meets anywhere from just a few to more than 100 Vietnamese women until he finds his bride. Although a Vietnamese woman selected by a Korean man may reject his proposal, most women accept it.<sup>40</sup> The brokers hasten their male clients to choose his bride within a few hours on the first day of arrival, and a man chooses his bride based on looks, his gut feelings, and/or the brokers' advice. Female brokers examine the woman's body to make sure she has never been pregnant. If both parties agree to a marriage, they sign a contract with the brokers and prepare for a wedding the next day.

The media descriptions shown in the newspaper stories are typical of public representations of Korean men in search of young Vietnamese women, invoking Korean men's sexual trafficking in Vietnamese women through intra-regional matchmaking. The epigraphs to this section, one drawn from a Vietnamese newspaper and the other from a Korean one, are responding to the same incident, which occurred on April 23, 2007. Both newspapers summon a dyad drawn from typical sex-trafficking discourse—female victim and male perpetrator—emphasizing Vietnamese girls caught up in trafficking, sexually objectified and harassed by ugly and old Korean men. The Vietnamese newspaper emphasizes the sexual objectification of the girls by Korean men and the

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<sup>40</sup> I observed many matchmaking scenes at a hotel and in Vietnamese brokers' houses, and I saw only two women who rejected men's proposals. Different from the other women, they asked the brokers questions about the grooms when they were chosen. The first woman was chosen by a divorced carpenter, 53, from a small city. She was suspicious of the man's motivations for marriage when she found out that his Vietnamese wife ran away after six months of marriage. The second woman rejected a rural bachelor, 40, because she was looking for a man from a metropolitan area.

vulnerability of the poor young Vietnamese women who are imagined as if forced into international sex trafficking. During brokered marriage processes, many women are indeed vulnerable to sexual objectification and inhumane treatment by marriage brokers and grooms in some cases. Thus the commercialized marriage process exacerbates the idea of sex-trafficking of women.

In this section I have explained the discursive construction of Korean manhood involved in brokered international marriages. The national remedy to save pitiful bachelor farmers in the rural areas constructed the image of deficient manhood. Meanwhile the media portrayals—the sexual objectification of Vietnamese women in the marriage agencies’ advertisements, the brokered matchmaking meetings, the maltreatment of Vietnamese brides during the marriage process, and domestic violence against Vietnamese brides—constructed the image of the sexually motivated man, which has become the dominant perception of the men involved in brokered international marriages. However, some questions arise from these simplistic, yet contradicting, images of the men who enter brokered marriages. Do the media images tell us the motivations of an individual man for deciding to enter brokered marriages? What do his subjective views on brokered cross-border marriage and international family making tell us about a particular cultural logic that constructs specific notions of manhood, marriage, and family?

In the following section, I discuss the motivations of Korean men who chose brokered marriage to Vietnamese women in order to provide a more nuanced account of men’s involvement with brokered international marriage and family making. I examine the men’s struggles and desires to become a normal man in their narratives of “*Chosŏn*



*sidae sik kyŏrhon*” (Chosŏn dynasty–style marriage), “giving up on the idea of marrying a white bride,” and “modern projects.” These narratives show that the intimate politics of cultural proximity operates through Koreanizing Vietnamese women.

### **Men’s Stories: to Become a Normal Man**

Korean society is patriarchal in that many men are given power in nuptial relations and decision making within the family. In the case of commercialized international marriages, men are considered to take initiative in their marriages because they have their own social networks and know about resources that their foreign wives have to depend on. The initiative granted to men in family making can be used both positively and negatively, since his initiative can be used to help his wife settle smoothly in Korea, but in the worst cases, his authoritarian attitudes may involve domestic violence (O. Kim 2006).<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the victim-perpetrator discourse, the Korean men I interviewed suggested different perspectives on their involvement with brokered marriages. Many men argued that they did not have any intention of buying a bride, although they were aware of negative public perceptions of Korean men and foreign brides engaged in international marriages. Instead, the men explained that they used a marriage agency to find a spouse like many other men and women who pay large

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<sup>41</sup> Hard figures on domestic violence in international marriages are difficult to find, although there have been reports of Korean men beating and killing their foreign wives, as well as foreign wives committing suicide. Divorce in Han-Viet marriages continues to grow with 28 in 2003, compared with 2507 in 2013. However, there is not enough data to elaborate on the co-relation between domestic violence and the increasing divorce rate in these marriages. For statistics on divorce in international marriages in South Korea, see Table 4, 5, and 6 in Appendix 1.

amounts of money to domestic matchmaking companies in order to find a spouse.<sup>42</sup> The men's subjective views on paying for a marriage service can be understood as one of the ways that these men resist and try to transform the social stigma attached to international marriages and interethnic or interracial families and children in Korea.

The Korean men I spoke with welcomed their role in initiating marriage and family based on their imagination of and intimate experiences with submissive Vietnamese women, and they implicitly expected to achieve a kind of patriarchal privilege in becoming the head of a family. To a certain extent, Korean men are complicit in concretizing a hegemonic manhood that institutionalizes male dominance in a gender regime requiring the subordination of women and non-dominant groups of men like themselves. However, it is still questionable whether the men's subjection to the dominant masculine ideology that entitles men to domestic patriarchal privileges (Suzuki 2003) should be understood only through sex trafficking discourses. Moreover, patriarchal privileges are not automatically given to the men in their marriage or in their consequent family making.

Men's motivations for and decisions to enter into marriages to Vietnamese women are heterogeneous. However, the men commonly expressed their desire to be *potong* (normal) in explaining their decisions to enter brokered cross-border marriages, as well as a desire to make a *potong* family. It is somewhat paradoxical that in order to be a *potong* person, the men choose brokered cross-border marriage and making interethnic families in an ethnically homogeneous society like Korea. These complicated desires and struggles are not necessarily relevant to achieving patriarchal privileges, and are far more

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<sup>42</sup> Yamaura (2013) also discusses Japanese men's de-stigmatizing practices in their commercial marriages with Chinese women.

complex than simply seeking to fulfill sexual needs. The following stories of two 39 year old men, Hŭi-chŏl and Yŏng-su,<sup>43</sup> who are the only sons in their families, illustrate the men's logic of becoming a normal man, with which they try to validate their brokered marriages and reduce their anxieties about marrying across ethnicity/race.

### *Reinventing Chosŏn Dynasty Marriage Practice*

Hŭi-chŏl was a subcontracted automobile factory manager when I first met him in early summer 2008. Hŭi-chŏl was the only unmarried sibling in his family, living with his widowed mother in the outskirts of Happy City, an agricultural city located in Kyŏngsang Province. Except for the four years he spent working at a textile factory in the Kumi industrial complex in Northern Kyŏngsang Province after graduating from a junior college, Hŭi-chŏl has lived in the village for his whole life. During the financial crisis in 1997, the textile factory he worked in was closed, so he had a year off before he moved back to the village. He worked at another subcontracted factory until he was promoted to the manager position two years ago. In 2008 he was working as a manager of process control at a subcontracted automobile factory that produced fuel tanks.

Since his father passed away 10 years ago, Hŭi-chŏl had felt the pressure of being the head of the family, and he was looking for a spouse who would accept living together with his mother. Hŭi-chŏl had been on more than 100 arranged meetings in the past 10 years. Once he passed 35, he realized he had fewer chances to get married through domestic matchmaking. He said:

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<sup>43</sup> All the names I use are pseudonyms. Happy City is not an officially recognized city in Kyŏngsang Province. I renamed cities and hotels to protect my subjects' privacy.

I have a college degree although it is a junior college and I think my income is decent. . . . I went to so many *sŏn chari* (blind dates) when I was in my twenties and thirties, and the numbers were getting fewer and fewer as I was reaching my late thirties.

Until 2008 he never imagined the possibility of entering a *gukje kyŏrhon* (international marriage). He used to think that a brokered international marriage or marrying a *Tongnama sinbu* (Southeast Asian bride) would degrade his pride and social position. Although he believed he still had a chance to marry a Korean woman, the thought of turning 40 brought pressure upon him. He said, “I declared to my coworkers and friends that I would marry before I turn 40. I knew the chances to marry a Korean woman were getting fewer for me, so I began to consider international marriage as an option.”

In contrast to Hŭi-chŏl, his mother, Mrs. Kim, 65, a part-time custodial worker and farmer, had considered international marriage as an option for her son ever since he turned 36. In 2008, nobody arranged a matchmaking meeting for Hŭi-chŏl, so one day Mrs. Kim went alone to visit Love Agency, the biggest matchmaking company in Happy City, to consult with someone regarding Hŭi-chŏl’s marriage. Similar to the rural mother who struggles to attain a particular maternal subjectivity in globalizing South Korea by attempting to marry her disabled son to a Filipina bride (Abelmann and Kim 2005), Hŭi-chŏl’s mother imagined and planned her son’s marriage to a Vietnamese bride. On her request, Mr. Lee, 50, the owner of Love Agency, immediately visited their home. Mr. Lee flattered Hŭi-chŏl’s college degree and decent income, comparing him to common clients like farmers and lower-ranked factory workers with high-school degrees.<sup>44</sup> Mr. Lee categorized Hŭi-chŏl as an elite for whom he would prepare a special group of well-

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<sup>44</sup> Hŭi-chŏl was one of the two college graduates that Love Agency recruited in its matchmaking history.

educated Vietnamese women only for Hŭi-chŏl. But Hŭi-chŏl was so overwhelmed by Mr. Lee's coercive tactics that he told Mr. Lee he wanted more time to make a decision. Recollecting Mr. Lee's visit, Hŭi-chŏl said, "I had to think about the marriage trip. But as I thought about it for a few days, looking for an alternative to get married, I had none!" On a hot summer day in late July, Hŭi-chŏl found himself flying to Ho Chi Minh City, half worried and half excited about getting married in the next five days.

Like other single men in their late thirties, the thought of turning 40 made Hŭi-chŏl hurry to marry. According to Confucian teachings on human life, reaching the age of 40 (*bulhok* 不惑) means becoming free of vacillation and fully in charge of one's life.<sup>45</sup> The men did not explain the Confucian teachings on ageing in detail, but they believed the age of 40 was a turning point in life and that getting married before 40 was one life decision they felt obliged to make. Generally in Korea, people grow a year older on every New Year's Day, and accordingly Hŭi-chŏl declared at work that he was going to get married before the end of 2008—before he turned 40. He indeed married a Vietnamese bride in July 2008 in Vietnam, although it took eight months, rather than the usual four to six months, for the bride to join his family in Korea.<sup>46</sup>

Hŭi-chŏl's search for a bride did not go smoothly compared to other men's marriages. As soon as he unpacked his suitcase in his room at Flower Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, he was called by Mr. Lee to meet two Vietnamese women in Mr. Lee's room. Hŭi-chŏl hurriedly came to the room, and was introduced to the women. He recalled his impression of the women: "I liked both of them. They were my type, tall and slender.

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<sup>45</sup> The Confucian teaching on ageing is written in *Nonŏ* (論語).

<sup>46</sup> Two months after marriage, the groom visits the bride's village to have another interview with local officials and pass a language test to verify his marriage. Hŭi-chŏl and his wife, Tay, did not pass the test, which delayed Tay's arrival in Korea.

But I didn't feel it right to marry one of them after a twenty-minute meeting." He was not able to choose his bride after meeting over 100 women in different brokers' houses. At the end of the day, he chose one of the two women he first met. Hŭi-chŏl's wedding ceremony was scheduled for the next day, but at night the police raided the hotel where he was staying in an attempt to uncover any illegal marriage activities. His bride was sent to a room, where she stayed until 5 a.m., but she suddenly refused to get married in the morning. While she was staying in the room, she had read a local news magazine that carried a report on a Vietnamese bride's suicide in Korea.<sup>47</sup> After talking to her mother on the phone, she decided to cancel her marriage to Hŭi-chŏl.

Being discouraged and feeling guilty, Hŭi-chŏl went to different houses until he finally found Tay, 21, fresh from a rural village in Can Tho Province of the Mekong Delta. Hŭi-chŏl confessed he felt guilty because he had sexual intercourse with the first bride before marriage. He said he wanted to be responsible for the sex although he believed she was not a virgin.<sup>48</sup> Because of this incident, he was not able to have intercourse with Tay during his marriage trip. In spite of his experiences with the arranged meetings and the police raid, in addition to feeling guilty about having sexual intercourse with the first potential bride, Hŭi-chŏl stated in a defensive way:

I paid for the marriage service, not for buying a bride or sex. . . . The marriage process was so fast and the environment where the brides were living was awful. But I was attracted to Tay among one hundred women. . . . How would you describe our encounter unless you call it fate?

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<sup>47</sup> A Vietnamese woman in Kyŏngsan City jumped off the 14th floor one month after she joined her husband. According to Korean news sources, she killed herself due to depression and domestic violence, while Vietnamese papers reported that her husband killed her.

<sup>48</sup> This is his subjective view on his wife's virginity. He explained to me that he would have seen blood on bed if she lost her virginity to him. In addition, he said she did not seem to be in pain when they had sexual intercourse.

Hŭi-chŏl used the term “*Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*”<sup>49</sup> to explain the way he paid money to matchmakers who set up arranged meetings for total strangers and to make sense of the experience of meeting and marrying his bride in only one day. He described:

Many people in my parents’ generation were married through arranged matchmakings. Some people even didn’t know their spouse’s face until the first night of marriage. But few people got divorced at that time. I think Vietnam is still traditional so Vietnamese marriage custom is similar to *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*. My marriage [to Tay] was like my parents’ marriage. Tay and I barely knew each other when we were married. But we will be a *potong* (normal) married couple as time goes by.

Hŭi-chŏl’s reinvention of Chosŏn dynasty marriage practices was repeated in other men’s descriptions of the matchmaking process and how they chose their spouses within a few hours in Ho Chi Minh City. Hŭi-chŏl explained the *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon* as an old-fashioned way of getting married, arguing that it was more common in the postwar generation of his parents. Hŭi-chŏl and other men are able to culturally connect Korea with Vietnam through their reinvention of old-fashioned marriage. By imagining Vietnam as similar to pre-modern Korea, according to their sense of progress and economic development, they concluded that the practice of arranged marriage was natural for Vietnamese women. The men thus transformed their brokered marriages into the Chŏsun dynasty marriage practice in order to water down the social stigma attached to brokered international marriages and to construct sense of cultural proximity between Vietnam and Korea.

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<sup>49</sup> The Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) was founded by Taejo Yi Sŏng-kye in the result of the downfall of the Koryŏ kingdom (918-1392). The state consolidated Korean Confucian ideals and doctrines in Korean society by importing and adapting Chinese culture. Its Confucian rules have had a strong legacy shaping modern Korea cultural values. In a typical Chosŏn dynasty upper-class wedding, “formal presentations between the two households punctuated a gradual process of affinal alliance culminating in the transfer of a bride to her husband’s kin” (Kendall 1996, 180). For details, see Kendall (1996).

Reaching the age of 40 pushed Hŭi-chŏl to enter an international marriage. He transformed his brokered international marriage into an old-fashioned marriage practice, now rare in Korea but imagined to be normal in Vietnam, in response to the popular stigmatization of commodified international marriage. Hŭi-chŏl's reinvention of the marriage tradition is one of the continuing negotiations in the process of becoming a normal man through brokered cross-border marriage and interethnic family making in ethno-nationalist Korean society.

### *Giving Up on Marrying a White Bride*

Like Hŭi-chŏl, Yŏng-su, 39 years old, was an only son living with his widowed mother. Unlike Hŭi-chŏl who lived in a village, Yŏng-su lived in an industrial city in Kyŏngsang Province. Yŏng-su had been on many matchmaking meetings since he was in his mid-twenties in hope of marrying a Korean woman, before he went to Vietnam and married Lien, 24, in 2008.

Korean men's experiences of the domestic marriage market, usually practiced only among Koreans, show the transformation in gendered hypergamy that differentially disadvantages men (and women) because of their social stratification. Aside from his responsibility for his widowed mother, Yŏng-su assumed that his blue-collar job and high school diploma, had led to his failure to attract a Korean woman. He regretted not having gone to college; as the youngest child and the only son, he could have had the privilege of a college education; his three sisters were sent to work in textile factories after graduating from elementary school. Like many other young women in the 1970s and 1980s, Yŏng-su's three sisters participated in the South Korean economic miracle, built by a low-paid



but highly productive and disciplined labor force consisting largely of female factory workers, mainly in the electronic, textile, and footwear sectors. State propaganda for its nation-building efforts incorporated social values associated with women, constructing the image of these female factory workers as altruistic, selfless, and dutiful daughters (S. Kim 1997). Thus Yǒng-su's sisters were expected to provide for their widowed mother and their younger brother.

However, Yǒng-su felt guilty about his comfortable life, so when he turned 20, he joined the military which is mandatory for men in Korea. He also hoped to find a career he would want to pursue. After being discharged from the military in 1992, Yǒng-su started working for a small-sized company selling and setting up karaoke equipment when the karaoke business was flourishing. However his company did not survive the Asian financial crisis. Like many other men, Yǒng-su was laid off in 1999. Since then, he has moved around between small scale companies until he was hired to work on an automobile assembly line in December 2007.

Despite strenuous efforts by his sisters, friends, and coworkers who set up *sŏn chari* (blind dates) for him, Yǒng-su never found the right match. Realizing that his chances to find a Korean wife were shrinking, he considered meeting divorced women. Yǒng-su's experience on the domestic marriage market reflects changing marriage patterns in Korea in terms of age, divorce, matrilocality, and exogamy. The fact that divorced women rejected him might indicate that men, whether single or divorced, without social capital (an office job, a college education, and a prominent family background, for instance), are marginalized, and that divorced men may be even more marginalized than divorced women. Yǒng-su's idea of meeting divorced women

exemplifies the changing patterns in marriage: marriages between a bachelor and a divorced woman made up 6.4 percent of all new marriages in 2005 (D. Kim 2010).

Based on the cultural logic of gendered marriage mobility, Yǒng-su assumed it would be hypergamy (marrying up) for a divorced woman to marry a bachelor. According to his logic, any divorced woman would be happy to accept him. To his dismay, the two divorced women he met refused to marry him.<sup>50</sup> He was bitter about the Korean women he met at matchmaking meetings, claiming that:

Korean women are so stiff-necked even though they did not have things to offer to marriage. One of them even had a nine-year-old daughter! But they want a husband with a higher education, a white-collar job, an apartment, and no elderly parent to care for!

He was not competitive on the domestic marriage market, compared to what he described as an ideal husband candidate, although he firmly believed (as did many other men I met) that he belonged to the middle class, based on his income, education, and the possibility of inheriting his mother's government-subsidized apartment.<sup>51</sup>

Like Hŭi-chŏl, Yǒng-su felt pressured to get married as he approached 40. The rejections by the two divorced women made him consider a foreign bride. Many men expressed having been hesitant about entering a brokered international marriage and that it was not an easy decision. Hŭi-chŏl's mother was impatient for him to marry. In Yǒng-su's case, however, his sisters and mother were extremely upset when he announced he was going on a marriage trip to Vietnam in summer 2008. They initially refused to believe that their precious brother/son could be one of those poor men who could not find

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<sup>50</sup> He assumed that the divorced women did not want to marry him because of his education, job-type, and living with a widowed mother.

<sup>51</sup> His class identification is enabled by the ambiguity in class identities in postwar Korean society resulting from transgenerational and gendered social mobility. For the formation of middle class identities in postwar South Korea, see Abelman (1997).

a Korean woman and so had to resort to buying a bride from a Southeast Asian country.

Yŏng-su commented on the negative perception of international marriages between

Korean men and Asian women:

[Korean] people are very much concerned with the public gaze, I think, being a foreigner means [in Korea]—maybe it does not matter if that person comes from an affluent country, but if coming from a poor country [and if she is] *sijip onda* [married to a Korean man], generally [people have] the idea of buying a bride.

*Sijip onda* in his description of the foreigner indicates her gender and signals patrilocal marriage. According to him, the economic status of a bride's country, not her individual economic position, may make her more or less culturally acceptable in Korea. His assumptions about gendered global marriage mobility are intertwined with localized ideas of ethnicity and race, and the Korean men invert the logic of the global geography of marriage mobility when they imagine but choose not to marry a *bekin sinbu* (white bride).

In interviews and casual conversations, men occasionally discussed the possibility of marrying a white bride. At one social gathering, Jae-min, 36, a city hall employee, half-jokingly declared:

If I fail this marriage [with Min-hŭi] I am going to marry a white bride. I've heard the presence of white brides in the farming villages. People are saying, 'Hey, look! There are Kim Tae-hŭi and Chŏn Ji-hyŏn<sup>52</sup> working in our rice field!' I guess white brides must look like beautiful Korean actresses.

The men spoke of a white bride (a Russian or Uzbekistan woman) whom the men imagined finding through brokered international marriage routes. Both Hŭi-chŏl and

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<sup>52</sup> They are Korean actresses famous for their beauty. There is not much difference between Korean women and Vietnamese women in Jae-min's racialization of Uzbekistan or Russian brides. The idea of proximities operates in this form of racialization.

Yŏng-su imagined marrying a white bride, saying they felt pressure from their coworkers.

Hŭi-chŏl responded to Jae-min:

My coworkers were talking about my marriage trip to Vietnam, and they told me I should have gone to Uzbekistan or Russia to bring back a white bride. . . . If I married a white bride, if I imagine [pause] walking with her in town, I must look like a capable man.<sup>53</sup>

Yŏng-su similarly stated, “I could have gotten a white bride if I wanted.” In reality, none of these men married a woman from Russia or Uzbekistan, although they were certain that they could afford the marriage service if they wanted to. How do particular socio-historical contexts structure the men’s pride in their ability to marry a white bride in contrast to giving up that idea?

In Korea, the grafting of racial difference onto ethnic difference is a modern invention. Korea’s history of modernization, often understood as Westernization, both ideal and despicable from a Korean nationalist perspective, is inseparable from the legacy of colonialism and imperialism (S. Moon 2005). S. Cheng (2000) explains the ways in which Korean nationalism constructed Korean men’s sexual desires for a white female body. According to S. Cheng, in Korean history, the nationalist rhetoric of building the nation has been reproduced in individual erotic fantasies about and desire for a white female body. While Korean nationalist discourses use the Korean female body to epitomize the wounded nation—occupied, threatened, raped by the Western powers<sup>54</sup> (C. Choi 1998; K. Moon 1997; S. Moon 1998), S. Cheng (2000) explains Korean men’s sexual fantasies about the white female body as intertwined with the “multi-valence of the white woman” (Schein 1997) representing modernity, sophistication, and sexual

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<sup>53</sup> What he meant by “a capable man” implied his socio-economic status and sexual potency in regards to the idea of global hypergamy and sexualization of white women.

<sup>54</sup> Japan is imagined as a colonial and imperial power, but is differentiated from Western powers in terms of racialization in modern Korea.

freedom. These fantasies can thus be understood as reflecting a nationalist anti-domination desire against Western domination. If Korean men imagine marrying a white bride will make them capable men and grant them access to the multi-valence of whiteness in Korean society, why did these men give up on the possibility even though they “could have done it” if they had wanted to?

In her discussion of correspondence relationships between Asian women and U.S. men, Constable (2003) points to the gendered and racialized asymmetry in U.S.-Asian relationships as a familiar cultural logic in which women move to husbands’ countries and it is more common for men to marry down than for women. In this framework, gender and racial inversion is unimaginable or at least laughable. Thus, the gendered and raced logic in U.S.-Asian relationships structures the global imagination, as Constable (2003) argues. According to the logic of global hypergamy, Asian husbands and western wives are less imaginable from a U.S. perspective and that of many Asians, retrospectively. Thus, Korean men’s racial inversion is imaginable but not executable.

The Korean men’s discussion of a racial inversion in global marriage geography reflects the global economic logic with which they imagine gaining access to the gendered and sexualized multi-valence of whiteness embodied in a Russian or Uzbek bride by economically ordering South Korea and Russia or Uzbekistan. The Korean men replicate the cultural logic of global hypergamy, as they feel more comfortable marrying a woman from a poorer country, but the logic is complicated when the men imagine marrying a white woman from a country they understand as less economically advanced than Korea. Yŏng-su gave the following explanation for abandoning the idea of marrying a white bride in favor of a Vietnamese one:

I don't think marriage to a white bride would last long. Firstly, [her] ways of thinking are too different from our culture. In contrast, a Vietnamese bride comes from a country that has Confucian and Buddhist traditions similar to Korea. But everything [about the white woman] is different from me. Also I think [she is] more open to sexuality. I don't know if I would like it. . . . She would not be suitable for me. . . . If a [Korean] man had experience living in a foreign country for a long time, he could marry a white woman and bring her to Korea. Well, I could have married a white bride but I am not sure how I would overcome all the differences [between her and me] in marriage.

In Yŏng-su's imagination of an interracial relationship, the white woman's body is hypersexualized, both desirable and undesirable to Korean men. In his own case, this gendered and racialized hypersexuality, as well as her racial difference (coded as cultural difference), was ultimately unattractive to him.

If the white bride's sexuality and cultural difference were barriers for Yŏng-su, the physiological difference of a Vietnamese bride was a barrier to leading a normal life in Korean society. His concern about a Vietnamese bride is based on men's perceptions of public anxieties about the children of interethnic or interracial families in Korea. Men's anxiety about their children shows how responses to marriage across national and ethnic borders are historically contingent. In Korea, this contingency has been powerfully influenced by the interracial intimate relationship between Korean women and U.S. soldiers since the U.S. military occupation of the mid-1940s (Jager 2003; K. Moon 1997; S. Moon 2005; J. Yuh 2003). In her discussion of the relation of male citizenship to mandatory military service in South Korea, S. Moon (2005) argues that the children of American soldiers and Korean sex workers are deeply stigmatized and that the difference in interracial children's physical features is considered a cause to potential danger, indirectly racializing the boundary of national identity. During the interview, Korean men talked about the xenophobia their children might encounter in school.

Because of their concerns about ethnic/racial markers on their children in the future, many men wanted to find Vietnamese women who could pass as Korean.

Yöng-su, like other men, chose his Vietnamese wife based on her fair skin and Korean appearance, believing that she could pass as Korean and would not influence his child's appearance. Although the men's ideas about what they meant by "Korean looks" were somewhat vague, they all agreed that fair skin is a marker of Korean ethnicity that differentiated Koreans from Southeast Asians. Yöng-su was worried about a foreign influence on his child, saying, "I was looking for a fair-skinned Vietnamese bride because, to be honest, color, pardon me for saying color, [that person's] complexion marks a degree of foreignness [in Korea]. It will influence my child." In the end, he was satisfied with his wife, Lien, who was fair-skinned and, he believed, could pass as Korean. His concerns about the looks of his wife and child reflect the dominant ideology of national and ethnic purity. Thus to make a normal family, fair skin was an important factor in selecting a wife.

The men's expectations of their Vietnamese wives, according to their views on the cultural similarities of the Confucian and Buddhist traditions, are based on traditional gender roles more oppressively imposed on women than on men, as well as their economic order of Korea and Vietnam. Many men thought making a family with a Vietnamese woman would be workable because of the legacy of Confucian gender roles in Vietnam, roles they assume Korean women no longer follow and white women do not share. In their imagination and in their experiences with Vietnamese brides during their marriage trips, the men confirm that Vietnamese women are traditional and subservient.

Many men believed Vietnam was still patriarchal. Both Yǒng-su and Hǔi-chǒl were negotiating their identities of being the only son, responsible for their elderly widowed mothers, and they expected their Vietnamese wives to accept the roles of traditional wife and daughter-in-law. At the same time, they expected to avoid some of their own responsibilities as sons-in-law. As Yǒng-su said:

I wanted to marry a woman who would focus on my family. If I were married to a Korean woman, I would have to mind her family. . . . It would be something like give-and-take between the two families. It's like, 'I will not care [about your family] unless you will.' But, as you see, getting married to a Vietnamese woman is different. I should care about her family, but they live far apart so that it would be less intense work for me.

In Korea the patrilineal tradition has weakened, and men attributed the waning of patrilineal tradition to living in *yǒsǒng sangwi sidae* (an era of women's superiority to men). Women have gained more power in familial decisions, and the obligations of daughters-in-law have been relaxed while men's obligations to their parents-in-law have increased. Men married to Vietnamese women through commercial routes have different ways of performing a son-in-law's duties, but they feel less obligated because of the geographical distance between the families and because of his material contribution to the marriage expenses. Men considered territorial exogamy (which demands marriage outside the wife's descent, as well as residence near or with the husband's kin) as more natural for Vietnamese women, sometimes citing the old Korean saying "A married daughter is no better than a stranger"<sup>55</sup> in order to make a demand or remind their wives of the role of a daughter-in-law (H. Lee 2008).

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<sup>55</sup> Korean mothers-in-law referred to the saying. I discuss Korean mothers-in-law's attitudes towards Vietnamese daughters-in-law in Chapter 4.



While the nuclear family is the trend in modern Korea and the eldest son does not necessarily support his elderly parent(s) anymore, patrilineal and patriarchal ideas are more strongly imposed on Vietnamese brides by these Korean men and their families. Locating Vietnam as analogous to 1960s and 1970s Korea in terms of economic development and patriarchal tradition, the men imagined that Vietnamese women would naturally accept traditional roles and obligations, in addition to old-fashioned arranged marriage practices, which many men likened to *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*.

### *Modern Projects*

Korean men, like Hŭi-chŏl, tried to make sense of their marital experiences by reinventing *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*. They reinvent traditional gender ideologies and practices to legitimate Vietnamese women's traditional gender roles and Vietnam as pre-modern. Their reinvention reaffirms conservative gender politics that dictates the social and domestic spheres are re-naturalized as male and female domains. In contrast, the reinvention reflects the men's anxiety about the public's views of international marriages and *Tongnama sinbu* (Southeast Asian brides). In this section, I show the ways that Korean men transformed their arranged marriages into love marriages and modernized their wives' looks when the wives joined them in Korea. The men endeavor to actualize the normative notion of romance and modernity through altering the mind and body of Vietnamese wives.

*Converting arranged marriage into love marriage*

Many men expressed that they preferred a love marriage to an arranged one. Even though they choose commercially arranged marriages, they plan to transform their marriage into love marriage after their wives join them in Korea. They reverse the conventional stages of romance, love, and marriage; they naturalize the reversed course, by marrying first and falling in love later. Most men told me they “fell in love” with their wives in Vietnam but they did not have time to form a romantic relationship with their wives due to the commercialized marriage process. In the interviews, men expressed their plans to cultivate romance after getting married. For example, Yǒng-su envisioned his conjugal relationship with Lien as follows:

When we begin to live together in Korea, it is like we are falling in love again. Like a love marriage. I can't wait to be romantic for my wife! [I want to] be romantic with my wife like any other lovers. . . . I will make my wife enjoy sexual intimacy! It is like I am opening a new world for her.

Similarly, Yǒn-hu, 40, a farmer and construction worker, planned to make his wife, Cam, 20, into a “girlfriend-like-wife.”

Yǒn-hu, a high school graduate, was living with his parents in a village in northern Kyǒngsang. He worked as a welder in town during construction seasons and occasionally helped his parents on their parsley farm. Many men I interviewed borrowed money from relatives or a bank to marry a Vietnamese woman. Yǒn-hu's parents were well-off enough to pay for Yǒn-hu's marriage trip. He was not interested in marriage, but his parents had begun pushing him to get married after his older brother was killed in a car accident three years earlier. Yǒn-hu still wanted to remain single. His rural residency, limited education, and blue-collar job might not have attracted a marriageable Korean woman. Nevertheless, he was confident, tall, well-built and had wealthy parents.

When asked about his education and job, Yŏn-hu explained, “I chose not to go to a university. What’s a college degree useful for? I am glad I chose to learn welding skills. I make enough money to enjoy my life.” However, he did aspire to an urban lifestyle, as urban styles and values are thought to be more liberal (H. Chung and J. Yoo 2013). During the construction season, when he lived in town, he met women and was popular among *dabang agassi* (tea-house hostesses).<sup>56</sup> Before he married Cam in December 2007, Yŏn-hu was dating a divorced hostess who was living with her teenage daughter. Yŏn-hu ended the relationship because of the social stigma attached to being a hostess and divorced and because of his parents’ forceful disapproval. Upon turning 40 and under pressure from his parents and married sisters, he decided to join a marriage trip to Vietnam.

In Vietnam, Yŏn-hu had a difficult time finding a “girlfriend-like wife.” He met two brides pre-selected by brokers based on his preferences, but he did not like either of them, saying “They are tall but look too country for me.” After seeing more than 100 women, he finally chose a bride, but she rejected him because he was living in a rural area. He had never imagined that a Vietnamese woman would reject him. In desperation he married Cam, one of the two pre-selected brides he had met at the start of the trip. He thought Cam had potential to become a girl-friend-like wife. Although living in a rural town, Yŏn-hu practiced what he considered an urban lifestyle: being trendy, like surfing the Internet, participating in an Internet club, and virtual dating, as he described. He was not looking for a traditional wife even though his parents expected a traditional daughter-in-law. During the marriage trip, he shared his expectations of Cam, “I prefer an affable

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<sup>56</sup> Tea houses are proliferating in rural towns where few young women live. Tea house hostesses deliver tea/coffee to customers and occasionally sell sex.

wife to an obedient one.<sup>57</sup> Now I don't know if Cam is affable or not because we can't communicate properly. . . . I hope she likes going on a date.” He expressed that he would make her a girlfriend first and then a wife once she joined him in Korea.

Yŏn-hu was not successful in making Cam into the urban-style girlfriend he dreamed of, however. When I met them in Korea in June 2008, Yŏn-hu told me that Cam was not interested in the urban life. Yŏn-hu complained:

I bought her nice clothes and cosmetics, but she never wears them. . . . She doesn't wear socks. She always wears flip-flops, like an old country woman. Look! How rough her feet are. She doesn't know why women need to take care of their feet. [Showing her hands to me] Look at her hands! They are so chapped, but she doesn't put lotion on them.

At home, Cam preferred working on the farm with his parents to staying home alone which she found boring. Cam chose to help his parents as she used to work on rice paddies in Vietnam. Yŏn-hu did not want her to work on the farm in Korea; he was heartbroken when he first saw Cam's hands covered with scars from using a scythe. Yŏn-hu's modern project to change Cam's looks and attitudes failed; it became harder because Cam became pregnant right after she joined his family. However, Cam's characteristics, such as being traditional, obedient and not materialistic, made her parents-in-law content with their decision to have sent Yŏn-hu off to Vietnam.

### *Transforming a Vietnamese bride into a trendy woman*

The men, who were in their early or mid-thirties and lived in cities, were more eager to change their wives' appearances than older men living in rural areas were. They

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<sup>57</sup> He originally used a Korean proverb, “a wife [girlfriend] like a fox or a bear.” It refers to a man's preference for his wife's personality. The impersonated characteristics of a fox are contrasted with those of a bear: being outgoing, friendly, and affable vs. inward, brusque, and obedient.

were more sensitive to criticisms of international marriages and *Tongnama sinbu* (Southeast Asian brides). Consequently, they made efforts to reduce or erase undefined ethnic differences in Vietnamese wives and tried to transform their wives into modern and trendy women to pass as Korean or the couples could pass without being stared at. One common practice is to change their wives' names into Korean ones even before the wives' arrival in Korea. The men changed the syllables to make them sound like Korean names or replaced the Vietnamese names with those of Korean actresses they admired. Some men also had their wives change their hairstyle. For instance, Jong-tae (35, a factory worker) and Jae-min (36, a city hall employee) took their wives to a hair salon for new hairstyles the day after they arrived in Korea. Jae-min commented:

I don't know why Vietnamese brides want to keep their hair long. [Because of their long hair] people can tell they are Vietnamese brides right away! I even feel scared when I see Min-hŭi at night. She looks like a ghost from the old times to me.

The men, like Jae-min and Jong-tae, viewed long, black, straight hair of their wives as a sign of being pre-modern and under-polished. Jong-tae asked the hair stylist to make his 24-year-old wife So-ra's hair wavy; Jae-min requested that his 21-year-old wife Min-hŭi's hair be cut and shaped into a bobbed style like that of an actress in a popular TV drama.<sup>58</sup> The men associated their wives' new hairstyles with being modern, urban, western, and sexy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The "Song Hye-gyo style" was named after an actress, Song Hye-gyo, who starred in the KBS drama, *The Place Where They Live* (2008).

<sup>59</sup> Jong-tae and Jamin openly commented on Dau's body and fashion. Dau was working at the marriage agency. They often asked Dau to help them shop clothes for their wives. The men's project of making their wives sexy was more or less private. For example, Jae-min took his wife to Itaewon (a popular area for tourists and US military personnel) in Seoul to get a tattoo of a black rose on her lower belly which he considered sexy.

Jong-tae and Jae-min were proactive about their wives' adjustment in Korea. Unlike most of the men I met, they started learning Vietnamese when they decided to go to Vietnam. Both of them believed they could have married a Korean woman if they wanted because of their looks, income, and age. The only shortcoming was their education; they were graduates from technical high schools. Jong-tae had not been pressured at all by his family to choose an international marriage. He reiterated that he had made the decision to marry a Vietnamese woman after visiting different marriage agencies. In 2007, he had an accident at work—his finger was cut off. The accident became a catalyst for him to execute his marriage plan. Instead of choosing a young Vietnamese bride, he chose a mature one from a good family. He was introduced to So-ra who was older than the average Vietnamese bride. Although her uncle was a physician and her aunt was a high school teacher, So-ra's parents were farmers. Like the Japanese men in Suzuki's study (2005) who dream of retiring in the Philippines, Jong-tae imagined moving to Vietnam after retirement to start a business with his wife. "I want So-ra to keep her Vietnamese citizenship to purchase property in Vietnam. One day, I will buy a building in her hometown and start a business. So-ra agreed to my plan." Jong-tae found new possibilities by positioning himself in the interconnected social fields of Vietnam and South Korea. While ascertaining "transnational business masculinity" (Connell and Wood 2005), Jong-tae planned a modern project to transform So-ra into a Korean woman by having her attain Korean language proficiency and adopting a modern and trendy appearance. I noted that Jong-tae and Jae-min regularly took their wives to hair salons and clothing shops to catch up with what was in trend, which made other brides at the agency jealous of So-ra and Min-hŭi.

Compared to Jong-tae, Jae-min was more sensitive to what people thought about him and Min-hŭi:

We went to a restaurant yesterday. I felt people were staring at us and talking about us. I felt so embarrassed. I didn't say any word while eating because I was afraid that they would hear Min-hŭi's broken Korean. We left the restaurant as soon as we finished dinner. . . . I know people look at us whenever we go to H supermarket. Maybe I should change Min-hŭi's outfits.

One might ask why Jae-min decided on an international marriage if he was sensitive about looking different. His decision for an international marriage was partially because he was the youngest of seven siblings in his family, and had been taking care of his mother, who had Alzheimer's. He was upset with his eldest brother and his wife who were not properly taking care of his mother, and concluded that Korean women were too selfish to take care of elderly parents. Just before he went to Vietnam, he had had to put his mother in a hospice. He did not plan to bring his mother home after marriage, but he wanted a bride who would not be selfish like his sisters-in-law was.

Jae-min's ideas about Vietnamese women were contradictory, however. He was concerned about being stared at in public because of his Vietnamese wife. At the same time, he expressed his preference for innocent Vietnamese women. In some ways, he reproduced the stereotypical idea that all young Vietnamese women were innocent, which he concluded after meeting more than 100 innocent-looking women during his marriage trip to Vietnam. In an interview, he said, "I wish I could bring all of them to Korea" not because he wanted to have them all, but because "I wanted to bring them all to Korea. So I can introduce them to my friends." He added, "I can't forget those innocent eyes asking me to choose them!"<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jae-min's idea of saving an innocent Vietnamese woman replicates the imperialist notion of the third world woman.

For Jae-min, however, a Vietnamese woman's body was an empty vessel that he could fill with his notion of being Korean. J. Kim (2011) argues that the material conditions of South Korean society have privileged the cultural products of powerful nations, while they have implicitly and explicitly dismissed those of countries less powerful than Korea. By locating South Korea and Vietnam in the regional economic order, Jamin views that South Korea has achieved modernity in comparison to Vietnam. Jae-min's views on Vietnamese women's innocence complicate the cultural identities that Vietnamese women embody. Vietnam signifies a gendered cultural identity against which he constructs his masculine subjectivity by consolidating himself as the head of the family. It also signifies a gendered ethnic identity that Jae-min has to change Min-hee into a trendy modern girl. Upgrading Min-hee's tastes denotes his aspiration to be normal, part of the faceless majority.

Men's modern projects do not last long, as Yŏn-hu's case shows. Most Vietnamese women become pregnant within six months of their arrival in Korea. This is partially because of the marriage agency's monitoring of the women's reproductive health. It is partially because many men who get married late want children, even though they are concerned with their children's appearance. In addition, most couples do not use any contraceptives. For instance, Jong-tae and Jae-min declared that they were not going to have any children. Jae-min was even considering vasectomy. However, they informed me of their wives' pregnancies within four months of coming to Korea.

The Korean husbands may feel empowered by modernizing Vietnamese women and expecting the women to comply. Some Vietnamese women conform to their Korean husbands' expectations and traditional gender roles, particularly early in the marriage.



Conflicts arise when Vietnamese women challenge the husbands' expectations and authority. In extreme cases, a couple chooses divorce over reconciliation.

### *A Story of Failed Marriage*

Out of the 14 men I met, three of them were divorced during my fieldwork. Among the couples I met during my field work, Yu-han, 41, a marriage agency clerk and Xeong, 20, were divorced. Xeong, an extrovert, came to Korea to join Yu-han's family in winter 2008.<sup>61</sup> They had been among the most optimistic couples about their marriage. As soon as Xeong came to Korea, she began to work as a shopkeeper in the grocery store that Love Agency owned. Yu-han was living with his 13-year-old daughter from his previous marriage. The daughter warmly welcomed Xeong.

In the beginning, Xeong was eager to adapt to her new life in Korea. She always carried a Vietnamese-Korean dictionary to learn Korean quickly. At a social gathering, she shared her dreams for life in Korea. Looking up words in the dictionary diligently, she said to me in broken Korean, "Xeong wants to be interpreter. [I will] study hard. Make money a lot. Happy." She was one of the most ambitious brides I met, but she gradually lost her interest in pursuing dreams. She was frustrated with Yu-han both at home and work. According to her, he was too demanding, but she was not going to give in. Instead, she defied his authority. Yu-han, frustrated, described Xeong's behavior at home, "She acts like a green frog nowadays. Whatever I say, she does exactly the

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<sup>61</sup> In the interview, Xeong shared with me about her motivations for Han-Viet marriage. Similiar to the other Vietnamese women's motivations, her motivations were complex, not being reducible to only one reason, such as the economic. She had a strong belief in herself that she could do anything she wanted.

opposite.” He was referring to a children’s fable about a green frog,<sup>62</sup> a little devil that does everything that its mother tells not to do. He added, “I feel like I am raising two daughters.”

Yu-han wanted Xeong to respect him as the head of a harmonious family. In contrast, according to Xeong, Yu-han was the problem. She disapproved of Yu-han’s attitude at home. Xeong said, “Everything I say and I do was not right for him.” For example, one day while quarrelling with him over chores, Xeong, out of anger, talked back to him in Vietnamese. She was not able to find the Korean words to express her frustration with him. Instead of understanding her frustration, he accused her of not making enough effort to learn Korean.

Two events ended their marriage: remittance and domestic violence. As the Chinese New Year was approaching, Xeong expected Yu-han to send a large amount of money to her parents. Xeong was upset with the amount (US\$100) that Yu-han was planning to send because her parents would lose face when the village people compared their Korean sons-in-law. During the argument over the remittance, Yu-han hit her. Yu-han, regretting his second marriage, expressed his frustration, “She nowadays provokes me a lot. She looks in the dictionary, finding bad words. She called me ‘idiot’ once. . . . About the remittance, a good wife would say, ‘Ah, honey, thank you for sending money to my parents.’ Right?” His idea of a love marriage with Xeong turned into the idea that Xeong was an opportunist who used an international marriage as an economic strategy

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<sup>62</sup> An immature and rebellious frog does everything in the opposite way that its mother tells. The mother assumes the son would do the opposite way when she dies, so that she tells him to have a grave on the river, instead of land. After her death, the son regrets about not listening to its mother. For the first time, he follows her wish so that he decides to make her grave on the river. Every time it rains, the son cries so hard because her grave is floating away.

(Bélanger, H. Lee, and Wang 2010). He continued, “Xeong said, ‘Why you send so little money?’ I am wondering if she only cares about money.”

The dictionary Xeong carried became a way for her to talk back Yu-han. Xeong’s resistance, such as defying his authority, doing the opposite, and manipulating language, challenged him. In the process, she might have intermittently empowered herself, but in the end her resistance did not provide her grounds for negotiation. After being struck, her resistance became stronger. Xeong quit the job at the agency when she found out she was not going to get paid for the first three months. In a private conversation, Xeong complained, “Bosses [are] bad. My husband [is] bad. Like this [with punching in her face] [he] hit me. Xeong was hurt. Xeong cried hard. [I] worked hard. No money. Not right. Xeong [is] sad.” At the marriage agency, the brokers sided with Yu-han, viewing his striking her as a necessary action to discipline a spoiled and ungrateful wife who did not appreciate her husband.

Xeong and Yu-han tried to reconcile. Yu-han decided to be a matchmaker and expected to make good money. They were optimistic about the job because for their customers they could be an example of a successful Han-Viet marriage. One day at the agency, I ran into Xeong, who, dressed in a business suit, was ready to go and meet Yu-han’s single friends in Peace City. With a smile, she said, “Unni (big sister), we will make money. [With gesture] Much. Xeong is happy.” They recruited one friend of his, and Yu-han’s commission was almost his four-month salary as an office clerk. Their efforts to recruit his friends ended within a month, however. Recruiting was not as easy as they expected. Xeong began to work as a helper in a restaurant. She worked 12 hours a day, but she said she was very satisfied with her job. Soon after taking the job in the

restaurant, Xeong became pregnant. One night she found her monthly wage had been transferred to Yu-han's bank account. He explained to her that he assumed she did not know how to save money or she would waste it. In response, she demanded a divorce. Yu-han thought she was bluffing and she would stay in marriage because of her pregnancy. Within a week, Xeong went to a clinic to get an abortion without him, an act that ended their marriage.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined a conceptual gap associated with brokered cross-border marriages—the gap between the competing social discourses on deficient/hypersexual manhood and Korean men's subjective motivations and views about those marriages. I examined the discursive construction of the deficient and hypersexual manhood, tracing the media representations of rural bachelors and blue-collar workers who entered brokered cross-border marriages. The rural bachelors' deficient manhood through international marriages was replaced by hypersexual manhood as international marriages became commercialized. Although critical studies on cross-border marriages have problematized stereotypes of women as victims, the general view of the men as hyper-sexual has not been rigorously challenged, and I have tried to present more nuanced accounts of the men involved with these marriages. In South Korean contexts, men have numerous reasons to enter brokered cross-border marriages. Among them are the cultural pressure to get married associated with being granted full-fledged manhood, which mobilized those men to find alternative ways to get

married. At the same time, they struggle with the public stigmatization of brokered marriage and interracial children.

The stories in this chapter suggest contradicting ideas in the men's desire to become normal men when they decide to enter brokered marriage to Vietnamese women. They show how the regional processes intersect commercialization of marriages between Korea and Vietnam, Korean men's decisions to enter those marriages, and racialization in South Korea. The sketch of Hŭi-chŏl, a village resident, who reinvented *Chosŏn sidae sik kyŏrhon*, reflects the ways that the men make sense of their involvement with brokered marriages and culturally connect Korea with Vietnam. The story of an urban resident, Yŏng-su, shows the ways in which men imagine a gendered and racialized inversion in the logic of global hypergamy but also ultimately feel comfortable following the logic, which may restore patriarchal privileges at home. The stories of Yŏn-hu, Jong-tae, and Jae-min show that while the men attempt to challenge conventional notions of intimacy, romance, love, and marriage, they desire the normative romantic intimacy that they had not experienced in their marriage process in Vietnam. In their modern projects, the men try to attain the love marriage that they dreamed of. Simultaneously these men consider ways of reducing their Vietnamese wives' physical differences from typical Korean looks in order to lessen their own anxieties about public views on brokered marriage and interethnic children. After their marriage trip in Vietnam, many men described fantasies about their newlywed life while waiting for the wives to apply for a visa to come to Korea. When the couple begins their married life in Korea, not every man attains this fantasy or achieves the patriarchal prerogatives he is assumed to have in

marrying down to a submissive Vietnamese woman. In some cases, Korean men fail to become normal men as Yu-han's story shows.

This chapter has showed the construction of masculine subjectivities and identities across transnational topographies of marriage and family. Men's views on international marriages and foreign spouses signify the ethnocentric national identity in South Korea is stretching. However, they still desire normalcy in their intimate relationships, as their imagination of cultural proximity between Korea and Vietnam indicates.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Patriarchal Bargain: Vietnamese Daughters-in-Law in the Transnational Family Making in South Korea<sup>63</sup>**

For the past two decades, cross-border marriage has been widespread in economically advanced Asian countries. In Japan, the number of foreign brides coming from Southeast Asian countries in the 1990s was five times that of the 1980s (Wang and Chang 2002). In 2000, one in 22 of all marriages involved a non-Japanese spouse. Similarly, between 1997 and 2007, more than 300,000 women from Southeast Asia and Mainland China migrated to Taiwan (Sheu 2007). In South Korea, 160,000 foreign women married Korean men between 1990 and 2005 (H. Lee 2008).

Some scholars of migration within Asia have studied foreign wives' settlement in the host countries, highlighting women's agency. For example, Japanese scholars emphasize Filipina brides' daily practices of resistance, negotiation, and change when they settle into Japanese society. Nakamatsu (2003) shows the ways that Asian wives of Japanese nationals are able to control the household economy by negotiating traditional gender roles. Suzuki (2003) argues that we should interpret even Filipina women's deviations from marriage, such as starting a business after running away, as their attempts to re-define their identities and re-assign new meanings to their lives.

Recent ethnographic studies on marriage migrant women's settlement in host societies have framed gendered agency in more relational terms (Faier 2009; Newendorp

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<sup>63</sup> The Vietnamese woman's transnational family making is twofold: in her natal family and in her patrilocal household. This chapter focuses on family-making in South Korea. A patrilocal household is one in which a young married couple lives in the home of the husband's parents.

2008). Newendorp (2008) discusses mainland Chinese immigrant wives' struggles when they join their husbands in Hong Kong and undergo localized processes of membership. Mainland Chinese women's negotiation for localized meanings of inclusion and exclusion encompasses their relations with people in different spaces, for instance, within their home and local communities. On the other hand, focusing on the in-between space of transnational encounters, Faier (2009) writes about the cultural encounters where Filipina migrant women and rural Japanese residents shape new meanings of culture and identity. Faier's ethnography of cultural encounters suggests a methodology that moves away from the dichotomous focus in the studies on globalization; moving from those studies that juxtapose politico- economic realms and human agency, and paying greater attention to the interstitial spaces.

Similarly, this chapter takes a relational approach to understanding the formation of transnational family through gendered cross-border marriage migration and localized meanings of membership that Vietnamese marriage migrant women negotiate in the patrilineal family. There has been a pattern in the studies on individual migrant brides' assimilation within the nuclear family. However, Vietnamese marriage migrant women settle in rural areas of South Korea where two- or three-generation families are common. Therefore, to capture a different pattern of transnational family formation and gender relations in the rural setting, this chapter examines the micro-negotiations between Vietnamese wives and their Korean in-laws in two- or three- generation families. In the household, the relationship between a Vietnamese daughter-in-law and her Korean mother-in-law is often hostile or hierarchical. In the joint households that I observed, a Korean mother-in-law has secured her authoritative status, whereas her Vietnamese-



daughter-in-law, as a newcomer, must accept the new household rules and gender assignments imposed by her Korean in-laws. I argue that the mother's gendering and ethnicizing practice of membership for her Vietnamese daughter-in-law re-constitutes local patriarchy. The Vietnamese woman's patriarchal bargain in the patrilocal residence reveals the local gender ideology re-constituted by the cross-border marriage phenomenon.

Negotiating and establishing her position in the patriarchal family is important for Vietnamese women to gain access to various resources and fulfill her filial duty in the natal family. In the negotiation, Vietnamese women can act collectively to resist authoritative figures at home. As many Vietnamese brides express their willingness to help their families in Vietnam, Korean family members partially acknowledge the woman's practical motivation through arranged marriage according to the capitalistic logic in global hypergamy. Concomitantly, they criticize her motivation when she utilizes marriage mobility beyond the patriarchal and familial order. Bélanger, H. Lee, and Wang (2010) examine national statistical surveys on immigrant spouses in Taiwan and South Korea, arguing that the questions in the surveys locate the immigrant spouses in a patriarchal and familial order, and reinforce ideologies of ethnic homogeneity, patriarchal family, and othering foreigners. This is not limited to the state governance of new immigrant women. Private institutions, such as family, are the sites that reproduce socially and culturally constructed gender and ethnicity, as Yeoh, Huang, and Lam (2005) emphasize the realm of family and household as an important site for understanding the globalization process in Asia. The formation of a transnational family reconstitutes the local patriarchal ideology. Juggling the construction of flexible

transnational families with the re-making of patriarchal families, Vietnamese women develop and deploy a variety of strategies and tactics. These strategies and tactics sometimes come as a collective action.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the changing gender dynamics in rural Korean families into which Vietnamese women settle. In the second section, I review Korean mothers' narratives about the rules of patriarchal families, which reinforce a Vietnamese bride's role as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Then, I analyze the everyday practices that Vietnamese women negotiate with their Korean mothers-in-law. Finally, I tell a story of failed negotiation.

### **Shaping Transnational and Patriarchal Family in Rural Korea**

In comparison to other national groups of marriage migrant women in South Korea, there is a tendency for Vietnamese women to marry Korean men who live in rural areas and two- or three-generation households (S. Kim and Y. Shin 2008; Seol, H. Kim, and G. Han 2005). According to Korean National Statistical Office (2009), 68 percent out of all international marriages involved men in the rural farming sector who married Vietnamese women. Like Seol et al.'s national survey (2005) on foreign brides living in South Korea, my data supports the common pattern that many Vietnamese women enter inter-generational households in rural areas and small towns.

S. Kim and Y. Shin (2008) attribute most of the difficulties that marriage migrant women confront during assimilation to the rural family structure, whose members are more culturally traditional and politically conservative than those of urban areas. I partially agree with their assumptions about rural family structures and characteristics,

but my observation of rural households where Vietnamese women settle suggests the rural family is not unchanging. Transnational forces, such as international marriage migration in the region, have localized the meanings of familial membership along the lines of gender, generation, and ethnicity.

*Cyclical Nature of Women's Power in the Patriarchal Family*

In the era of globalization, the demand for a new way of understanding private aspects of life, such as family, gender role, sexuality, and individual identity, is transforming the ideas and structures of the patrilineal household. It challenges the traditional patriarchal familial order, and generates new types of families formed by transnational personal networks. The gender arrangements in the traditional Korean family are characteristic of patrilineal society with men as the head of the family, and have been transformed through rapid socio-economic and political changes since 1960s. However, popular ideas about international marriage migration in Asia since the late 1990s, with a common structural pattern in which women move from a poorer country to a wealthier one, seem to revive the traditional gender arrangements tailored to Vietnamese brides. In order to reconstruct the traditional family, Korean mothers work at the forefront, projecting traditional gender roles onto Vietnamese women by re-mobilizing the rules of the patriarchal family.

Kandiyoti's discussion of the women's life cycle in classic patriarchy can explain the ways that Korean mothers subject their Vietnamese daughters-in-law to the rules of the patriarchal family. Kandiyoti (1988) explains the cyclical nature of women's access

to power and authority in the patrilineal family that continues through the exploitation of women's labor and reproductive labor. Kandiyoti writes:

women's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourage a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. However, women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. (280)

According to Kandiyoti's discussion about the dynamic between older women and younger women in the patrilineal family, a young bride would try to circumvent and possibly evade the control and authority of her mother-in-law who has achieved old age security. However, material conditions such as the new market forces and political reforms have changed the gender and generation hierarchy which led to the crisis in the classic patriarchal family (Stacey 1983; Kandiyoti 1988). With industrialization and political transformation, the older generations of women were caught in between tradition and modernity, when the decline of classic patriarchy liberated younger men from their obligations to their parents and younger women from the cyclical patriarchal-power reinforced by their gender (Kandiyoti 1988). For the older generation of women, the erosion of classic patriarchy may be a personal misfortune because the women lose opportunities, without having any empowering alternatives, to exercise the patriarchal power that they have paid the heavy price for an earlier patriarchal bargain.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kandiyoti (1988) quotes M. Wolf's discussion about the statistics on older Chinese women's suicide since 1930. M. Wolf (1975) argues that the statistics are related to the transformation in

According to Kandiyoti's theory of transformations in classic patriarchy, older Korean women, having no material base, are stuck in the in-between generation. In contrast, a Korean mother-in-law draws benefits from her patriarchal bargain by controlling her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. Based on her conceptualization of the bride's origins as poor, rural and traditional, the mother naturalizes the bride's submission to the rules of the patrilineal household and forces her to earn membership in the family. She expects the bride's submission based on her views of the unequal material exchange between her family and the bride's. As one mother-in-law stated, "My [Vietnamese] daughter-in-law came to Korea with no home furnishings, but, only her body." A Korean widow who controls her son's material base may undermine the normative order of the patriarchal family by grasping economic power; yet, she expects her son to be the center of his family because of concerns about her son who is at the margin of the society. She negotiates her household-authority and his family-authority by requiring the Vietnamese bride to fulfill the obligations and responsibilities of a daughter-in-law as defined by the patriarchal family ideology.

A Korean mother-in-law sets boundaries for her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's social membership and mobility within family. Tang and Wang (2011) describe Asian patriarchy in which the mother-in-law retains the main power in the family while the foreign daughter-in-law has to serve her husband and his family. Conflicts arise when the daughter-in-law subverts the mother-in-law's authority, or refuses to live up to the family's expectations. In response, the mother resorts to scolding, threatening, and excluding the daughter-in-law. One of the harshest punishments is the family's threat to

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the patriarchal family that emancipated the sons from familial control but robbed the older women of their power and respectability as mothers-in-law.

send the bride back to Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> Many Korean mothers and family members want the bride to stay home, perform domestic chores, and raise children. The bride may pay a price when she transgresses these boundaries.

Korean feminists argue that mobile global capital is operating within an immobile patriarchy to extend and reproduce the gender inequality in Korean society which has become more distinctive since the Asian financial crisis (U. Cho 2004; Song 2006). The immobile patriarchy disguises gender inequality as familial harmony, as its cultural belief of the male domestic and family authority persists. The immobile patriarchy was protected by the family head system law until it was abolished in March 2005.<sup>66</sup> The discourses of the family breakdown post IMF and after abolition of the family head law reflect how a patriarchal order is stubborn (Cho 2004), which underlie Korean mothers' execution of patriarchal rules for their Vietnamese daughters-in-law. If the male breadwinner ideology and patrilineal family system justify and institutionalize Korean women as second citizens, the revival of the classic patriarchy, reinforced by Korean mothers-in-law at home, institutionalizes a foreign bride as a third-class or partial citizen (M. Kim 2008). The bride's membership, based on her cultural and reproductive roles, as wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and care giver, is conditionally granted, and her performance is continuously evaluated by the arbiters of her patrilocal household. As Cheng (2011) points out, domesticity and reproduction are conditions of a marriage migrant woman's membership, reinforcing an exclusive citizenship regime that punishes and disciplines women who fail to conform.

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<sup>65</sup> Some Vietnamese women turned this threat against the husband's family by threatening to divorce their husbands. Their reversion did not necessarily solve the family conflict.

<sup>66</sup> U. Cho (2004) argues that the family head system law had institutionalized men's dominance over women in terms of maintaining patrilocal marriage, the patriarchal family, patrilineage in kinship, and the inheritance of property.

*The Dynamics of Gender and Generation in the Rural Family*

Scholars agree that Confucianism has shaped the Korean family. The central relationship in the Confucian family is that between parent and child, particularly between father and son, and the relationships between family members are hierarchical. Vertical filial piety in relationships can be characterized by “benevolence, authority, and obedience” (I. Park and L. Cho 1995, 124). Korean tradition has supported the cultural norm that the eldest son is the linchpin between generations, required to live with and support his elderly parents (Hong and Byun 1998). With the industrialization of Korean society since the 1960s, as I. Park and L. Cho (1995) argue:

the value of children - especially sons - as a means of continuing the family has declined substantially among rural Koreans. . . . In 1990, some 41.7 percent of the national survey respondents reported that they did not need children to succeed them or that daughters could provide the necessary succession (126).

Nonetheless, Korean scholars argue that the legacy of the traditional family has remained strong, especially in rural areas (S. Kim and Y. Shin 2008).

The changing views on son preference have not brought the decline of intergenerational relationships, nor does it signal the advent of gender equality in the family and society. Although intergenerational relationships have been transformed by rural-urban migration of the young and the decline of patrilocal tradition, the emotional and economic bonds between parents and children have been modified rather than being erased (Hong and Byun 1998). In addition, the changes in family size, from three- and four-generation households to one- or two-generation households, in both rural and urban areas, has not improved the social and political status of women, nor did it stymie the idea of male superiority persisting in the family and the society (I. Park and L. Cho

1995).<sup>67</sup> This indicates that Korean families still display strong patriarchal characteristics despite rapid economic, political, demographic, and social changes.<sup>68</sup>

According to my observation of the rural households that Vietnamese marriage migrant women joined, there was a similar pattern in terms of parent-child bonds and gendered division of domestic labor. The joint households that I observed usually consisted of two or three generations. The sons who lived with their parents were not necessarily the eldest. Mothers—especially if widowed—had strong influence on family decision-making and the assimilation of Vietnamese daughters-in-law. The patrilineal family structure seems to have survived, but material aspects in the family have changed the inner gender dynamics between generations. Most working-class Korean men who chose international marriages have been mostly limited to farmers and blue-collar workers. Similarly in my study, the men who married Vietnamese women were in their late thirties or forties were farmers and blue-collar workers.<sup>69</sup> Some men had not taken advantage of opportunities to migrate to metropolitan cities, and others had returned to their villages during the Asian financial crisis and moved back in with their parents. The men's age, educational attainment, job-type, and residential type weakened their competitive edge in the domestic marriage market.

Under these family dynamics, a mother had a great influence on her son's decision to embark on an international marriage. According to the pattern in my data, a

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<sup>67</sup> I. Park and L. Cho (1995) address the ratio of female to male wages fell from 46.5 percent in 1970 to 44.4 percent in 1980 and women are the major source (75.8 percent) of unpaid family work on farms and city factories as of 1988.

<sup>68</sup> The findings of I. Park and L. Cho (1995) and Hong and Byun (1998) are not irrelevant to the gender gap in Korean society. South Korea has one of the highest levels of gender inequality in the world, rated 111 worst out of 135 countries by the World Economic Forum. For example, from 2003 to 2013, the wage gap between men and women was the highest among OECD countries.

<sup>69</sup> For the age and occupation types of Korean husbands in my study, see Appendix 2.



second or youngest son was living in his parents' house, was economically unstable, commuting to work at sub-contracted factories or small companies near their villages, and helping parents during the farming season.<sup>70</sup> Korean mothers were supportive of their sons who were living with them. For example, Mrs. Ko, 73, a widow, felt sorry for her youngest son, who had not moved to a metropolitan area and married as his three brothers had.

Mrs. Ko imagined and actualized her maternal citizenship in order for her son to achieve socially and culturally defined manhood: the head of his family through international marriage. She said, "My son has the right to live a normal life, like making his own family. As a parent, I paid for his marriage trip to Vietnam." This normal family life she paid for made her financial responsibilities heavier. Mrs. Ko expressed ambivalence about her son's family, however. She said, "I wish my son's family lived separately. Sometimes, I feel that my age is a burden to me. But who's going to help him when he is not able to support his family?"

Like the outskirts of Happy City, Mrs. Ko's village was industrializing with the establishment of subcontract factories that supplied automobile parts to an adjacent industrial city. After her husband died, Mrs. Ko quit farming and started renting out part of her property to a factory; this was her main source of income. Her son worked at a nearby factory and contributed to the household income. Still, she was the main breadwinner in her three-generational family. Under this generational and economic dynamic in a joint family, it was the mother who had the most influence on her

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<sup>70</sup> There are exceptions to this pattern. For example, Hŭi-chŏl in Chapter 3, was the eldest son living with his widowed mother. They lived in a farming area, and his mother was commuting to work as a janitor in a public health center in Happy City. He had a junior college degree, and worked as a manager for an auto parts factory.

dependents, including her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. Rationalizing that her son and Vietnamese daughter-in-law owed her for the expense of marriage and keeping them in her house, Mrs. Ko was able to remind both her son and Vietnamese daughter-in-law of “the sponsorship debt” (Côté, Kérisit, and Côté 2001).<sup>71</sup>

In the following section, I examine the ways that a Korean mother-in-law redefines familial membership for her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. In the rural households that I observed, Korean mothers greatly interfered in Vietnamese women’s settlement, and this interference depended on the mothers’ authority in the family. The formation of transnational family by international marriage migration reconfigured a familial order in which the Korean mother was entitled to assert her authority over a new family member. In the uneven, gendered cross-cultural dynamics of family, a Korean mother saw her Vietnamese daughter-in-law’s membership only through the gender roles assigned by the patriarchal family, which she herself had bargained with during her lifetime.<sup>72</sup>

My focus on the power dynamics between women in the patrilocal household is not intended to replicate the popular idea of *kobu kaltŭng* (a family conflict between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law). That concept reinforces sexist ideas about women as narrow-minded, jealous or socially inadaptatable, whereas it dismisses the economic and psychological conditions in patriarchal and patrilineal family structure that pressure women to compete for status and power. Rather, my objective is to reveal the material and ideological conditions shaped by cross-cultural patrilocal families in which a Korean

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<sup>71</sup> Marriage brokers similarly remind Vietnamese women of the sponsorship debt (see Chapter 6).

<sup>72</sup> Johnson (1983) calls this, female conservatism, in her study of Chinese women.

mother is entitled to reinforce patriarchal and patrilocal rules, which she has internalized, and now imposes upon her Vietnamese daughter-in-law.

### **Rules in the Transnational Patrilineal Family**

With limited access to resources and network during the early settlement process in Korea, Vietnamese women may have to perform the traditional gender roles that her in-laws expect. However, her active and passive conformity to the rules of her husband's family should be understood as strategic and tactical, like their active and passive resistance to the rules, to maximize their access to various resources as they settle in. According to Kandiyoti (1988)'s discussion of classic patriarchy, women play the rules of the game and use different strategies to maximize their security and life options with changing potential for active or passive resistance under patriarchal oppression.

In their patrilineal household, Vietnamese women play by the patriarchal rules reinforced by their Korean mothers-in-law (and family members) and resort to different tactics and strategies to maximize their opportunities and find ways to maintain ties to their natal family.<sup>73</sup> In some cases, their resistance might open more opportunities, but, in some cases they come at a high price. In the joint household as she enters, a Vietnamese bride soon recognizes her Korean-mother-in-law's influence in family.<sup>74</sup> In the following pages I present two patriarchal discourses that Korean mothers mobilize to define membership for Vietnamese daughter-in-laws: "Once married out, a daughter is a stranger" and "A married woman should live under her husband's shadow."

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<sup>73</sup> Some Vietnamese women expressed the patriarchal gender roles were backward.

<sup>74</sup> In her discussion of uterine family, Wolf (1975) argues patrilocality deprives women of social power.

*Once Married out, a Daughter is a Stranger*

On a clear day in late November, I was driving outside Happy City to visit Hyun-mi's home. Her village was located in a rural area, a 20-minute drive from downtown. Like that of other villages, the landscape of her village was being transformed by a boom in the construction of *pensions* (vacation homes) by wealthy middle-class urbanites. As speculation in real estate spread into rural areas, many villagers had sold their land and left. However, Mr. Kim, Hyun-mi's father-in-law, decided to stay. He had been the head of the village for the last 10 years, wanting his son, Dong-min, to live with him and perpetuate his lineage. A few years ago, he built a three-bedroom house for his family.

Upon entering the village, I drove past a row of pensions. Mr. Kim's stately red-brick house stood out, signifying his status as an influential figure and well-off farmer. While parking, I saw Hyun-mi comfortably holding her eight-month old son, Gyöng-su, in one arm, and she waved to me with a big smile. As soon as we sat on the floor in her room, we started chatting about her marriage and until Mrs. Hwang, her mother-in-law, entered the house after feeding the cows. Hyun-mi sprang to her feet and hurried to the living room to greet Mrs. Hwang, who was taking off her shoes. At the same time, she glanced at me and placed her index finger on her lips. I was wondering what she wanted me to be quiet about when I introduced myself to Mrs. Hwang. After having a quick look around, Mrs. Hwang chided Hyun-mi for treating a guest poorly. I told her that I had just arrived, but Mrs. Hwang vanished into the kitchen and returned to the living room carrying a small table with orange juice and ripe persimmons. While we were eating, I noticed that Hyun-mi had become quiet and Mrs. Hwang dominated the conversation. Hyun-mi slipped away. When I was listening to Mrs. Hwang who was

speaking for Hyun-mi about marriage and settlement, I glanced at Hyun-mi from the corner of my eye and saw that she was breastfeeding Gyöng-su.<sup>75</sup> [A visit to Hyun-mi's home 11-27-2008]

Like many other Vietnamese women who entered intergenerational households in farming areas, Hyun-mi joined Dong-min's family four months after they were married in Vietnam. At first she did her best to meet their expectations. She said, "I wanted to communicate with them better. I tried hard to learn Korean. I was carrying a Vietnamese-Korean dictionary everywhere, putting sticky notes on every object in the house, and listening to Korean music and watching television." As she settled in, she found Dong-min was too reticent and sometimes did not come home. The marriage broker, Mr. Lee, told her that Dong-min was a typical *Kyöngsangdo namja* [a man of few words] and he sometimes had to work late. No one told her that because of a trauma during his military service, Dong-min had some psychological issues that led to alcoholism.<sup>76</sup> His parents believed that he would change if he became responsible for his own family, so they married him off. In the beginning, the parents worried that Hyun-mi might want to leave her marriage if Dong-min did not change. They were therefore relieved when Hyun-mi became pregnant.

Dong-min's father went to Vietnam to choose a bride for his son, but he rarely interfered in women's business at home. During the matchmaking meeting, Hyun-mi

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<sup>75</sup> I first met Hyun-mi at her cousin's wedding in Vietnam. She did not want to be called by her Vietnamese name. She gave herself a Korean name. Korean husbands usually name their brides after their favorite Korean actresses or modify the sounds of Vietnamese names (see Chapter 3). Marriage brokers at Love Agency considered Hyun-mi as one of the role models for other brides because she showed her determination to settle in Korea, by actively and consistently learning Korean language, culture, and familial roles (see Chapter 6).

<sup>76</sup> In the village, there was a rumor that he was raped by his senior soldiers. After being discharged from the military, he began to behave strangely, disappearing for a few days.

and six other women had been presented to Dong-min and his father. Dong-min chose a tall and pretty woman, but his father advised him to choose Hyun-mi, describing her as “looking less materialistic than others but wise, and willing to meekly follow our ways.” “Our” ways reflect the patriarchal view on women and marriage that defines a daughter’s temporary status in the patrilineal family. Upon her entry into their household, her mother-in-law reinforced “our ways” emphasizing her status as an outsider.

The father’s and mother’s narrative of “our ways” reflects the discourse, *chulgaoein*, referring to a girl’s status in her natal home, defined as “once married out, a stranger” (Kendall 1983, 98).<sup>77</sup> Similar to Wolf’s observation on the Chinese kinship system in which a daughter’s status is temporary and thus she has no influence, the discourse reflects the daughter’s status as an outsider in the Korean patrilineal kinship system that typically accompanied patrilocal marriage.<sup>78</sup> As Sorenson (1983) points out, even when a Korean bride joins her husband’s household, she is conceptually an outsider who is brought into the household and provides services to family members.

Hyun-mi’s attitudes at the patrilocal home were greatly different from those at her natal home. According to Bélanger and Linh’s study (2011) of the impact of transnational marriages on sending communities in Vietnam, remittances have considerably increased the status and power of emigrant daughters in their native households. Making her family transnational through her cross-border marriage, Hyun-mi had brought resources to her family: building a house for her parents, remittances, and

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<sup>77</sup> The patriarchal Taiwanese family system has a similar view on a married daughter as “water that has been poured out” and who should not return to her natal family. See Tang and Wang (2011).

<sup>78</sup> For the discussion of the transformation of the patrilineal kinship system in pre-modern Korea, see Deuchler (1992).

material goods. She was the center of her family in Vietnam, as many marriage migrants express their entitlement as breadwinners (Belanger and Linh 2011). When I met her in Vietnam, she was joyful, dominating the family conversation. She even defied Mr. Lee, the marriage broker, whom she called Dad in Korea, when he scolded her for drinking beer during her pregnancy. She replied that beer would make her baby's complexion white in Vietnamese culture. She drank a toast to a healthy baby while sipping her favorite beer, the 333 that the broker brought for her family as a gift. When in the presence of her mother-in-law, however, she was quiet and deferential. I observed other Vietnamese women acting similarly, falling silent or disappearing when in the presence of parents-in-law or senior family members.

Hyun-mi's spontaneous behaviors at the presence of her mother-in-law and the mother's speaking for Hyun-mi are examples of disciplinary mechanisms in patrilineal homes. Hyun-mi's body language indicates her subjugation to the roles and duties of a daughter-in-law, instilled verbally or tacitly by her mother-in-law, husband, family members, or neighbors. Tang and Wang (2011) show that a newlywed foreign woman in the patriarchal Taiwanese family learns how to negotiate new, manifold, and complex family relations for her own survival. Hyun-mi's conscious and unconscious responses to her mother-in-law show the ways that a Vietnamese woman learns to behave as a daughter-in-law and negotiate the rules often imposed by her Korean-mother-in-law in daily life.

In the following pages, I discuss a Korean mother's narrative, "A "married woman should live under her husband's shadow." Along the *chulgaoein* discourse, the narrative indicates the ways that Korean mothers-in-law (and family members) try to

confine the Vietnamese bride to the family and deny her economic autonomy while accentuating her sacrifice for the sake of the hierarchical family relationship.

*A Married Woman Should Live under her Husband's Shadow*

The ideologies of male breadwinner and patrilineal kinship system have institutionalized gender inequality in the economic and political arenas in Korean society.<sup>79</sup> U. Cho (2004) observes that agricultural patriarchy included women in the labor force during the post war industrial development period, whereas the interests of mobile global capital have had a tendency to use local patriarchy to exclude women from the labor force. The discourse of family breakdown during the years of the Asian financial crisis promoted conservative and normative family values, which legitimized laying off female workers before male workers (Song 2006). The legacy of the male breadwinner ideology reproduces gender inequality, operating in everyday discourse.

The Korean mothers' narrative, "a married woman should live under the shadow of her husband," justifies the male breadwinner ideology that centers a Korean man in his family. According to my conversation with Korean families, they expected a Vietnamese bride to stay home even if the family had very limited income. Some Korean mothers prevented Vietnamese brides from working, accusing them of being opportunists.<sup>80</sup> Some imagined that the brides must be happy staying at home because they did not have to work in the fields anymore. Others argued that Vietnamese brides should not

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<sup>79</sup> According to the Orgnaization for Economic Co-operation and Development report (2009), women earned 61.1 percent of the male wage in South Korea. Women's representation in the national assembly was 13.7 percent in 2000 and increased to 16 percent in 2012.

<sup>80</sup> This view on Vietnamese women's employment appears to contradict some Korean mothers' breadwinning role, for example, Mrs. Ko in the previous section. Nonetheless, the contradicting perspectives on working women show gender roles are in transition.



complain about life in Korea because they would always be fed. One mother-in-law complained about her Vietnamese daughter-in-law who expressed her intention to work in the future:

I don't know what is wrong with Dau. Isn't having three meals a day enough for her? She was like a skeleton when she came to Korea because she wasn't fed well in Vietnam. Look at her complexion now. She looks so healthy. She has been content with basic needs [such as shelter, food, and clothing], so now she wants more.<sup>81</sup> [A visit to Dau's home 02-04-2009]

Vietnam is associated with poverty, which reminds the mother of Korea's own past. According to the mother's imagination and logic, Dau came to Korea to escape the backwardness of Vietnam but became greedy and too hungry for money (Tang and Wang 2011). The Korean mother imagined the Vietnamese bride who was vulnerable to materialist temptations in Korea. In the mother's words, "When a foreign bride from a poor country gets a taste of money, she won't stay in marriage." Therefore, when Dau expressed her desire to work, she became an opportunist who "must have had other intentions when she married" her son. The mother-in-law's suspicion from the contradictory images of an innocent third world woman and a runaway bride while reinforcing the patriarchal ideology of a wife's place at home and her dependence on her husband. The narrative, "a married woman should live under the shadow of her husband," reflects the sexual economy in the family that justifies a wife's material and psychological dependence on her husband. It maintains the patriarchal order, counteracts

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<sup>81</sup> Some family members felt sorry for young Vietnamese brides. For instance, a brother-in-law told me how much he pitied the young bride (Siren, 19) staying home all day. Siren married Jang-wu, 42, who was mentally handicapped. The brother-in-law continued, "She would have been a college kid if she was born and raised in Korea. . . . My mother is so worried that she would run away. She does not want to let her go out of the house. There is no Internet service at home. She is just staying in her room all day doing nothing but dealing with my difficult mother."

the Vietnamese wife's autonomy, and engenders psychological (and sometimes physical) abuse of the wife.

Some in-laws promise a Vietnamese bride that they would let her work when her child is old enough to attend kindergarten. In most cases, the families were reluctant to let a Vietnamese bride work. In their studies of foreign wives in Korea, Y. Kim, M. Kim, and G. Han (2007) describe the ways that Korean mothers-in-law disapprove of marriage-migrant women's intention to work. In the case of Vietnamese wives in Taiwan, Taiwanese husbands cannot comprehend why their Vietnamese wives insist on finding a job, a behavior which opposes the Taiwanese image of a traditional wife (Tang and Wang 2011; Thai 2008). According to their views, it is not economical to send the child to all-day childcare or hire a part-time nanny which costs almost her entire salary (Tang and Wang 2011).

Similarly, Korean husbands and mothers disapproved of Vietnamese women's desire to work, and some Korean mothers accused their Vietnamese daughter-in-law of being negligent with housework to earn small money (Y. Kim et al. 2007). A Korean mother similarly commented on her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's insistence on working, "What kind of work can she do? She will end up working in a restaurant or a factory. She will be paid a pittance. It's not economical. She'd better stay at home. That actually saves more money." The mother's views on women and work reflect the patriarchal ideology of the male breadwinner, dismissing women's earning power. It is not surprising to hear a mother say, "It is wise for my Vietnamese daughter-in-law to learn how to live frugally rather than trying to make extra money." Thus the Korean

mother expected her Vietnamese-daughter-in-law to learn how to be satisfied with her roles within the household.

This chapter has discussed the ways Korean mothers-in-law seek to restore traditional values by molding the newly arrived brides. They use patriarchal discourses to discipline a newcomer, such as, “once married a daughter is a stranger” and “a married woman should live under the shadow of her husband.” These narratives reflect the Korean mothers’ assumptions about transnational marriage mobility and their efforts to restore their son’s manhood by making him the head of his family. The Korean mothers reap the rewards of their patriarchal bargain by imposing the rules of the patrilocal household on their Vietnamese daughters-in-law. The following section discusses as the ways that Vietnamese women conform to and resist the rules of the patrilocal household in order to achieve status in family, to maximize their access to resources or actualize their agendas brought into their marriage migration.

### **Vietnamese Daughter-in-Law: Passive and Active Patriarchal Bargain**

During the early years of settlement in Korea, a Vietnamese bride in a two- or three-generation household finds ways to negotiate the family’s expectations for her until she develops a social network or has access to resources, such as employment or citizenship. Women craft different strategies to negotiate the patriarchal and patrilocal rules. They search for any available resources or favorable structural conditions, and they gradually find ways to free themselves, even temporarily or conditionally, from their controlling environment. Hyun-mi played the traditional gender roles assigned by her patrilineal household. Since she was living in a village, she could not network with other

Vietnamese women; therefore, she chose to be a good wife, daughter-in-law, and mother to maximize her autonomy and access to resources. However, a Vietnamese daughters-in-law's patriarchal bargain results in ambivalent gains or losses. Pregnancy precludes employment, while giving birth may confer status in the family and access to Korean citizenship. Being fearful of jeopardizing life choices she made to come to Korea, the bride might choose to stay home to appease her family until she would gain their trust. She might have to perform domestic labor even when she takes a job. The bride's initial efforts to be a good wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and caregiver may work against her intention to find employment outside home since the family may interpret her intention to work as an act to subvert the familial order.

The analysis of Vietnamese women's settlement experiences, like creating strategies or coping mechanisms in the new patrilocal households, reveals the ways that "patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women's rational choices but also shape the more unconscious aspects of gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of their early socialization, as well as their adult cultural milieu" (Kandiyoti 1988, 285). The Vietnamese women who are socialized by the patriarchal family ideology in Vietnam may effortlessly cope with the patriarchal rules reinforced by her mother-in-law at home. However, some brides consider the rules to be backward or feudalistic, when they observe in-laws attempting to find cultural commonalities between Korea and Vietnam only within the terms of classic patriarchy. The Vietnamese bride's ethnic difference becomes distinctive when the in-laws find the Vietnamese bride does not follow or resists their expectations. Thus, in their patrilineal family, the women negotiate their ethnic difference that the family ties to gendered cultural similarities in terms of

traditional gender roles and patriarchal familial order. When the Vietnamese women resist those traditional gender assignments, their ethnic difference becomes incomprehensible and undesirable to the family. In reverse, Vietnamese women use ethnic difference as a way to resist the family.

S. Kim and Y. Shin (2008) argue that the social and cultural milieu in rural Korea causes the social exclusion of marriage migrant women since rural farming communities are not accustomed to racial diversity generated by international marriages. Rural communities tend to preserve traditional Korean social and cultural values, such as cultural exclusion, the extended family, and social homogeneity. Therefore, marriage migrant women living in rural farming sectors are more socially excluded than those in urban areas.

Clashes between the foreign bride and her family arise since there is a lack of mutual understanding in cultural difference (S. Kim and Y. Shin 2008). I saw some family conflicts arose because of the idea that the Vietnamese bride was culturally similar; thus the family did not consider her cultural difference. She was imagined as a subject onto whom cultural similarities were easily inscribed.

Korean families' imagination of cultural proximity between Korea and Vietnam imposes the ideas of traditional gender roles and compulsory cultural adaption onto a Vietnamese woman. The ideas of cultural similarities are ascribed to their inaccurate information about Vietnam. The in-laws generalize Vietnam as pre-modern society so that they imagine Vietnamese women are traditional but sharing the same "Asian" cultural values. A family conflict arises from the Vietnamese woman's failure in or resistance to the assigned gender roles and compulsory cultural assimilation. Like the

observation by Y. Kim et al. (2007), I noted that the Korean family members I met expressed negative or superficial opinions about Vietnamese women's resistance to cultural adaptation. For example, one woman described her Vietnamese-daughter-in-law as demanding, lazy and poor (Y. Kim et al. 2007) generalizing it as Vietnamese when she did not conform to the family's expectation. The description shows the ways that national identities are constructed at social sites like the household.

According to Y. Kim et al.'s study (2007), marriage migrant women are frustrated because of the difference in family structure and strict gender roles in Korea. Most of the women in their interviews said that they freely participated in socio-economic activities in their countries and expected housework, child rearing and education as a shared duty. In contrast, large numbers of husbands and mothers-in-law in their study explained that a wife should be responsible for household chores and raising children. The Vietnamese women in my interviews were ambivalent about their in-laws' expectations. Some women expressed frustration with the strict gender roles and domestic responsibilities. Some women openly challenged the patrilineal family tradition in Korea, as a bride said, "The youngest sibling, not the eldest son, is supposed to take care of old parents in Vietnam." Others, although they did not rule out taking a job in the future, expressed satisfaction with staying home. Some women accepted the patriarchal rules as obligatory, based on their belief in traditional gender roles. For example, a newly arrived bride said, in response to following Korean ways, "I married a Korean man. I must follow Korean ways of living to settle in Korea." Under pressure to abide by strict gender roles and to adapt to Korean culture and custom, Vietnamese women strive to maximize their autonomy and mobility in and beyond the patriarchal household. They can exert

different “degrees of agency” (Pessar and Mahler 2003) in their social locations since agency is not only affected by external factors but also essentially individual characteristics. They find ways to passively or actively bargain with family members to achieve the goals they brought into their cross-border marriages.

In the following sections, I discuss the ways that Vietnamese women negotiate with Korean in-laws who impose compulsory cultural assimilation on them. Y. Kim et al. (2007) observe that the Korean families’ demands of cultural assimilation are the most visible in Korean language, diet, conduct towards older in-laws, and domestic chores. Similarly I discuss three indicators of cultural adaptation that Korean in-laws use to measure Vietnamese women’s assimilation in their households: eating practice, communication, and reproductive labor. At the end of the section, I discuss a failed negotiation between a Vietnamese bride and her Korean mother-in-law.

### *Eating Practice and Erasing Ethnicity*

When a Vietnamese woman begins the settlement process, her Korean family members consider eating practice as a way to quickly assimilate her to Korean life. Since eating is an important part of everyday life, eating practice is used to measure the Vietnamese bride’s willingness to adapt to Korea. In a joint household, a Korean mother-in-law is usually in charge of teaching the bride eating practices and cooking. As H. Kim (2007) observes, some Korean mothers-in-law require their foreign daughters-in-law to eat only rice and *kimchi* so that they would quickly be accustomed to Korea. During my visit to their homes, some mothers shared similar views on the relationship between eating Korean food and cultural adaptation. A Korean mother was contending

with her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's adaption to Korea, "Now, I rarely see her eating Vietnamese food at home. She loves *teonjangchige* (Korean bean paste soup) and *kimchi*. She has become almost Korean."

However, when a bride avoids or is reluctant to eat a particular dish, her in-laws interpret her as being too stubborn to adapt. One day when marriage brokers visited a Vietnamese woman's home, her mother-in-law began to complain about her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's stubbornness. The mother said, "I have observed that Dau does not touch *Kimchi*. How can she quickly adapt to Korean life if she doesn't eat like Korean people?"<sup>82</sup> The Korean mothers interpreted their Vietnamese daughters-in-law's reluctance or conformity to eating Korean food as their un/willingness to assume a Korean identity and patriarchal rules.

There are similar food cultures between Vietnam and Korea, such as the Chinese influence on staples, food preparation, and consumption. The nearly 1,000 years of Chinese domination in Vietnam influenced the use of the staples like soy sauce, bean curd, and noodles, food preparation techniques, and consumption, such as stir-frying and deep-frying with the wok, Mongolian hot pot, and the use of chopsticks (McLeod and Nguyen 2001). These staples can be useful for Vietnamese women when they wish to make Vietnamese dishes at home, but there are certain Korean dishes that they are reluctant to try.

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<sup>82</sup> Dau, 23, married Hyun, 43, in 2007. Hyun was living with his widowed mother, Mrs. Myŏng, 70, in a village. Hyun was the second son in his family. Mrs. Myŏng, like other mothers-in-law, believed Hyun was not able to find a Korean spouse because of his education, blue collar job, and low income. After Hyun failed numerous matches, Mrs. Myŏng persuaded him to go to Vietnam to find a bride. She paid all the marriage expenses for him, which entitled her to intervene in his marital life or with Dau's assimilation into Korea.



One of the Korean dishes that Vietnamese women resist eating is raw fish.<sup>83</sup> Due to the tropical climate, most women from the Mekong Delta areas never had raw fish, although they may enjoy dried fish. When a Vietnamese bride joins her husband's family in Korea, marriage brokers advise the family to avoid pressuring the bride to eat raw fish. Simultaneously, the brokers assure the family that the bride will eventually become accustomed to it. Some families are patient with the Vietnamese bride, but others consider the bride's willingness to treat raw fish as a symbolic embrace of Korean ways. Some Korean people are curious about the bride's reaction to it, and they subtly pressure the bride to try it. At get-togethers with Han-Viet couples, I saw some Korean people forced Vietnamese women to try raw fish as if the eating practice was a test of the wives' will to follow Korean ways. This cultural insensitivity temporarily disappears when a bride becomes pregnant since eating raw fish during pregnancy is a cultural taboo in Korea.

Under pressure, a Vietnamese bride can find ways to deal with this eating practice. She may avoid the situation at home, saying she is full or she just had a meal and leaves the dinner table. She may manipulate the situation so that the family would not recommend it to her any more. Noc, 26, said:

I have lived in Korea for more than four years. But I still don't like raw fish. I remember my in-laws forced me to try it. I tried different ways to avoid the situation, but they were persistent. . . . One night, as soon as I put a piece in my mouth, I pretended I was going to throw up in front of them. After that, they stopped pressuring me to eat raw fish.

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<sup>83</sup> Senior Korean women in a cultural assimilation program similarly viewed eating raw fish as a way to Koreanize Vietnamese women (see Chapter 5).

Noc's attempt at stopping in-laws' pressure was somewhat successful. Nevertheless, her in-laws took her action as the typical stubbornness of a Vietnamese woman. At a social gathering, a Korean husband, Jae-min, 36, used chopsticks to place a piece of raw fish near his wife, Min-hŭi's mouth. Out of anger, she swallowed that piece whole. Impressed, one husband said, "Vietnamese people can be really tenacious. Think about the fact: they are the only people who defeated the mighty American military."

At the start of their settlement, brides in rural areas do not have much mobility, for instance, going to Happy City where they can get Vietnamese staples. Considering that she may be homesick, some families are sensitive enough to purchase food, such as pork belly, duck or fried chicken which she would enjoy at home. Until she has more physical and financial mobility, she creates ways to use whatever is available at home. Sometimes, she eats boiled rice with soy sauce when it is the only staple immediately available—even if it looks strange to the family. When a bride becomes pregnant, she is temporarily released from pressure to eat only Korean food.<sup>84</sup>

### *Negotiating the Roles of a Talker and a Listener*

Communication at home can be an important factor in marriage migrant women's assimilation in Korea. Language barriers can lead to conflict and tension because of misunderstanding and miscommunication between foreign brides and family members (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013). According to the Kyŏngsangbukdo report (2007) on marriage-migrant women's families, 54.9 percent of the respondents said they learned Korean

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<sup>84</sup> A Vietnamese bride's pregnancy is considered for her Korean in-laws as a sign of getting settled in Korea. The Korean family also follows cultural myths about pregnant women. For instance, pregnant women should not eat raw fish. That a pregnant woman should suffice her cravings for food to deliver a healthy baby could be another example.

language at home, and 18.3 percent at local women's organizations, 10 percent at private organizations, 4.6 percent at social groups, and 2.0 percent at marriage agencies. More than a quarter of Vietnamese women reported that they learned Korean at local women's organizations and 4.4 percent at marriage agencies. Some of their respondents answered that the language education was unnecessary (30.9 percent), they did not know where to go (16.8 percent), the programs were far away from home (13.1 percent), they did not have someone to care for their young children (6.3 percent), and their families did not allow them to go to a program (1.9 percent). The Vietnamese women that I met, who were living in rural areas, were learning Korean at home by themselves except for two women who had home tutors from the government of Happy City.

I observed a Vietnamese woman who was eager to learn Korean. Her in-laws expected her to learn the language as quickly as possible, so they welcomed her enthusiasm. The family provided her with whatever she needed to improve her Korean at home. For example, Vietnamese women asked their families to purchase a Korean-Vietnamese dictionary. I often saw a bride carrying a small Korean-Vietnamese dictionary everywhere she went.<sup>85</sup> At home, Vietnamese women put a Korean word on every object, and took notes when watching Korean television. They wrote down words both in Vietnamese and Korean on their notebook and memorized the vocabulary every day. Korean in-laws thought learning Korean was the most important part of adaptation to Korea and later education for a child, so their expectation for the bride's language acquisition was very high.

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<sup>85</sup> I described the ways in which Vietnamese women, for example, Xeong (Chapter 3), used a dictionary to achieve their goals.

Korean in-laws were satisfied with the bride's efforts to learn Korean at home as opposed to taking classes, but they shifted all the responsibility for communication onto her. Misinterpreting the difficulties that the bride might experience when she learned a new language, the family members blamed her for not making enough effort to adapt to Korea when they became frustrated communicating with her. Some family members insulted the bride's intellect or character, calling her "slow or lazy." Her family evaluated her Korean language proficiency in terms of how much effort she put into adapting to Korean culture. Some mothers kept track of how often a bride called her parents in Vietnam, which could not only cause a family conflict when phone bills were high or she talked too long but also it might slow the bride's progress with Korean. Her Korean fluency became an issue if the family found her Korean proficiency unsatisfactory after she had a child. Since foreign brides from other countries communicate with their husbands mostly in Korean (Seol et al. 2005); Vietnamese brides were expected by the family to speak only Korean at home, which made them feel alienated.

Learning Korean alone was not easy for a bride. Her family dealt with her Korean acquisition by utilizing a reward and punishment system. The family tried to teach her Korean, and their concerns about her language proficiency grew when she had a child. I saw that some Korean mothers were worried their grandchildren were slow in speaking Korean, and blamed their Vietnamese daughters-in-law. The Ministry of Gender Equity and Family has published Korean language text books, CDs, and e-learning for immigrant women, but some families did not know where to obtain the textbooks. Most Vietnamese women in rural areas did not have access to the Internet,

and according to my interviews, most households did not have Internet service. Some families did not allow the bride to use the Internet, based on the brokers' advice that she might venture into chat rooms where Vietnamese migrant workers would seduce her to run away by offering her a job. Vietnamese women in rural areas learned Korean by themselves or through conversation with family members, especially mothers-in-law and husbands. The family members' inconsistent ways of teaching Korean confused the bride.

The southern dialect that the family uses can also be an impediment. One bride complained she was learning two different languages. Family members explained Korean words and phrases to the bride, but sometimes they felt frustrated when the bride asked them a chain of questions. The following lunchtime conversation between a Vietnamese woman and her family shows the frustration caused by dialectical difference and questions.

Husband: [to Ara] “mai mura.”

Ara: “*mai mura?*”

Husband: [repeatedly moving his hand up to the mouth] “It means eat a lot. [Chuckling] “*Saturi* [dialect].”

Ara: “*saturi?*”

Mother-in-law: “Oh, why can't she just understand tacitly? [Looking at Ara] *Saturi* is *saturi*. Don't talk too much while eating. That's bad table manners in Korea.” [A Home Visit 10-13-2008]

Ara, an extrovert, had been in Korea for six months. Vietnamese wives in urban areas may have easy access to women's centers or other organizations that offer Korean classes. However brides, like Ara, who live in rural areas that usually have limited

public transportation, have to learn Korean by themselves or from family members.

Ara's mother-in-law trusted the marriage brokers who told the family that she would have bad influence from the women's centers in Happy City. There was a rumor in the next village that a Vietnamese bride had run away, leaving her one-year-old daughter. Accordingly, the mother was certain that Ara would develop bad thoughts and attitudes if she met the cunning brides at the women's centers. Instead, the brokers persuaded the family to send the bride to the agency because it was safer. The mother-in-law was not satisfied with Ara's improvement in Korean language at home, so she sent Ara to the marriage agency once a week to learn Korean.

In the conversation above, the mother-in-law expected Ara to learn things tacitly, imposing the role of listener. Being unable to explain the dialect, the mother shifted the conversation to Korean custom. At home, Vietnamese brides usually learned Korean from husbands or in-laws. Except for a few families,<sup>86</sup> most family members, like Ara's mother-in-law, believed that Vietnamese brides would learn Korean as they settled in Korea. Learning Korean at home required the bride to become a listener in the presence of senior members at home, but also she was expected to be a speaker at home.

A Vietnamese bride, spending most of the day with her mother-in-law, learned to become a listener through gendered division of labor at home. One Korean mother explained how she taught her Vietnamese daughter-in-law:

In the early years, I spoke to her in Korean showing how to do and what to do at home. Sometimes there are things too complicated to explain to her. She learned things tacitly. Like preparing the table for dinner or washing clothes

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<sup>86</sup> Si-ho, 34, factory worker/farmer, set up the Internet for his wife, Bung, 21, to take online Korean courses offered by the Ministry of Gender and Family for immigrant women when she joined his family.

properly, I repeatedly explained to her in Korean - showing her how to put spoons and chopsticks on the table.

When there was miscommunication or misunderstanding, the family often ascribed it to her lack of interest in adaptation, being slow, or manipulative. Sometimes a mother-in-law accused her Vietnamese-daughter-in-law of being scheming. On one of my visits to Mai's home, her mother-in-law, listening to my conversation with Mai, interrupted us, snapping, "[Tut tut], now she understands everything [in Korean]! She always says, '*molayo, molayo*' (don't know). Today, I don't hear it at all. She must have intentionally done it to me." Based on her mother-in-law's expression, tone of voice and my embarrassment, Mai understood the mother's disapproval and became quiet. Mai might have manipulated her mother-in-law, saying "don't know," or she really did not comprehend. Mai might have used her limited vocabulary to deceive or resist authoritative figures at home.

According to my observation, the Korean family members, including bride's husbands, rarely tried to learn Vietnamese.<sup>87</sup> At social gatherings, some Korean husbands spoke simple Vietnamese words or phrases, for example, "Anh yêu em" [I love you: men to women], đẹp [pretty or beautiful to women], and "Hẹn gặp lại" [see you later] to attract their wives' attention. The husbands use Vietnamese words from a sheet of Korean-Vietnamese phrases that the marriage broker gave them during the marriage trip. The other phrases commonly used by the men are "Cám ỏ'n" [thank you], "Xin chào" [hello], and "Xin lỗi" [I am sorry]. However, the men's interest in Vietnamese usually did not last long. Instead, they expected their Vietnamese wives to learn Korean

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<sup>87</sup> For example, Jong-tae and Jae-min in their thirties, who were relatively young compared to the other Korean husbands, were studying Vietnamese to communicate with their brides better and to help their brides settle in Korea (Chapter 3).

quickly. The husbands who were quiet wanted their brides to be talkative. At a gathering with two couples, Yŏn-hu complained about his wife, Cam who had been in Korea for two months. He told Wu-hyŏn, “Cam is very quiet and shy. I am wondering how she can learn Korean if she does not speak at all. I wish she was more talkative, like your wife. She does not talk much. It gets worse when she is upset with something.” Learning tacitly that she is supposed to be quiet, not to talk back to in-laws, and not to interrupt, the Vietnamese bride is confused when her in-laws expect her to be talkative on some occasions and quiet on others. However, she can use being understood or confused to resist the authority at home.

Vietnamese brides can use their limited language skills and resources to manipulate the family’s demands or express what she needs. The Vietnamese-Korean dictionary can be transformed by the bride into a means of talking back. Mai was not able to understand or speak Korean well, but she kept a list of words in a notebook she carried around. She showed it to her husband and mother-in-law to express herself. Her mother-in-law told me, “Words like motorcycle, rice cooker, house, air conditioner, trip, and so on. I figured right away the list was what she wanted for her natal family. I told her we could not buy all those things at one time. I thought she understood me, but she became so sullen for the next days.” Some Vietnamese women intentionally used provocative words like “unhappiness,” “divorce,” or “beating” to express their thoughts about their life in Korea. Some brides used these words to threaten the family. These acts could be understood as language politics that Vietnamese brides could subvert.

Vietnamese women can act collectively, excluding their husbands or family members. For example, at a gathering for Han-Viet couples, the brides usually sit



separately from husbands. The brides talked in Vietnamese, without worrying about family members who usually told them to speak Korean only. It was one of the few moments when the brides acted collectively. The brides I met liked these gatherings since these were times when they could expand their network and be away from their in-laws' control. The brides who lived in rural areas took advantage of social gatherings and made their husbands attend. At the meeting, Vietnamese brides were in high spirits, talking aloud in Vietnamese. Sometimes they played drinking games. One time when a husband asked the brides to lower their voices, the brides laughingly ignored his request. In that way, the brides exclude their husbands from their conversation. The brides share their stories about husbands, mothers-in-law, remittances, work opportunities, and gossip about other Vietnamese brides. When a husband, picking up some Vietnamese words, asked them to explain what they were talking about, the brides simply replied "nothing, just jokes."

Their collective dismissal of authority sometimes occurred when they visited a friend's home. For the brides who live in rural areas, it was not easy to take the bus to Happy City or to Love Agency. Most families did not allow the bride to go alone to visit the agency until she was pregnant or had given birth. They felt it was safe to allow her friend(s) to visit their home instead of her going out so that they could watch her. Bich was living in a village, so it was inconvenient for her to take a bus to visit the marriage agency to meet her friends. Instead, she asked her mother-in-law if she could invite her friends over. Her home became a gathering place for the brides living close to her village. Her friends usually stayed for a few hours during the daytime, and sometimes cooked Vietnamese food together. One day I was invited to Bich's house and saw that her

friends were less concerned with talking in the presence of Bich's mother.<sup>88</sup> Feeling excluded, Bich's mother-in-law assumed they were talking about her.<sup>89</sup>

Vietnamese brides used different ways to manipulate or to resist authority at home. Their communication strategies included silent treatment, using provocative words, using selective words for her demands, talking in Vietnamese with her friends in front of in-laws, and exaggerating what they did not know. Although Korean families gave contradictory messages to the bride when communicating with her, the bride occasionally subverted her position as listener by feigning indifference or ignorance. Vietnamese women struggled to gain membership in their family, but used different ways to express their approval or disapproval—even if their Korean was not fluent. In other cases, Vietnamese women talked to themselves and their child or called their family in Vietnam to exclude their mother-in-law or husband who did not understand Vietnamese. This action might have caused a conflict in the family if the mother-in-law or husband decided to forbade her to speak Vietnamese at home and her action could be understood as rebellious whether she intended to be or not.

### *Duties of Reproductive Labor*

Bélanger et al. (2010) report that families do not want to let the foreign wife work outside the home during the early settlement, particularly before and after the birth of a

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<sup>88</sup>In her discussion of mobility of rural Miao women in southwestern China, Schein (2005) discusses the ways Miao women their dialects to be free from the prying ears of their in-laws (64).

<sup>89</sup> Some brides considered me an ally, so they included me in their conversation. Because of my language limitations, a few brides helped me to understand their conversation. But, in some social gatherings, especially those organized by the marriage agency, I was excluded from their conversation. I believe it was a defensive mechanism that they were suspicious of any Korean person who might cause some trouble to them, by exposing their secrets to their family members or marriage brokers.

child. This pattern also occurred in my data. No Vietnamese woman in a joint household was working during the early settlement, except Dau who temporarily worked at the marriage agency. In most cases, Vietnamese women stayed home until their children became old enough for kindergarten. Until then, their wish to work outside the home caused family conflict.

Vietnamese women expected their domestic work and childrearing to be ways to gain resources, including visits to Vietnam, remittances, building a house for her parents, or citizenship. A Vietnamese woman's pregnancy assuaged her family's concerns about a fake marriage or running off, but also reinforced the family's expectation for her to stay home. However, giving birth cannot completely remove the family's suspicion that she might run away when she expresses her intention to work. The Korean family enforced the image of the harmonious family, which usually required the Vietnamese woman to embrace the hierarchical order of gender and generation. As Bélanger et al. (2010) similarly argue, foreign wives' contribution to the host society is limited to their roles as mothers and wives within the hierarchical family system.

Even when Vietnamese women were allowed to work, they suffered from doing double labor at work and at home. When they worked, they were more likely to be blamed for any family conflict related to domestic and care work. The family reluctantly allowed her to work, so she had to promise not to neglect her household duties. Some brides not only economically contributed to their family, but also remained in charge of domestic chores and child care.

Y. Kim et al. (2007) argue that most Vietnamese women consider the nuclear family ideal and they are not familiar with the obligation of patrilineal extended family.

In the case that they do know they do not prefer it outside of economic benefit. In Seol et al.'s study (2006), foreign brides in Korea view reproductive work, such as washing dishes, cleaning, childcare, preparing meals, and doing laundry, as a job for family members or helpers, and their desire to work outside the home is very high. In my interviews, the Vietnamese women living with parents-in-law the joint strongly expressed their wish to work and have a nuclear family. A few women said they were satisfied with being full-time housewives as long as their husbands were making enough money and the family was well-off. However, most women responded that they would take any available job and hoped that their Korean in-laws would allow them to work in the future. They were ambivalent about the obligations of patrilineal extended-family and full domestic responsibilities given to them.

As settling in, the Vietnamese women become fully responsible for the domestic and care work. As the women realized their husbands alone were not able to afford living expenses in Happy City, some insisted upon working. The women who stayed home accepted domestic responsibilities but they hoped that their parents-in-law would eventually help them to move out. Those who worked often expressed their struggles with difficult mothers-in-law who were indifferent to the women's double burden of labor.

### *Double Labor for Conditional Freedom*

Many Vietnamese wives expressed their desire to work in the future. Bélanger (2010) claims that marriage migrant women have a dual objective: to marry and migrate. They do not contract a marriage of convenience but rather try to help their families

financially and improve their own lives. The women's Korean dreams entail more than a dual objective. They anticipate making a happy family of their own and achieving better economic conditions and opportunities in comparison to what Vietnam could offer (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013). When they join their husbands in Korea, they realize they need to meet their husbands and in-laws' expectation to produce a child and to perform household tasks. Even after meeting her family's expectation, a Vietnamese wife may not be able to work outside the home without negotiating with her family about her domestic responsibilities and childcare.

Vietnamese women compete for scarce jobs and endure discrimination at work, ignoring their family's disapproval of their economic independence. They are willing to accept any opportunities. This is not because they lack critical perspectives on systemic discrimination against non-citizens, but, because they understand there are not many opportunities because of their social and legal status. Love Agency was one of the employers who took advantage of Vietnamese women who wanted to work and whose Korean families would not allow the women to work unless they trusted the employers.

Trang was working at the agency when I met her in 2008. Three years earlier, Trang was married to a factory worker living with his parents who were farmers in a rural area. The agency hired her hoping that Trang could be a model for customers who were considering Han-Viet marriages. She was living with her parents-in-law in a rural area and the mother of a child. Customers liked her friendliness, her appearance, optimism, and fluent Korean. She could pass as Korean. Moreover, her three-year-old daughter did not have any Southeast Asian features. She worked from 10:00 am to 5:00

pm, and was paid 600,000 won (about US\$500) a month. She was allowed to bring her daughter to work, which avoided family conflict over childcare.<sup>90</sup>

Trang had promised her mother-in-law that she would not neglect domestic responsibilities if the family allowed her to work. She described her day:

I get up at 6:00 am. I prepare breakfast for the family and set lunch ready for my father-in-law. After cleaning dishes from breakfast, I dress up for work, prepare milk and snacks for my daughter, and then wake her up. I have to catch the bus that leaves at 9:20, so I can arrive at the agency in time. When I come home in the afternoon, I help my mother-in-law prepare dinner, wash clothes, and clean the house. Then it becomes almost 9:30 at night. I feel so tired, but I still want to continue working at the agency. . . . I want to save money to help my husband move out.

The participants in Sung's study (2012) said they performed most of the domestic labor at home. They complained about overloaded and unequally distributed domestic labor. A participant complained about the domestic labor, "I cook for my family and in-laws, and clean the house. . . . I have to cook. And then I need to clean the house because I have my in-laws living with me. . . . I work to death" (Sung 2012, 521).

Trang's family wanted her to stay home raising her daughter; but she did not want to miss out on the job at Love Agency. Tang and Wang (2011) argue that employment enhances marriage migrant women's empowerment in terms of improved language skills, social networks and economic independence even though it might lead to family tension, domestic violence or the breakdown of the family. Living in an extended family, Trang took charge of all the domestic work, cooking and cleaning, as her family viewed domestic labor as normal and natural for her.

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<sup>90</sup> I discuss Trang's work experience at the marriage agency in Chapter 6.

Trang gained trust of the family after giving birth to her daughter, and as long as she was responsible for housework, she was allowed to visit her friends. She wanted to achieve some economic independence. Having a job was a threshold for self-empowerment: working outside improved her fluency in language, enabling her to build relationships with people outside the family, saving money for her citizenship, and hoping to have a nuclear family. Initially Trang's family opposed her working. She promised to keep up with the housework and childcare and to contribute to the family's household income. After working at the agency for four months, Trang was replaced by another Vietnamese woman. Her family was relieved that she would now stay at home. However, Trang asked her friends who worked in factories to keep their eyes open for available jobs.<sup>91</sup> She soon started working full time at a factory near her village, earning about US\$800 a month. She was still doing all of the housework, paying for her daughter's preschool, and contributing more to the family's income. Trang saved very little money for herself.

Trang realized that her temporary status in Korea made her vulnerable in her relationship to her daughter and at work. Her husband was the second son in the family. Lacking economic stability, he was living in his parents' house. His older brother's wife was extremely hostile to Trang, criticizing her desire to work and her outfits. She even told the mother-in-law that she would take care of Trang's daughter if Trang's marriage broke up. She allowed her children to bully Trang's daughter, calling her "strange foreigner." Trang believed she had been a good daughter-in-law.

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<sup>91</sup> Tang and Wang (2011) explain that immigrant wives find jobs easily because of Taiwan's gendered market structure, such as labor shortage in 3D sectors (437). In similar, small- and medium-sized sub-contract factories in the outskirts of Happy City provide jobs for Vietnamese women.

I never complained about doing everything at home. I cook, clean, and take care of my daughter. I pay for my daughter's education, and I even contribute to my family's income. . . . I believe I have been a really good wife and daughter-in-law. Better than any other Korean wife could be.

Trang felt betrayed by her mother-in-law who agreed with her first daughter-in-law's remarks. She was heartbroken when she imagined being forced to leave her daughter behind. In addition, she realized she could be discriminated against because she was a foreigner. Consequently, she wanted the Korean citizenship that could give her security and job opportunities. After speaking to her Vietnamese friends and brokers, she knew her husband would not be able to financially sponsor her. Her desire to work was getting stronger. Trang was not financially obligated to help her natal family. Her two older sisters, who married Taiwanese farmers through matchmaking, had contributed to building a new house and sent regular remittances to their parents.

Like Trang's sisters, many Vietnamese brides that I met felt pressured to offer financial support to their natal parents. Since they did not have any income,<sup>92</sup> the brides have ways to persuade their husbands or in-laws to help their family in Vietnam.

According to Seol et al.'s survey (2006), Vietnamese brides annually sent 970,000 Won (about US\$800) to Vietnam (98). My data shows the remittance ranges from US\$100 to US\$3,000, and most families responded they regularly sent money to the bride's family and paid for the bride's annual visit to Vietnam. The brides who stayed home expected their husbands or parents-in-law to send regular remittances to their parents. Both the bride and her in-laws view monetary reward as an exchange for the bride's contribution to the family, including domestic and farming labor, giving birth, childcare, and elderly

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<sup>92</sup> Women found ways to save or make money when they were not allowed to work. One bride was saving money from the living expenses or pocket money that her husband gave her. Another bride grew garden vegetables to sell to the agency.



care. When a bride is dissatisfied with the amount of remittances, she compares it unfavorably to that of her friend's in-laws. She might emphasize a son-in-law's obligation to her parents. She might ask help from in-laws for family emergencies in Vietnam, like hospitalization, flooding, or siblings' weddings. However, the issue of remittance and visits can cause serious conflict within the family.

### *Crafting Tactics and Strategies of Fighting Back*

Vietnamese women gain membership in family, through their reproduction of children and adherence to rigid gender roles at home. Giving birth for the family can enable them to negotiate with the family over remittances, work, and citizenship. The entitlement or mobility that opens access to different resources seems to be conditional. Some Vietnamese women resort to extreme measures to negotiate with husbands or in-laws. The following example shows a Vietnamese woman who succeeded partially in her negotiation by running away.

Noc wanted to work for a few reasons. Like Trang, Noc wanted to separate from her husband's parents and save money to apply for Korean citizenship. Noc's husband, the youngest son in the family, was living in his parents' house. He was commuting to a factory near the village where they lived. Noc also wanted to help her family in Vietnam since her husband's income was insufficient. When her friend told her of a job opening at a factory, Noc implored her mother-in-law to allow her to work. She complained, "My mother-in-law is so stubborn! My husband's income is so little. I need to help him to save money to have a separate family and to apply for my citizenship. But she won't allow me to work."

Besides her dream of having a nuclear family, Noc was concerned about her two-year-old son, whom she believed was being bullied by other children in preschool. Noc said, “The children made fun of my son because of me. I look different. My eyes are so big. I speak broken Korean. I want citizenship.” I asked how the children would treat her son differently after receiving citizenship. She replied, “I can show my ID and tell them I am Korean, too!” Noc was aware of the stigma attached to Vietnamese wives, as Trang shared with me her views about the public gaze on a foreign bride. “When I was on the bus today, I saw a few people looked at me and whispered something in their ears. I felt ashamed. I felt they looked down on me because I am a Vietnamese bride.” Both Noc and Trang consider citizenship to be a valuable source of new possibilities.

Many brides did not plan to runaway when they married Korean men. In contrast, Korean in-laws worried about this. Mi-yŏng’s mother-in-law would not leave her in the house alone. She locked the entrance door when she went out for errands. Because it was so cold outside, it took one month for Mi-yŏng to realize that she was being locked in the house. She was disappointed in the mother and her husband who did not trust her. The mother continued to lock the door until Mi-yŏng became pregnant. The mother was not apologetic.

Mi-yŏng had nothing to lose in her marriage to my son. I paid everything for their wedding both in Vietnam and in Korea. How do I know she might have a bad intention? How do I know what she has in her mind? I had to lock the door until I was sure that she was not going to run away.

As Mi-yŏng’s experience and her mother-in-law’s narrative show, the family conflict often arises from discrepant expectations.

Some brides go to extreme measures to negotiate with in-laws for mobility.

When Han found a job at a factory, she promised her husband and mother-in-law that she

would do all the housework and contribute to the income. However, her husband and the mother strongly opposed her. Out of frustration, she decided to spend a night away from home, leaving her three-year-old son.

I was so upset that I just wanted to go somewhere to blow off steam. I called a friend who is having a rough time with her in-laws, and asked if she wanted to go downtown for fun. I left my son at a neighbor's house. I lied to my mother-in-law that I had important errands to run. My friend and I were just wandering around downtown, and we suddenly decided to go to a karaoke place to have fun. We turned off our cell phones. We also ordered beer, sang and drank until 12 am. We were so drunk and it was too late to go home.

After the adventure, Han began to work at a factory. Han's mother-in-law realized that Han could run away, even leaving her son behind. The mother-in-law compromised on the condition that Han remain responsible for domestic chores, childcare, and childcare expenses. Han's story was a rare one. Even if a bride succeeded in gaining employment, as Trang and Han did, they continued to struggle against the patriarchal organization of gendered labor at home and discrimination at work.

Vietnamese women struggle with inequalities at home and at work. Their strategies and tactics to fight inequalities in patrilocal residence may create new opportunities for them. However, their strategies and tactics sometimes backfire. As I explained earlier, some Korean families construe Vietnamese women's actions as "tenacious and fierce," as they described, reproducing stereotypical images of the Vietnamese.

### *A Failed Negotiation*

According to the government report on international marriages, the divorce rate, especially during the early stage of assimilation, is rising.<sup>93</sup> S. Kim and Y. Shin (2008) claim that many foreign wives fail to root in the early stage of the marriage. They argue that Korean extended families are responsible for a foreign wife's assimilation and thus for the high level of divorce involving internationally married couples. They add, however, that the brides are partially responsible for their divorce since they do not acquire enough information about Korean husbands and life in Korea before marriage. Korean men and their families have little information on foreign wives and their cultures, which makes a foreign wife's assimilation more difficult. At the beginning of a foreign wife's settlement, her in-laws monitor everything that she says and does, and make a judgment of her good or bad intentions for marriage. Some women defy the surveillance and judgmental attitudes of their in-laws, but this defiance can end the marriage.

Siren, 19, married Chang-wu, 42, in December 2007.<sup>94</sup> Their marriage lasted for six months. Siren was worried that she had been in the dormitory for two weeks and no Korean man had chosen her. Her debt to the broker was increasing. When Chang-wu's father chose her for his son, Siren thought she did not have any choice and agreed to the marriage. Chang-wu looked fine to her until he got up and spoke. He walked with a limp and talked inaudibly.<sup>95</sup> Siren thought that marrying him was her fate. Siren did not get

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<sup>93</sup> For the total numbers of divorces in national and international marriages 2003-2013, see Table 4, 5, and 6 in Appendix 1.

<sup>94</sup> The age difference between a foreign wife and a Korean husband is often imagined as one of the inequalities that a young foreign wife encounters in marriage, for example the idea of a controlling husband. In reality, a young foreign wife expects her husband to be responsible and mature because of his older age.

<sup>95</sup> Chang-wu had physical and mental disabilities. At matchmaking, men usually sit in the room first, and then women enter.

along with Chang-wu's overbearing mother. Although Chang-wu's father had promised to help Chang-wu and Siren live separately in Happy City, the mother refused. At home, Siren did not fully understand Korean, but she inferred her mother-in-law's hostility from her facial expression and tone of voice. Siren thought that nothing that she did could please the mother. Siren tried to avoid the mother-in-law during the daytime when Chang-wu was working. The mother did not allow Siren to go to Love Agency, so Siren usually stayed in her room, watching TV or sleeping. She had chronic migraines. Nobody in the family tried to persuade the mother to be more sensitive to Siren.

The mother construed Siren's withdrawal and attitude as defiance of authority and as attempts to control Chang-wu. She had opposed his marriage because of his mental and physical disabilities and believed a foreign bride would marry him with ulterior motives. One day when two marriage brokers visited her home, the mother complained about Siren's attitude:

See? She even did not come out to greet guests! [She's] so rude. It's been two months [since she came to Korea], but I don't see her making any efforts to settle. [Her voice was getting loud]. . . . She manipulated my son to buy a pair of blue jeans for. They cost 50,000 won (about US\$50)! How can I trust her? She is such a misfortune to my family. [Siren was reluctantly coming out of her room]. Look at that sullen face! Oh, I can't stand her anymore. You said you would refund the marriage expense if we don't like the bride. Take her back to Vietnam! [A visit to Siren's home 06-15-2008]

The mother expected Siren to be submissive to her. Siren's efforts to read minds and to adapt to the new family were never good enough for the mother.

Every day there was a power struggle between Siren and her mother-in-law.<sup>96</sup>

Siren tried to ally with her father-in-law and her husband. Although the father-in-law did

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<sup>96</sup> The relationship among Siren, the mother-in-law, and Chang-wu, is an example of the "uterine family" that Wolf (1971) described in the kinship system in rural Taiwanese family. The uterine

not object to the mother's mistreatment of Siren, Siren was able to win Chang-wu's loyalty. Chang-wu came directly home after work, always bringing snacks for Siren. Chang-wu and Siren spent most of their time in their room unless the mother called them for errands or meals. The mother was disappointed in Chang-wu because she thought that he was no longer a good and obedient son. She blamed Siren for Chang-wu's change. Siren was winning Chang-wu away from his mother, and this enraged her. When the mother found out that Chang-wu was giving his monthly salary to Siren and he wanted to move out, she accused Siren of tricking her son in order to run away with his money. Siren packed her clothes and went to stay with a friend in the same village. When Siren told the mother that Chang-wu would be heartbroken if she left him, the mother threatened to divorce her from Chang-wu and send her back to Vietnam. The marriage brokers informed the mother that she might have to pay a lot of money to have Siren deported. In response, blaming the brokers for matching her son to a wrong bride, the mother declared she would not pay anything.

After the incident, Siren's mother-in-law asked the owners of Love Agency to take Siren until she returned to Vietnam. Chang-wu came to the agency every day in tears and begged Mr. Lee to persuade his mother to forgive Siren. Chang-wu stuttered that he loved Siren so much that he did not want her to leave him. However, his mother was adamant that she would end her son's marriage. Within a month, the mother-in-law on behalf of Chang-wu filed for divorce, and her six-month marriage was dissolved. When I met Siren at the agency, I asked if she wanted to stay in Korea until her one-year

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family is consists of a woman's mother and her mother's children. Siren struggled with the mother-in-law's uterine power.

spousal visa ended. She was too heartbroken to consider that option.<sup>97</sup> She stayed in a women's center in Peace City before returning to Vietnam.

## **Conclusion**

Compared to other national groups of marriage migrant women in South Korea, Vietnamese women married to Korean men tended to live in rural areas and in two- or three-generation households. Korean men had factory jobs commuting to Happy City while helping their parents on their farm. The Vietnamese women in my study married Korean men who were not necessarily eldest sons but were living with their parents, usually but not always for financial reasons. Parents-in-law usually paid for the son's wedding expenses and most of his living expenses, so they had a great say in their Vietnamese daughter-in-law's settlement. In particular, Korean mothers are responsible for teaching Vietnamese brides because of their authority in the home and their economic power over their sons. In two- or three-generation families, the formation of transnational-patrilineal family and social membership is more visible in the micro-negotiations between Vietnamese brides and Korean mothers. Ideas of global hypergamy and fake marriages influence Korean mothers' expectations of Vietnamese brides' roles only within the home and family. The mothers' efforts at imposing conventional gender roles onto Vietnamese brides reinforce the rules of old-fashioned patriarchy. Therefore, this chapter examined the formation of the transnational family as an institutional site where Vietnamese brides negotiate patriarchal ideology, although changing, that Korean in-laws are trying to reconstitute.

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<sup>97</sup> I am not sure that Siren loved Chang-woo or she just wanted things to work.

Earning the trust of in-laws is important for a Vietnamese bride to achieve access to resources beyond her home. To achieve status in her patrilineal family, a Vietnamese bride negotiates the familial membership that her Korean mother-in-law defines. The stories of the Vietnamese women in this chapter show that they bargain, actively and passively, with the rules of the new household until they have secured their status. Giving birth and being in charge of reproductive labor might create opportunities for the brides to look for a job. Yet, the path to economic mobility is still difficult due to the structural constraints that hinder their empowerment and freedom. Only three out of 36 women had achieved legal residency; this required their husbands' financial and legal sponsorship. Husbands and families have the power to restrict wives' mobility, keeping their dependent status. The legal regulation on their temporary residency may constrain their employment opportunities and also make them vulnerable to abuse or harassment at work. Their language barrier, social capital, and lack of Korean citizenship limit their employment options. Most women, like their husbands, wish to work when they have opportunities. There is lack of social support, besides cultural centers that are usually focused on women's cultural roles.

In this chapter, I examined the changing gender and generational dynamics in rural families in Korea to discuss the rural households that Vietnamese women settle in. Under the gender and generational dynamics in the three-generational rural household, a mother controlled her Vietnamese daughter-in-law's settlement and cultural adaptation. My analysis of the mothers' narratives showed how Korean maternal citizenship in relation to post-marriage migration of a Vietnamese bride reconfigures patriarchal ideology that limits women's roles within the family. Even though their family



membership is conditional, Vietnamese women negotiate those roles and the patrilocal rules reinforced by Korean mothers-in-law to gain access to resources for themselves and their natal families in Vietnam. The tension between remitting and making their own lives better also arises.

## CHAPTER 5

### Gendering Old and New Membership:

#### Korean Grandmother-Managers and Vietnamese Immigrant Women

In 2008, a philanthropic organization in Happy County, sponsored by the county's local government and a broadcasting company, held an event for Vietnamese married migrant women residing in the rural area.<sup>98</sup> The organization invited to Korea the mothers of fifteen Vietnamese brides. They considered the Vietnamese women as role models for married migrant women in the County because the women met with their three criteria for this event. They chose the Vietnamese women who were living in rural Korea for at least three years, supporting their parents-in-law, and gave birth to children. The three criteria were repeated in the opening speech at the welcome event. The president of the organization told the audience, "Your daughters are happy with their marriages in Korea. We are proud of them. They sincerely support parents, follow their husbands, and rear your grandchildren well. . . . Have a good time with your in-laws and enjoy the remarkable economic development of Korea."

The president's national pride coming from the "remarkable economic development of Korea" implied Vietnam is behind in its economic competition to transnational orders of East Asia, but also the Koreans were benevolent enough to invite families of Vietnamese migrant women who were socially disadvantaged in Korea. The

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<sup>98</sup> The event was a two-day program. On the first day, the mothers and the Vietnamese women were on a city tour in Pusan, and on the second day, they came to Happy City to this night event and dinner afterwards. The city major and local government officials came to celebrate this event. Most Vietnamese mothers and fathers stayed in Korea for a week.

organization's benevolence implied a feeling of Korean superiority over other less developed Asian countries because the Vietnamese women "married up" in its economic measuring of marriage mobility. Another implication in his speech was that he confined Vietnamese women's identities only within marriage and family. His speech encouraged the Vietnamese married migrants to act up as mothers, wives, and good daughters-in-law, and the entitlements emphasized women's reproduction based on patriarchal family values. The organization actively participated in the governance system of the Korean state to transform foreign brides into immigrant women and multi-cultural family making. The assimilation program at a citizen center that I attended for participant observation had similar functions like the organization I described above.

The center's cultural assimilation program incorporates two state projects designed to empower the socially marginalized. One is a cultural assimilation project for immigrant women; the other is a welfare project for senior citizens. The center's assimilation program reflects the state policies to integrate foreign wives into Korean society. Like multicultural centers and NGOs that assist immigrant women in Korea, the premise of this center's program is that immigrant women would be quickly integrated into Korean society since they had entered Korea through marriage (Bélanger 2010). Marriage migration identifies women as the spouses of Korean citizens because of the mode of entry. The identification as a dependent constructs the women as secondary, not as new residents or citizens. Scholars criticize the cultural assimilation programs for their implicit intentions to Koreanize foreign wives by imposing Korean values and culture on them (S. Cheng 2011; G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013; J. Kim 2011; S. Lee 2012). This "coercive assimilation" (H. Kim 2007) consolidates the boundaries of the nation by

disciplining foreign wives into a “gendered sameness” (S. Cheng 2011). The legitimacy of the immigrant women’s stay in Korea is conditioned upon their social membership and roles limited to family (S. Lee 2012). The cultural assimilation program is a site where foreign wives are constructed as immigrant women, elevated to the status of legitimate cultural subjects who have earned the right to reproduce the traditional Korean family.

Conversely, elderly women, often treated as genderless and asexual, are instilled with the idea of dependency, no longer thought of as economically productive. The cultural assimilation program, as part of the state welfare project, was designed to empower elderly women by giving them something to do. The welfare project categorizes the elderly population based on the mode of (un)productivity that re-genders senior citizens. The senior women in the cultural assimilation program were multi-cultural educators who are trained to perpetuate the ideal of middle-class Korean womanhood. In a sense, the elderly women in the program are elevated to legitimate subjects similar to foreign wives in terms of their roles and contribution to gendering of citizenship. The cultural program is a disciplinary site in which women’s productivity and reproductivity, as dutiful subjects (E. Kim 2001), are channeled into state productivity (S. Cheng 2011).

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which gendered social membership is reproduced through the micro-negotiation between senior Korean women and Vietnamese women in a cultural assimilation program. This chapter shows the effects of the state policies to shape foreign brides through cultural assimilation and to empower senior citizens through job creation. The welfare policies have gendering effects on senior citizens; a local community center maximizes senior women’s labor to culturally

assimilate Vietnamese wives. The center, aided by the state, applies senior women's labor to the cultural assimilation of Vietnamese wives. Senior women and Vietnamese wives enter an educational site that consolidates Korean national identity and genders social membership. In the process, senior women are trained to become grandmother-managers<sup>99</sup> and Vietnamese brides are the objects of the management in which they are transformed from foreign brides to immigrant women. Senior women train themselves as managers by professionalizing their middle-class experiences of caring and educating unfit mothers.<sup>100</sup> For their part, Vietnamese women find ways to take advantage of the cultural assimilation program, even if they are under the management of the senior women. This chapter contemplates the limitation of the alliance among these women who are located differently along the lines of class, ethnicity, and generation.

### **Replacing Foreign Wives with Immigrant Women**

Numerous societies have seen the waning of the traditional patriarchal family, but family is still an important socio-cultural unit for state intervention into individual choices of marriage and reproduction (Lan 2008; Mesner and Wolfgruber 2006; Paxon 2004; Thomas 2003). Moreover in the global era, increasing transnational marriage practices have produced new forms of intimate unions and transformed the state relationship to family and citizenship (Constable 2003; Hirsch 2003; Padilla et al. 2008; Piper and Roces 2003). States, facing the declining and aging populations, have clear

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<sup>99</sup> Barbara Katz (1989), in *Recreating Motherhood*, discusses managerial mothers to describe middle-class American mothers who are working outside of the home full time. Nakano Evelyn Glenn (1994) calls them mother-managers (7). I have extended Glenn's terminology to grandmother-managers.

<sup>100</sup> I borrowed the idea of unfit mothers from Hsia (2007, 2009) and Lan (2008) who discuss the social construction of foreign wives as culturally unfit mothers in Taiwan.

interests in intervening into private decisions regarding transnational marriages and family, but cross-border marriage migrants and inter-ethnic citizens who are the results of commercialized transnational marriages challenge ethnically homogeneous national identity and citizenship in the host country (H. Lee 2008; Sheu 2007; Suzuki 2007; Tan 2008; Wang 2007).

H. Lee (2008) explains that Korea, an ethnically homogeneous and patriarchal state, nonetheless changed the Korean Nationality Act to accommodate the influx of foreign wives and the offspring of international marriage couples. In 2006, the Korean state proposed a Grand Plan and a Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Migrant Women, Biracial People, and Immigrants to integrate multi-cultural families but disregarding migrant workers (Ahn 2012; S. Cheng 2011; J. Kim 2011; H. Lee 2008). Apart from the destabilization of patriarchal family values coupled with the aggrandized belief in women's socio-economic empowerment, recent studies have noted that the state project of making multi-cultural families reproduces and sustains traditional family values and exclusionary citizenship in nation-building (H. Kim 2007; M. Kim 2008; H. Lee 2008).

The government's policies in the making of multicultural family reflect the Korean state's efforts to make a modern state in a global state system that qualifies internal difference of states (Abelmann and Kim 2005). However, the governmental policies for multicultural families are basically assimilationist. Its multiculturalism is a coded term in order to incorporate people of different ethnic or racial groups, establishing a cultural hierarchy between Koreans and non-Koreans (J. Kim 2011). The derogatory term, *Kosian* (a child of a Korean father and a non-Korean mother), demarcates and

contrasts the pre-modern, inter-racial, and working class family with the modern, Korean, middle-class family (Seol, H. Kim, and G. Han 2005). State policies and services have disciplinary and exclusionary effects on legitimate gendered subjects, by granting citizenship to foreign brides conditional upon their assimilation as dutiful wives and mothers, and perpetuating gendered and ethnically homogeneous Korean nationhood (S. Cheng 2011).<sup>101</sup>

According to H. Lee (2008), prior to 2004, the Korean government was not concerned about foreign spouses, but local governments and NGOs were. The governmental support for international marriages is a means of managing the rural population; thus, for the government, marriage migration is a family issue, not an immigration issue (Bélanger 2010).<sup>102</sup> The South Korean government has only recently begun to regard foreign brides as immigrant women (Bélanger, H. Lee, and Wang 2010). The National Assembly passed the Multicultural Family Support Law (2008) to provide services and programs to foreign wives and inter-ethnic/racial families (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013; J. Kim 2011). The government has funded NGOs and women's shelters to help foreign wives at the grass roots level.<sup>103</sup>

The state's immigrant policies show that ethnonationalism and multiculturalism are difficult to reconcile, and often contradictory (Bélanger and Wang 2008; Wang 2007). The rights of immigrant women are premised upon the women's roles within family. In Taiwan, foreign brides became the target of the state family planning, because they were

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<sup>101</sup> According to Korean Nationality Laws, a foreign spouse, who has a child with a Korean spouse, can be exempted for an official inspection visit by a government employee.

<sup>102</sup> In comparison to marriage migrant workers, A. Kim (2009) argues that the Korean government insists on "zero-immigration policy" (89) to control migrant workers' inflow, stay, permanent residence and limited citizenship.

<sup>103</sup> One of the NGOs' efforts was to change the term of foreign wives to immigrant women.

assumed to weaken the quality of Taiwanese. Foreign brides and their children become a threat to the Taiwan miracle because the brides came from poor countries (Hsia 2007). The Taiwanese discourse of population quality shows the ways in which gender, class, and ethnicity intersect in the making of citizens. Similar to the discourse of the new Taiwanese children, the new discourse of cultivating global talents (S. Lee 2012) in Korea shows the normative aspect in the making of multicultural citizens. Foreign wives are assumed to be biologically fertile but culturally unfit mothers because of the danger of their low class (Hsia 2007, 2009; Lan 2008) and genetic difference. Multicultural centers and cultural assimilation programs are the sites where foreign wives are trained to cultivate global talents.

Multicultural family support centers have been burgeoning in South Korea. There were 100 multicultural centers in 2008 and now there are more than 170. Five base centers link the central administration to the regional support centers (J. Kim 2011). They offer Korean language classes, job training, counseling, support groups, family life education, learning about legal, economic, and social systems in Korea at no or minimal cost. If NGOs are included, there were an estimated 700 centers in 2009 (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013). The senior citizen center in Happy City is typical of the centers and NGOs that transform foreign brides to immigrant women.

### **Senior Citizen Center: Gendering Silver Labor**

Gilbert (2006) explores governmentality in relation to older people to analyze the ways in which “individuals are identified, measured and segregated” on the basis of “self-managing” (75). The disciplinary role of the state is enabled by numerous experts and



their corresponding agencies collecting statistics that classify the elderly population under various categories: affluent, physically ill, mentally disabled etc. They are identified, measured, grouped, described, and interpreted into a variety of texts and distributed (Gilbert 2006). In the Korean state's welfare policies for the elderly, for example creating jobs for the elderly, its categorization or chart of the elderly population is based on productivity. Gender is an important category to delineate the modes of productivity.

The cultural assimilation program in the senior citizen center in Happy City was part of the state's attempt to empower senior citizens. The name of the program was *noin iljari changchul saup* (The National Project of Creating Jobs for Senior Citizens). The Ministry of Health and Welfare developed the project, and each year it expects to increase the number of jobs for Koreans who are more than 65 years old. The first plan created 35,000 jobs with revenue of 4,250 million won (approximately US\$40 million), and in 2005, the Ministry created 100,000 jobs. The jobs were specified under the rubric of public service, education-welfare service, and micro-credit (The Ministry of Health and Welfare Report 2005).<sup>104</sup>

The senior citizen center in Happy City ran 10 programs until 2008, and developed six more in 2009. All programs were funded by the local and the central governments. According to the interviews with the program staff, senior women were concentrated in the education-welfare or public service programs; senior men were clustered into the micro-credit programs. This tendency reflects the gendering of the

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<sup>104</sup> Apart from the positive appearance of the welfare plan for the elderly, their labor is temporary and no less than manual labor, paying 200,000 won (US\$180) per month. The state focus on the number of jobs rather than quality reflects a bureaucratic desk plan to remedy the ageing nation, not considering demands or differences in the experiences of the senior.

senior labor force, and such a gendering process continues in the state's organizing and distributing of silver labor.

The senior citizen center developed its cultural assimilation program in 2006, under the rubric of education-welfare service for senior Korean women to assist foreign wives who were residing in Happy City. It received three years of funding from the central government's social integration projects for foreign wives and multi-cultural families. The program staff expected the cultural assimilation program to be valuable for both senior women and immigrant women. The staff recruited senior women during the center's annual job expo, and selected 15 after interviews. Although the program was open to all senior women in Happy City, all of the participants in the program had upper middle-class backgrounds.

The cultural assimilation program in the center was a three-year project with seven-month periods each year offering a half day class (every Friday between 1:00 pm and 5:00 pm). The program was composed of Korean language, custom, cooking, and field trips. In the first year (2007), the program accepted foreign wives of any nationality, but the program staff concluded that the program might be more effective if they would serve one group of foreign wives at a time. Consequently, in the second year (2008) it recruited only Vietnamese women, and offered beginning and intermediate Korean language classes. In the intermediate group of 2008, the Vietnamese wives had been in Korea for one to five years. The program offered day care for small children, and student volunteers from a nearby university tended to the children in the back of the classroom during class.

Unlike programs in which a teacher taught different groups of marriage migrant women, the program at the center adopted one-to-one tutoring. The selected senior women were expected to be both teachers and mothers for their Vietnamese brides in and outside the center. In class, a Vietnamese woman and a senior woman shared a desk and participated in class, following the instructions from a daily assigned teacher.<sup>105</sup> Below is an example of a daily schedule:

[Daily Schedule: 05 September 2008]

13:00-14:00 Reading continued from last week: “Don’t Follow a Stranger”

14:00-15:00 Individual reading instruction and dictation test

15:00-15:30 Break and snack time

15:30-16:30 Korean custom: Learning members of an extended family

16:30-17:00 Sing along a children’s song: *ong-dal-saem* (small spring)

17:00-17:30 Staff meeting

In every class, a Vietnamese woman took a test, in which she was asked to read a paragraph from the textbook or write down words on the board in front of the class. The teacher usually encouraged Vietnamese women so that they would not feel embarrassed about not knowing how to read or write Korean perfectly. Their knowledge of Korean culture and language was tested, evaluated and rewarded by the teacher. At the same time, peers and program staff assessed the senior women’s effectiveness as teachers and mothers.

### **Grandmother Managers: Empowering Middle-Class Senior Women**

Katz (1989) describes mothering as intimate work. It is monotonous, dirty, arduous, isolating, frustrating work but also it brings the joy of creating people (Katz

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<sup>105</sup> Each senior woman, based on her teaching interests in Korean, cooking, custom, and singing, was supposed to play a daily teacher role during the program year.

1989, 9-10). However, middle class, educated American mothers have become “managerial mothers” who need to shoulder the physical and psychological burden from the double workload of full-time employment and the traditional mother role (Katz 137). Although Katz briefly discusses stratified child care labor in the United States, Glenn et al. (1994) emphasize that white, American, middle class women benefit from being elevated to the position of mother-managers and their benefits are buttressed by the racial and class division of maternal labor in US history.

How do we understand a middle-class grandmother’s mothering and care labor in South Korean culture and society? In what ways do middle class senior women benefit from being elevated to the position of “grandmother-managers” in relation to the position of foreign wives and rural mothers in globalizing Korea?

The elderly women may be assumed to be free from social obligations based on biology.<sup>106</sup> Despite the elderly woman’s freedom from her cultural shackles, in the assimilation program, senior Korean women voluntarily re-enact gendered social obligations to re-culture foreign wives. The senior women feel empowered when managing foreign wives in a sense that they are entitled to embody normative womanhood and to educate gendered obligations. Through caring—mothering and educating—foreign wives, the senior women rise to the position of grandmother-managers whose reproductive labor is categorized as productive and whose middle-class identity embodies normative womanhood.

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<sup>106</sup> According to Beauvoir (1989), an old woman is “in the autumn and winter of life that woman is freed from her chains; she takes advantage of her age to escape the burdens that weigh on her . . . [She is] freed from social obligations, dieting, and the care of her beauty. Rid of her duties, she finds freedom at last” (583).

*Professionalizing Middle-Class Experiences of Care*

The following newspaper article shows how a senior Korean woman feels empowered through mothering and educating a Vietnamese bride. Mrs. Roh, 72, participated in the cultural assimilation program. She gave an interview to a newspaper<sup>107</sup> about her experiences in the cultural program and then agreed to an interview with me. She said, “Since I consider her [a Vietnamese bride] like my real daughter or daughter-in-law, I sincerely do my best in teaching and taking care of her. If you don’t have such a belief, you can’t do this job.” The article described her roles:

Every Friday she plays multiple roles as a guardian, teacher, driver, and a grandma nanny for Nyungen (24). . . . Mrs. Roh does not feel tired despite doing all those jobs [since] Nyugen has improved Korean now saying “*pob jobsushōtsūmnika*” [an honorary form of “did you eat?”], instead *pob mugōsō* [you eat?] six months ago.

The newspaper article called the senior women in the program grandmother teachers. However, their roles are more like those of managers. In the program, the senior women intentionally avoided calling themselves grandmothers because *halmōni* (grandmother) is unprofessional. Instead, they were called as *ōmōhnim* (mothers) or *sōnsaengnim* (teachers), as Mrs. Roh emphasized her professionalism in teaching and mothering. In the interview, Mrs. Roh stated that making money should not be the primary reason for senior women to participate in the cultural assimilation program. She described her commitment to the program:

This program was created by the government to create jobs for senior citizens. But we get paid 200,000 Won [about US\$180] per month. It is just a small amount of pocket money for people like us. If earning money was the primary purpose, we should not have been part of the program.

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<sup>107</sup> Mrs. Roh allowed me to use her real name as it appeared in the newspaper. However, to protect other respondents’ privacy, I decided to omit the reference to this newspaper article.

She identified herself as upper middle class, differentiating herself from foreign wives (or rural Korean mothers-in-law). In addition, she claimed that taking money for helping others was demeaning. Mrs. Roh insisted that her work was a community or volunteer service, which signifies this differentiated middle class identity.

However, the pocket money that senior women receive from the center is not small if the working hours are considered. The minimum wage per hour in 2008 was 3,770 Won (about US\$3.20), and senior women worked four hours each week. Their hourly pay was 2.5 times the minimum wage. This compensation was generous, considering that most of the senior women had never been in the workforce. On the one hand, the middle class identity of the senior women de-materialized the paid care labor converting it to community service; on the other hand the title of cultural educators empowers the senior women when they were entrusted to teach foreign brides how to perform gender roles at home and for the community.

In the program, the senior women were trained to professionalize their experiences of mothering and educating to assimilate Vietnamese wives into Korean culture. Professionalization of care accompanied senior Korean women's mothering/teaching and re-culturing Vietnamese wives. In the cultural assimilation program, senior Korean women became cultural educators who disseminated middle-class notions of womanhood in teaching Vietnamese women, although some senior women felt ambivalent about seeing themselves as grandmother-managers.<sup>108</sup>

The criteria that program staff used to select qualified senior Korean women were based on their ability to perform care work professionally and teach Korean culture and

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<sup>108</sup> Some senior Korean women attended the cultural assimilation program to take advantage of the welfare project for elderly citizens.

language to marriage migrant wives.<sup>109</sup> The senior Korean women I interviewed identified themselves as *gajŏng jubu* (full-time housewife) when I asked their current profession.<sup>110</sup> Being a full-time housewife was both positive and negative qualification for their roles in the cultural assimilation program. The staff assumed the senior women lacked professionalism because most of them had never held a job, but expected the women to be qualified to professionalize care work because of their years of experience as full-time housewives.

In the training sessions, the program staff emphasized the senior women were to act professionally in and outside the center. The professionalization of the senior women involved training to become managers for foreign brides. The coordinators constantly evaluated the senior women's performances in class. For example, Ms. Kim, a program manager, attended every class to observe them, and asked the senior women to submit a weekly report on their assigned foreign wife's progress in learning. The senior women were also asked to regularly call the assigned wife's family to check that she arrived home before 6 pm.

The following example shows the ways in which senior women are viewed as unprofessional in the classroom setting.

In class, there was confusion about vocabulary, *inkyŏk* [personality or character], between a daily teacher and a few senior women. The daily teacher was trying to explain to Vietnamese wives learning cultural etiquette was related to 'building a character.'<sup>111</sup> Unable to agree on a definition, the senior women

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<sup>109</sup> The center selected senior women after interviews. There was no assessment of their cultural knowledge or teaching skills.

<sup>110</sup> Two of the senior women I met were widowed. None of the 15 women was divorced.

<sup>111</sup> Challenges to a daily assigned teacher were commonly seen in my observation of the program. The issues of spellings, meanings, and pronunciation of words generated disagreements among them during class.

decided to continue the class, leaving the Vietnamese wives confused.  
[Observation in a Cultural Etiquette Class 07-02-2007]

In response to this incident, Ms. Min. 35, the program director, raised the issue at a staff meeting.

Ms. Min emphasized the monetary reward that the senior women received from the program which was part of the state's policy, *no-in il jari changchul* (Creating Jobs for the Elderly). After reiterating the center's goal to empower the silver population through productive labor, Ms. Kim, 27, the program manager, added:

Dear mothers, our program is different from other cultural assimilation programs in Happy City. We recruited very qualified mothers and teachers, like you, so we expect each of you to play a birth mother's role as well as a teacher's role for your assigned immigrant woman. But, today in class I noticed that some of you did not take your role properly. I suggest you make more efforts to act like professionals.

Ms. Kim recommended that the senior women form a study group and work on self-training. In addition, she reminded the women: "be punctual," "no breaking away from the work site," and "clean the classroom before and after class." Then, she threatened to investigate those who were sitting in class only to receive money. She told them the center would deduct from their pay if they missed even an hour or would eliminate them from the next year's program. Ms. Kim emphasized the market logic of demand and supply because the center would have more senior women applying for the job in the following year so competition would be unavoidable if the senior women in this year's program wanted to keep the job. Although the senior women lack professional experiences, they were still legitimate cultural subjects because of their middle-class background, age, and expertise as housewives when they educated unfit mothers.



### *Koreanizing Vietnamese Wives*

In the assimilation program, the senior Korean women were regarded as qualified educators who culturally and socially assimilated marriage migrant women, into middle class womanhood. With the trope of cultural assimilation, the senior women sustained the gender regime based on “collectivist cultures” (Gilligan 1982) that emphasizes traditional gender roles and importance of passivity and self-sacrifice on the part of women in maintaining family relationships. The senior women believed that Korea accepted foreign wives as new members of society. However, the politics of culture locate Korea in the center in relation to the countries of Southeast Asian foreign wives. The notion of cultural proximity is imagined through the lens of gender, and a hierarchy of cultures between Korean and non-Korean is reproduced in the cultural assimilation program that constructs the normative cultural self and the gendered and classed cultural other.

The education curriculum in the program implies the intention to impose Korean values and culture on foreign wives (G. Chung and J. Yoo 2013). It reflects a political discourse that confines immigrant women’s cultural roles as wives and daughters-in-law and reproductive roles as mothers and caregivers (Lan 2008). It is also a site for constructing national identities. The following example shows the exclusionary construction of national boundaries in the senior women’s views on foreign wives.

On November 8, 2008, three foreign wives attended the program while 15 senior women came to class.<sup>112</sup> In class, the daily teacher led a lesson on a children’s story *kũn*

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<sup>112</sup> From late October and November in 2008, the attendance of Vietnamese women was low. The average number of attendees during that time was between three and seven except special classes, such as cooking classes and field trips.

*son halmõni mandu mandŭlgi* (Generous Grandmother Makes Dumplings). In the second class, they sang children's songs, *daramchwi* (Squirrel), *licharo kŭtnanŭn malŭn* (Words Ending with *li*), and *chumõk chigo sonppyŭk chwigo* (Closing Fists and Clapping). The senior women whose partners did come enthusiastically followed the daily teachers, reading books aloud and singing songs with gestures. During the first class, each foreign wife was called to read a passage and write down new vocabulary words on the white board. Once she finished her reading, the daily teacher encouraged her, saying "You did a great job! Keep up the good work. Then you will become a classy *buin* [Mrs. or Madame]." The teacher told another foreign wife, "Write 'I love my husband.'" When she did, the teacher laughingly said, "You did a good job, too. Now write '*urinara*' [our country]." The bride asked, "you mean, *urinara*?" The teacher responded, "Is *urinara* difficult [to write]? Since you came here, isn't Korea our country?"

The daily teacher assumed that the foreign wife would think Korea as "our" country since she was married to a Korean man. The bride was wondering whether *uri* was her country, Vietnam, or literal meaning. The teacher was surprised by the bride's confusion and reiterated that the bride belonged to Korea. The daily teacher's conception of national belonging for the Vietnamese woman was based on the patrilineal family tradition. The senior Korean's fictive kinship roles for Vietnamese women were changing in terms of national belonging. As H. Kim (2007) notes, this coercive cultural assimilation and reproduction of Korean family is based on the "mono-cultural imagination" (229) which leaves no room for differences.

Here is an example of coercive cultural assimilation. During a field trip for teaching the foreign wives Korean table manners, the senior women made a reservation

in a raw fish restaurant. Without asking the foreign wives about what they would like to eat, the senior women ordered *hoe dŏp pab* (raw fish mix on rice). A few wives began to place spoon and chopsticks for the senior women as they learned at home and other table manner classes. I was curious why they picked the restaurant since most Vietnamese women did not eat raw fish. When I asked a senior woman if she was aware of that, she said the brides were married to Korean men so that they needed to follow our Korean ways. The senior women's narrative of Korean ways reflects J. Kim's (2011) critiques of the cultural centers that construct multi-cultural Korea, signifying the society's hierarchical approach to solving the issues and challenges of cultural diversity. The senior women's insensitivity to Vietnamese culture indicates their society's uncritical understanding of cultural difference that masks structural inequalities. In the program, the hierarchy of cultures between Korea and Vietnam is constructed, conceptualized, and practiced. The hierarchical imagination of culture and practice engenders "cultural racism" (J. Kim 2011), which reinforces a hierarchy of cultures and buttresses Korean superiority in terms of the economic order in transnational Asia.

### *Educating "Unfit" Mothers*

The language curriculum in the program shows the ways in which foreign wives are infantilized. The curriculum is based on children's stories and songs. The curriculum of the assimilation program exemplifies the ways that marriage migrant women are imagined as infantilized and dependent subjects. The program staff, advised by professors from the social work department of a nearby university, created a textbook of children's stories and songs. The extracurricular visits to a culinary institute and lessons

in cultural etiquette, reflect how the social contribution of the foreign wives is limited to their cultural and reproductive roles.

Reading children's stories and songs might be an introduction to learning a new language. However, the content of the stories is deliberately chosen to reflect traditional gender roles in Korean society. In some cases, senior Korean women used the moral lesson from the children's stories to reinforce general ideas about runaway brides, by playing the role of gatekeeper. For instance, in a language class, senior Korean women and Vietnamese wives were reading a story, "Don't Follow a Stranger" (Trixi Haberland, trans. by Jo Youngsoo). The story was about a little girl who was exposed to dangers of kidnapping by following a stranger. After a few instances in which the Vietnamese brides did not go home directly after class, the senior women worried that one of the foreign brides would run away and the husband's family would blame the program. In class, the daily teacher identified the little girl, Lisa, in the story, with a Vietnamese woman being easily targeted by strangers (meaning dangerous labor migrant or brokers) who would lure her away from her husband with a false promise of employment.

The cultural authority of senior women reinforces their hierarchical relationship with Vietnamese women. The senior women's position as teachers relegated the foreign wives to the status of pupils. G. Han (2006) observes a similar pattern, asserting that infantilization of foreign wives by Korean husbands, in-laws, and neighbors indicate that the foreign wives are not treated as autonomous individuals. Similarly, in the assimilation program, Vietnamese wives' assigned relationships with the senior women reinforced their dependence.

The idea of dependent subjects constructs foreign wives as “unfit” or “potentially problematic mothers” who presumably do not know how to take care of their infants or children (Bélanger et al. 2010). For example, in a survey (Seol et al. 2005) funded by the Korean government, foreign wives were asked whether they had had their children vaccinated. The survey assumes that foreign wives are unfit mothers based on their ability to take care of and educate their children at home. The discourse of problematic or unfit mothers is relevant to the public anxiety about interethnic/racial children as potential social threats if they are not educated properly. These ideas are replicated in the extra curriculum of the assimilation program.

In August 2008, the participants in the assimilation program visited a center for children with learning disabilities. The purpose of the visit was supposedly to educate marriage immigrant women about community services available to help a socially disadvantaged group. Ms. Kim, the program manager, explained to me that the purpose of the visit was “to help marriage immigrant women envision their future roles in the community.” Her vision reflects the state’s agenda to transform foreign brides, dependent subjects, into immigrant women as valuable citizens, in this case good mothers. In contrast, I saw the center’s representative pressure foreign wives to consult with the center for their children’s learning (dis)ability.

In Taiwan, social discourse has produced the threats of non-Chinese migrants from underdeveloped nations and interethnic children to the quality of the population in Taiwan (Bélanger 2010; Bélanger et al. 2010; Hsia 2007, 2009). Foreign wives are assumed to be unfit mothers whereas interethnic/racial children are of an ambiguous status. The children belong to national families because of *jus sanguine*, but their

inadequate or incapable foreign mothers might jeopardize their potential as global talents according to the social discourse of the multicultural family in South Korea.

These attitudes towards immigrant women were observed in the language class. Senior women expressed concerns that foreign brides were not proficient enough in Korean to educate their children at home. In a review session, I observed Mrs. Kang, 65, scolding her partner bride, Eun-ju, 25, who was faltering over a passage.

[Observation of a Class in Senior Center 09-05-2008]

Mrs. Kang: “You need to do this. If you can’t read [in Korean] properly, you won’t be able to read this kind of story to your children. You become a bad mother, negligent of your children’s education.”

Eun-ju: “Later, Later. I learn.”

Mrs. Kang: “There is no later. Your first kid is already five years old. But her Korean is so bad.”

Eun-ju: [Smiling] It’s okay. [I’ll] teach [her] later.

Mrs. Kang: “No. You can’t. Look around at the other brides. They are studying hard! You need to do this for your children. You don’t want your children to be looked down on by people, right? Come on! [Pointing to the book]. Repeat this after me”<sup>113</sup>

Mrs. Kang’s pressure on Eun-ju reflects the social concerns about foreign wives as “unfit” mothers. It also reflects coercive assimilation that Eun-ju and her children must learn to fit into Korean society. In Mrs. Kang’s view, there is no notion that ethnic difference might be a valuable asset in a multi-cultural society. Rather, being different would hinder the children’s potential to become valuable citizens, which reflects the political rhetoric of multiculturalism in Korea.

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<sup>113</sup> I do not think Vietnamese women intentionally tried to raise their children bilingual. I think their children naturally learned Vietnamese by spending most of time with their Vietnamese mothers. In many social occasions, I observed their children picked up a few Vietnamese words.

The discourse of marriage migrant women as unfit mothers is related to the assumed social status of the family that the women marry into. According to the senior women, both foreign wives and their mothers-in-law are unfit mothers. They distinguished themselves from rural elderly women who had failed to teach Korean language and culture to their daughters-in-law. Some senior women acted as if they were responsible for enlightening both groups of women. In a Korean class, a daily teacher, Mrs. Pak, began with a story about her student, Tuyet, 20, whose face was burned when a portable butane gas container exploded. Mrs. Pak asserted, “It is our responsibility to educate our brides since her mother-in-law does not teach her properly.” Her tone was lamenting, almost self-critical. Mrs. Pak’s confession continued:

[Observation of Korean Class 10-25-2008]

Poor Tuyet! Now a big sorrow wells up in my heart. Because she is a foreign child, I am sad even more. I think I am also responsible for what happened to her. I did not know village people still burn garbage in their yards. We should have known that, so we could have told Tuyet about how to separate a gas container from garbage. She is industrious, clean and trying everything hard to meet her family’s expectation. . . . That day she got burned from cleaning up the house while her mother-in-law and husband were working in the field.

Mrs. Pak refers to Tuyet as a child to emphasize her innocence and dependence. Mrs. Pak addressed her peers using the word, “we” separating herself from the rural mother and the foreign bride. Although burning garbage in the yard was often seen in the outskirts of Happy City, Mrs. Pak implied that it was something that Koreans did not do. Mrs. Pak’s narrative matches the stereotypical images of foreign brides as poor, uneducated, and pre-modern with those of rural Korean mothers. The categorization of foreign wives and rural mothers as unfit mothers delineates the normative womanhood

embodied by middle-class senior women. Senior women had an enhanced sense of belonging in comparison to the racialized and classed other.

Senior women assumed rural mothers-in-law treated their daughters-in-law harshly. In an interview, Mrs. Sõ said:

I think only few mothers treat Vietnamese brides fairly. They should treat the brides fairly. The mothers should be more sympathetic to the brides. Imagine that the bride was her own daughter who married a foreign man and lived in a foreign country. Imagine how difficult for the daughter to settle there when she doesn't know anybody and she doesn't know the local language and culture. Rural mothers don't understand that because they don't put themselves in the bride's shoes.

Mrs. Sõ was apologetic, changing her statement that not all rural mothers were insensitive to foreign brides. She continued:

But, [foreign] brides are so young. They must have so many things they want to buy, like clothes or cell phones. My partner bride's mother doesn't understand that. She thinks it is unnecessary for the bride. She is so stubborn and narrow-minded.

Senior women's self-perception of being better mothers-in-law was sometimes contradicted in the interviews. In an interview, Mrs. Ha, 69, shared her thoughts about a mother's responsibility for raising a child and a wife's responsibility for supporting her husband. Contrasting herself to rural mothers, she emphasized how well she was getting along with her (Korean) daughter-in-law who married her son (a medical doctor). Her daughter-in-law had a master's degree and a career, but she quit her job when she was pregnant. She was staying home raising a child and supporting her husband. She praised her daughter-in-law's decision. Mrs. Ha expected a married daughter should follow the wishes of her husband's family. "The married daughter now belongs to *sijip* [her husband's family] so that she must follow the rules of *sijip*." In a way Mrs. Min's



understanding of the rules of *sijip* for married women is not much different from a rural mother whom she imagines to be pre-modern in terms of a married woman's obligation and responsibility only for the husband's family.

In response to my question as to whether she would accept a foreign daughter-in-law, Mrs. Roh, 72, said she was about to introduce a Vietnamese woman to her second son who was in his early forties. However, she emphasized that the Vietnamese woman was a college graduate who had been introduced to her by her friend in Ho Chi Minh City. Her attempt to marry her son off to the Vietnamese woman failed because her son said that he "would live and die alone rather than marrying a Southeast Asian bride." Mrs. Roh's failed matchmaking shows the normative practice of endogamy in terms of class background and education. Mrs. Roh concluded that the living standard of the Korean husband was a good match for a foreign bride, as a narrative of low *saengwhal sujun* [standards of living] shows.

Senior Korean women viewed the Korean husbands of the foreign wives had low standards due to their educational attainment, economic stability and job type. According to them, educational attainment and economic stability determined Korean men's social status. The senior women assumed that the socio-economically disadvantaged men had no choice but to marry a foreign bride. The senior women claimed that a rural Korean man and a Vietnamese bride could be well matched if they had similar backgrounds. In an interview, Mrs. Ha, 69, expressed her thoughts about Korean husbands and the possibility of unfair match-making:

The men's *suju* [quality] is very low. Nowadays [we] need money for kids' schooling. His family's economic *suju* is low, he gets less education, and consequently he has a blue color job. . . . I think a marriage agency should tell

brides about Korean men's *sujun*. He should be matched with a bride whose standard is similar to his.

Mrs. Ha condemned the profit-oriented matchmaking agencies that deceived Vietnamese women. However, she distinguishes herself from the family of low standards, and justifies the management practice to educate foreign brides.

By professionalizing their experiences of care, the senior women are entitled to the roles of teachers/mother to Vietnamese women. In the process they impose gendered meanings and practice of social membership on the younger women. The senior women, expected to be mother and teacher, take on the roles of grandmother-managers. The senior women may feel empowered by professionalizing care and Koreanizing Vietnamese wives. The gendering practice through re-culturing Vietnamese women has dual effects of gendering both groups of women since the senior women are being subjected to the making of ethnicized, classed, and gendered citizens.

### **Vietnamese Women: Negotiating Management**

Vietnamese women come to the program for a variety of reasons, such as to learn Korean language, to find a social network, or to gain access to resources. I met 15 Vietnamese women in 2007. When I re-entered the center in 2008, I met five new Vietnamese women, two of whom had been pregnant when they first attended the program. I met three of the 20 brides again at the Love Agency. Compared to those who just arrived in Korea, the women with children had more freedom since giving earned trust from husbands and/or in-laws. However, their in-laws still did not like the Vietnamese wives spending too much time outside of the home. Except for three women who were living in Happy City, the other women lived in the outskirts of Happy City;

their in-laws were farmers. The children of the women were between one and four years of age. There were three support centers in Happy City, and the day care service at the center attracted Vietnamese women with children. Cooking classes and field trips also attracted women to the center. Upon joining the program, Vietnamese women learned to negotiate the coercive cultural assimilation process, administered by senior Korean women. Simultaneously, Vietnamese women found ways to use the senior women's managing to advance their own interests, which I address in the following sections.

### *A Temporary Escape from Everyday Life at Home*

The Vietnamese women who attended the cultural assimilation program at the Senior Citizen Center were full-time housewives. Most of them were living in two- or three-generation households on the outskirts of Happy City. They became pregnant soon after joining their husbands in Korea. Through childbearing, the women gain trust from their in-laws, since reproduction for immigrant wives is an easy path to citizenship (S. Cheng 2011). It is also a gendered path to familial membership and status which gives the women more autonomy and mobility, as expressed by a Vietnamese wife:

My mother-in-law used to lock the door outside when she got some errands to run. I felt like I was a caged bird. The saddest thing about being locked was that my family didn't trust me. But after I got pregnant, my family treated me differently. I felt I was accepted to the family. . . As long as I take care of house chores, I now can get permission from my mother-in-law to go visit my friend or come to downtown during the day. (Hae-jöng, 24 years old)

Reproduction confers more autonomy, mobility, and trust, which is contingent upon the wives' dutifulness as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. But this conditional membership gives immigrant wives certain degrees of mobility, even limited in terms of the places and times they are allowed to go. The cultural assimilation program is one of

the places immigrant wives can get permission from their in-laws to visit. Gayöng, 22, expressed her excitement about the program:

I always look forward to Fridays. I have a free afternoon every Friday. My parents-in-law allow me to come here. After cleaning the house in the morning, I usually help picking tomatoes, but I don't have to on Fridays. As soon as I finish cleaning the house and preparing lunch for them, I am out of the house to catch a bus to downtown.

Vietnamese wives gained trust and mobility, through reproduction, and also through reproductive labor.

The accounts of Vietnamese wives show the ways immigrant wives take advantage of the limited resources provided to them. Vietnamese women mentioned the free services that the program offered and the ability to explore places without fees. Most of the women were financially dependent on their husbands and in-laws. The only expense was bus tickets, which was about 2000 won (about US\$1.80) for a round trip. Vietnamese wives felt free, even temporarily, with statements, such as “coming here is to catch two birds with one stone;” and “After the program, I can stop by the supermarket with friends. I don't have money, but it's still fun to look around.”

On some Fridays, when a field trip or cooking class was scheduled, the attendance of Vietnamese wives was very high. Some wives did not like the language classes.

Eunju, 25, complained:

I am not interested in the language class. I don't like sitting in classroom for hours. Sometimes I don't pay attention to the teachers in class. I feel awkward singing children's songs with motions. I feel like I am a three-year old girl. . . . I love field trips and cooking class! I wish we always have those classes instead of boring language and culture classes.

Vietnamese wives took advantage of free resources and felt more active in the extra-curriculum than in language classes. Another wife, Mi-yŏng, 21, made the following comment:

Interviewer: Why do you prefer cooking class to language class?

Mi-yŏng: I don't know. It is more fun. I feel I am more engaged in the activities. I usually stay home. So moving around makes me feel so good. I don't want to just sit and listen to the teachers.

Another Vietnamese wife expressed similar views on a culture class about family relations:

Interviewer: Do you think you learned something from the culture class today? How was it?

Su-ae: Yes. I think so. It is too difficult to remember all titles of family members. Are they really useful? It was funny to see the teachers were also confused about the titles. Sometimes I am not sure the language and culture class is what I really want. Why do I only have to learn Korean culture? (Su-ae, 32 years old)

Su-ae's question is similar to a foreign bride's response to the cultural assimilation program in a multi-cultural center in G. Chung and J. Yoo's study (2013): "how about Korean husbands trying to understand the culture of their wives coming from?" (248). Vietnamese wives feel more empowered when they perform as active participants, and feel powerless when they are recipients or treated as objects of the program.

Even though the program was focused on making them Korean wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, it was still a valuable resource for the Vietnamese women. The language class was meant to help Vietnamese women become better mothers. Consistent with G. Chung and J. Yoo's (2013) findings in their research on empowered foreign wives in the multicultural center in Korea, there were a few Vietnamese wives who

enjoyed competence and empowerment, feeling that they are “like Korean wives.”

Vietnamese wives came to the center not necessarily for their children’s education. A temporary escape from everyday life at home opens another possibility for them to expand their own social network.

### *Expanding Social Network*

Vietnamese wives expressed a strong desire to work in the future. Hyun-ju and Hae-jöng, who had been in Korea for three years, were looking for jobs through the program:

I speak good Korean. The Korean language class is too elementary for me. The reason I attend this program is that I want to find a job. My kid is going to be four years old, ready to go to a kindergarten. My teacher worked for the city hall, and she knows a lot of people. I hope I benefit from my teacher’s friends. (Hyun-ju, 26 years old)

I want a decent job. I don’t think my family will allow me to work at a factory or restaurant. Now I don’t know what kinds of jobs I can get. Maybe I can be a teacher like the teachers here. (Hae-jöng, 24 years old)

Hyun-ju and Hae-jöng envisioned becoming career women. Hyun-ju added, “I want to be a teacher . . . teaching Korean to Vietnamese brides. . . . I might be a better teacher [than the senior women] because I speak both languages.”

Vietnamese wives knew that their husbands and in-laws opposed them working outside the home. Vietnamese wives could find jobs easily in Happy City where there were many small and medium size industries and services. However it would be difficult for the wives to work full time when they were also responsible for domestic labor and child care. Thus, they strategically looked for a part time job that their family would approve of. Taking advantage of any available network with Korean people, they

envisioned a career even though there are not many decent job choices for immigrant wives.

The Vietnamese wives developed strategies to build relationships among themselves through the assimilation program. Before and after the program hours, three or four Vietnamese wives socialized. Yu-jin, 28, who had lived in Korea for three years, did not have many opportunities to make friends after she had her baby. She was excited about spending time with other Vietnamese friends after the program:

It took some time for me to figure out the bus schedule in the beginning. Now I know what time I need to be at the bus stop in my village, and what time I need to catch the bus going back home before dinner. I want to spend more time with my friends here, but I can maximize my time.

Eun-ju, living near the center, invited her close friends, including Yu-jin, to her home after the program hours. She had been in Korea for five years, and had a five-year-old daughter and one-year-old son. Her mother-in-law welcomed her friends<sup>114</sup>; her husband owned a tent shop. After the program hours, Eun-ju and her friends sometimes made Vietnamese food at home or went window shopping downtown before going home. They shared their life experiences in Korea, from familial conflicts to remittances. In addition, they discussed work and citizenship. Sharing secrets and their experiences as immigrant women made their bonds stronger. This kind of community building at home shows not only the women's survival skills but also a possibility of forging a larger community where they can make their voices heard.

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<sup>114</sup> There were a few Vietnamese women who had good relationships with their Korean mothers-in-law. Eun-ju was one of them.

*Navigating the Management*

The program was built on the one-to-one partner system which engendered both intimacy and surveillance. A senior woman was in charge of teaching/mothering her assigned Vietnamese wife. Caring created an intimate relationship between the two. Some Vietnamese women appreciated the senior women's understanding of their struggles at home. However, the senior women were responsible for keeping track of the younger women. One of the management techniques was calling the family of a Vietnamese wife to check whether she had arrived at home safely and on time. Some Vietnamese wives felt betrayed when they found that their teachers regularly called their in-laws and husbands to check on them. Xiu thought that her relationship with her teacher, Mrs. Ha, was falling apart because she suspected that Mrs. Ha was on the side of in-laws. Xiu, 23, said:

I thought our relationship was very close. I shared with her all the trouble that I had with my husband and in-laws. She was so sympathetic to me and encouraged me to stay strong. . . . Last week, my mother-in-law scolded me not studying hard enough at the center. I realized that my teacher [elder woman] has called my mother-in-law regularly to check on me. I felt betrayed.

I do not think Vietnamese wives knew that there were other surveillance techniques that the senior women were asked to use; for instance, the senior women were asked to write a daily progress report on their assigned Vietnamese wife. When Xiu found out about the phone calls, she told the other Vietnamese wives.

Some Vietnamese wives asked the senior women to arbitrate when they had a conflict with in-laws in relation to the assimilation program. When Su-mi's close friend ran away, her mother-in-law did not allow her to go to a field trip organized by the center. Su-mi, 20, recollected:



I couldn't believe my mother-in-law thought I was going to run away like my friend. I was very upset because I was not able to go to the field trip to a fishing village. I am even pregnant! The only person I could get help was my teacher, Mrs. Ha because my mother-in-law and husband trusted her. So I called her to persuade my mother-in-law.

In emergency cases like this, Vietnamese women asked help from senior women. Some Vietnamese wives confided to senior women about domestic violence and abuse. Pantien, 34, was abused by her husband's children who opposed their father's marriage to Pantien. Mrs. Sõ, 67, a senior woman, explained:

Pantien told me horrible stories about her step children. I kind of understand why they are upset with their father. He is 63 years old! He has four children from his previous marriage, and the oldest is 43 years old. They are so upset when Pantien got pregnant that they asked her to get abortion. She was pregnant again. That time, she had twins. She got another abortion. But this time she is too late to get an abortion. She is eight month pregnant! I have to say Pantien's husband is the problem! Shame on him!

Not having anyone to turn to, Pantien shared her problems with Mrs. Sõ, who listened to her and condemned her step children. However, Mrs. Sõ told the other senior women in the program. The senior women eventually found Pantien's husband and his children. They embarrassed him by revealing his identity. Pantien suffered too, when her husband and stepchildren assumed Pantien brought bad reputation to the family and forbade her to return to the center.

### *The Limit of Fictive Kinship*

Senior women showed their sympathy for the Vietnamese wives who had problems like difficult in-laws, homesickness, and economic instability. In the case of Tuyet, senior women collected some money to help her family. Some of them regularly visited Tuyet and shared her recovery with the rest in the program. Some women

identified with Vietnamese wives far away from their natal families and especially from their mothers. Their views on controlling mothers-in-law in rural areas reminded some women of their old days when they were struggling for status in their patrilocal homes. They understood the difficulties that Vietnamese wives might encounter.

The senior women are trained to convert their caring into managing Vietnamese wives, which entails competition and self-training. Some senior women felt ambivalent about their roles, and felt insecure about their performance in the program. For example, when two Vietnamese women did not show up for a field trip, Mrs. Kang, 65, explained the pressure of watching and reporting the Vietnamese women. Sitting next to me on the bus, she heavily sighed:

I am so worried that I did not tell Ms. Kim about what I saw yesterday. When I passed by Eun-ju's house, I saw the brides whispering. I had a gut feeling that they were planning something bad. I should have called Eun-ju this morning to make sure that she was coming. . . . I was curious why they were together yesterday. They must have some plans to ditch us. I doubt they would run away, but this is not right. I have been good to Eun-ju. I really don't know why she is doing this to me.

After calling the wives and their families, Ms. Kim, the program manager, confirmed they were shopping downtown. Everyone on the bus seemed to be relieved, and the bus driver started the engine. Mrs. Kang was telling me that she felt betrayed by Eun-ju. She often stopped by her house on the way home, bringing snacks for her and her children, as she said, "I treated them as if they are my own daughter and grandchildren." While feeling betrayed by Eun-ju's ingratitude, Mrs. Kang was concerned about her unprofessionalism.

Some Vietnamese wives felt welcomed and cared for by their teachers who treated them like their own daughters. Some wives built close relationships with their teachers and trusted them enough to share their struggles at home. Some women benefited from trust and

intimate relationship that they built with senior teachers. Hae-jöng, who wanted to be a teacher, was recommended by a senior woman to a part-time job in the city hall where she was working as an interpreter for Vietnamese immigrant women. However, as Pantien's case shows, some wives felt betrayed when teachers shared her personal stories with other women or when they felt that their teachers were hovering over them. In addition, senior women's paternalistic attitudes towards immigrant wives offended the Vietnamese women.

The relationship between a senior woman and a Vietnamese woman seemed superficial.<sup>115</sup> The management system and coercive assimilation of the program trained the senior women as grandmother managers. Thus Vietnamese wives become the object of a Koreanizing project that devaluates cultural differences. The middle class identity of senior women differentiated themselves from rural mothers and from the Vietnamese wives. Most of all, senior women tended to see Vietnamese wives as outsiders to Korean national family. The senior women's narrative of fate shows their support of the patriarchal family. Mrs. Ha, 69, ascribed Xiu's struggles at home to fate:

I gave advice to my bride when she was so sad about her current situation with her husband and in-laws. I said, 'It is your fate. Marrying your husband is your destiny. You have to accept it as it is. Then, you will have a better life someday.' But she wasn't convinced. She goes, '[my] mother-in-law [is] wrong, wrong.' So I told her, 'Don't say that. It is your fate coming across with her. She must have a good intention. So be patient. Then everything will be alright.'<sup>116</sup>

Mrs. Ha asked Xiu to endure hardship, rather than fight back. Senior women's narrative of fate resonates in their reference to an old saying, "A bride must endure nine years of

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<sup>115</sup> Senior Korean women seemed to be sincere when they expressed their sympathy for Vietnamese women who were far away from home and struggling with in-laws. However, their intimacy did not seem to develop further, although it could be said that my observation of their relationship was limited.

<sup>116</sup> I first met Xiu at Love Agency. Xiu (23), living with her mother-in-law, was married for three years and had a two-year old son and was pregnant. Xiu's mother-in-law did not like to see Xiu going out with her friends even during the day time. When Xiu's son was hospitalized because of a heart problem, the mother-in-law blamed his illness on Xiu's negligence.

hardship if she wants to achieve a status in her husband's family: being dumb for three years, deaf for three years, and blind for three years." When senior women sided with in-laws, Vietnamese wives felt the shallowness of the relationship that they had tried to build.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed gendered social membership as being reproduced in the relationship between senior Korean women and Vietnamese wives in the cultural assimilation program. I showed how two state projects intersect in the assimilation program: one is to culturally assimilate foreign brides and the other to utilize silver labor. The assimilation program is an educational site where senior Korean women and foreign brides are subject to the politics of gender and ethnicity. In the program, senior Korean women are trained to become grandmother managers while Vietnamese brides are the object of the management. Grandmother-managers try to transform Vietnamese brides into immigrant women whose roles are defined by normative womanhood: good wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. Senior Korean women's views on Vietnamese brides and rural mothers-in-law as unfit mothers show the ways that racialized classism is taking shape in multicultural Korean society. Middle class senior women are entitled to the position of grandmother-managers through professionalizing their care experiences to educate these unfit mothers.

I tried to show the ways that Vietnamese women find ways to take advantage of the cultural assimilation program, even if they are subjected to the management of the senior women. Vietnamese women attend the assimilation program for various reasons, not limited to learning Korean language or culture. The accounts of Vietnamese women

whom I encountered in the program indicate they enjoy more freedom and mobility because they have children and are in charge of reproductive labor at home.

Reproduction and domestic labor gave these women a path to a status in the family by gaining trust from their husbands and in-laws. In terms of curriculum, they chose the program because of extra activities and child care service. Joining the program,

Vietnamese women are subjected to the coercive cultural assimilation process, administered by senior Korean women. Simultaneously, Vietnamese women find ways to use the senior women's managing to maximize their own interests.

In the last section, I contemplated the bonds between the senior women and Vietnamese women. Meeting four hours per week for seven months, different techniques of surveillance, and management, did not seem to engender trust.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Negotiating Fictive Kinship: Korean Marriage Brokers and Vietnamese Women**

Scholars who specialize in marriage migrant women's settlement in East Asian host societies have not paid sufficient attention to the role of commercial matchmaking agencies in marriage migrant women's settlement in the host country. Most Vietnamese marriage migrants from the province of Can Tho from the 1995 to 2009 period who married Taiwanese and Koreans met them through matchmaking agencies (Bélanger and Linh 2011). In Can Tho, between 1995 and 2002, 90 percent of registered marriages were between Vietnamese women and men from Taiwan or Korea.<sup>117</sup> Media coverage tends to denounce profit-oriented marriage agencies either for taking advantage of poor women or for sexually objectifying prospective brides. Sensationalist terms are used to describe the broker's house, where women stay for matchmaking meetings, as "brides-to-be camps," "concentration camps for brides" or "a market of cheap human meat," only emphasizing human trafficking as part of the international matchmaking businesses (Hsia 2009; Lin 2012; Tsai 2011).

Few scholars have examined commercial marriage agencies and cross-border marriages in East Asia. Wang and Chang's (2002) findings on commercial marriage agencies in Taiwan and Vietnam show the brokerage system in cross-border marriages between Taiwanese men and Vietnamese women. Marriage brokers introduced the first Thai and Filipina brides to Taiwan in the late 1970s, and reached out to the descendants

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<sup>117</sup> When I visited a bride's home village in Vietnam, a relative half-jokingly asked me if I came to the village to find a Vietnamese groom. It would be interesting to find any marriages between Korean women and Vietnamese men registered in Can Tho.

of Hakka in Indonesia, and Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1990s (Wang and Chang 2002, 334). Nakamatsu (2003) argues that the development of Japanese matchmaking agencies is a result of the globalization and economic integration of the Asian region. Both studies show the inner workings of the matchmaking process and the marriage brokerage industry (Chee, Yeoh, and Vu 2012). Marriage agencies know the legal and immigration procedures involved in marrying a foreign bride and bringing her into the host country. They can take care of all procedures and financial arrangements, making themselves crucial for their clients. Their indispensable roles continue after the wedding and the migration of the bride to her husband's country.

Korean marriage agencies are heavily involved in marriage processes, from the recruitment of prospective Vietnamese brides and Korean grooms through their post-migration. My research on the Love Agency shows that Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives depended on the agency for matters such as Korean men's marriage trip, visa documentation, bank loans, health insurance, prenatal care, employment, language class, remittances, flight tickets, and Vietnamese food. Korean men trusted the brokers at the agency because of the brokers' ability to gain access to resources in regards to their wives' entry and settlement. Like the larger marriage agencies that promise their male customers that they would help a Vietnamese bride settle, the Love Agency guaranteed care-service to Korean clients after a match was arranged, as Chee et al. (2012, 103) similarly describe the "after-sales service" of Singaporean matchmaking agencies. The Love Agency emphasized post-wedding services to satisfy their customers. By earning the trust of their Korean customers, marriage brokers were able to create a surveillance system to monitor Vietnamese women's settlement. Many of the Korean

husbands I met did not know how to help their Vietnamese wives settle in, and the marriage agency was the only place where they could ask questions and obtain information. Vietnamese wives rarely have an extensive social network in Korea. They might have a sister or cousin living in another part of the country, but these women have limited mobility to travel until their children are old enough to attend kindergarten. Thus, the agency becomes a networking place for Vietnamese women because Korean husbands and in-laws trust them to keep the new wives safe and out of trouble while enabling the new wives to form a social network with other Vietnamese women. The social network at the agency becomes a means for the women to accumulate social and economic capital, for example, building network and seeking employment, as they settle into Korean life.

This chapter discusses the role of marriage agencies in Vietnamese women's settlement in Korea. This chapter uses my participant observation data to examine the business tactic of manufacturing fictive kinship<sup>118</sup> through which the marriage agency facilitates Vietnamese women's settlement. I argue that the making of this fictive kinship enables the brokers to justify parental protection for Vietnamese brides. With the fictive kinship, the brokers are able to intervene into the Vietnamese women's settlement. By imposing the idea of parental protection on both Korean husbands and their Vietnamese wives, the brokers attempt to control the women's reproduction and take advantage of their domestic labor as surrogate parents. Their parental protection emphasizes

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<sup>118</sup> Anthropologists have deconstructed the universal notion of kinship based on blood or affinal ties. Cross-cultural understandings of kinship ties prove kinship ties are not necessarily based on blood or marriage. In social settings, people in Vietnam and Korea refer to themselves and others in a form of fictive kinship ties, such as the use of honorific titles, usually based on gender and age.



hierarchical family relationships between parents and children, and thus the marriage brokers endeavor to require Vietnamese women to perform the same filial duties that their own daughters do. In some cases, the brokers even expect Korean husbands to respect them as parents-in-law.

Second, the chapter discusses the ways in which Vietnamese women manipulate the quasi-kinship ties for their own interests. The women individually or collectively assume the role of children in order to exact caring parental responsibilities from the marriage brokers. Vietnamese women maintain the kinship ties with the marriage brokers until they gain access to resources and forge their own social network. Vietnamese women bond with each other by sharing marriage migration experiences. The competition for scarce resources provided by the agency prevents the women from forming a collective that may help them manipulate and disrupt the disciplinary mechanism. However, they move on beyond the marriage agency once they have learned how to seek out opportunities by themselves.

### **Post-Marriage Migration, Marriage Brokers, and Fictive Kinship**

“Vietnamese brides call me Papa.” – Mr. Lee (Marriage broker, 50 years old)

“He [Mr. Lee] is not my dad. He is just a businessman.” –Tan (22 years old)

International matchmaking companies in South Korea have played a vital role in the development of the marriage market between Korea and Vietnam and Vietnamese women’s post-marriage migration. The marriage agencies assisted the state’s campaign, “Getting Rural Bachelors Married,” by organizing marriages between these bachelors and ethnic Korean women in China. In the early 2000s they expanded their market to

Vietnam where Taiwanese companies had already established an international matchmaking industry. There are few studies of the role of marriage agencies in post-marriage migration. Like cultural centers and NGOs that cater to marriage migrant women, matchmaking agencies offer “after-sales service” (Chee et al. 2012) to their clients in the early stage of the women’s settlement. The brokers at Love Agency were confident that they offered more help to their clients than cultural centers or NGOs did. They were also proud of their matchmaking practice.

The following is an excerpt from a forum for the police department, women’s NGOs, and marriage brokers, organized by the government of Kyöngbuk Province in December 2008. A marriage broker, Mr. Kwon, responded to an NGO director, Ms. Pak, who had blamed profit-oriented marriage agencies for domestic violence and divorces among the couples that they had matched. In response, Mr. Kwön emphasized his contribution to matchmaking men who were unable to marry. He had matched more than 300 Korean men with Filipinas since 2003. He continued:

People accuse us of violating human rights. But they are wrong about us. Our business is to save Korean men who are not able to find a Korean spouse. . . . Where can they find a spouse? Ms. Pak talked about human rights issues. How about human rights of disabled men? They have rights to marry, and we find brides for them. They thank us for what we are doing! [A Forum for Immigrant Wives 12-17-2008]

Ms. Pak suggested that the state regulate marriage agencies to prevent domestic violence against marriage migrant women. In response, another broker, Mr. Kim, argued that Korean grooms and their foreign brides trusted brokers more than they did any other multi-cultural centers or governmental agencies. Another broker who had himself married a Vietnamese woman added that marriage agencies were doing a better job in terms of care-service than local governments, claiming that Yecheon government had

helped 16 Korean men marry Vietnamese women and half of those couples had divorced. Marriage brokers emphasized Korean men's inability to find a Korean spouse and the human rights of disabled men to get married. They depicted unmarried Korean farmers as pitiful and rebutted the accusations of that matchmaking services were violating human rights. Mr. Kwōn concluded that the marriage agencies took care of the needs of the internationally married couples better than cultural assimilation centers did.

Most cultural assimilation centers had been established in response to the growing concerns about marriage migrant women's settlement. The marriage brokers' confidence comes from their business practice in managing their clients' needs before and after marriage. A marriage agency provides a variety of services. A couple manager (a euphemistic term for matchmaker), can, among other services, help a Korean man to receive a bank loan for his wedding expenses; he passes letters back and forth between newlyweds until the bride comes to Korea<sup>119</sup>; he delivers money to Vietnamese families on behalf of Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives; he brings Vietnamese food, goods, and gifts to Korea for Vietnamese brides; and he arranges visits home for Vietnamese wives. Most of all, these marriage agencies closely supervise Vietnamese wives after they join their Korean husbands.

The brokers working for the Love Agency regularly visited Vietnamese women's homes, as a way to serve their Korean clients. They were the middleman when there were disagreements between a Korean husband or his family and the new bride; they consulted a Vietnamese bride's in-laws in the case of divorce; they took a selected group

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<sup>119</sup> Love letters were not fabricated by brokers. Vietnamese women and Korean men wrote love letters to each other. Mr. Lee delivered the letters for them between Korea and Vietnam. Two Vietnamese women, hired by Big Madame, translated letters for Vietnamese women. In Korea, helpers at Love Agency translated letters for Korean men.

of Vietnamese women to multi-cultural family events in Happy City; they stood in for the bride's parents at the wedding. They also assisted with legal documentation, visa changes, and translations. Some agencies offer Korean language classes to Vietnamese wives, as Love Agency did. Brokers escort Vietnamese brides on their visits to Vietnam. Love Agency also sold Vietnamese food and products in its grocery store.

With these promises of care services to their clients, marriage agencies supervise the settlement of Vietnamese women in South Korea. For example, Love Agency had surveillance cameras in the grocery store where Vietnamese women shopped and socialized. They used the cameras to keep track of who was coming and going, even though they insisted the cameras were to prevent shoplifting. The surveillance management can also take the form of parental protection. Marriage agencies take advantage of Vietnamese women's lack of a social network in South Korea. Marriage brokers speak for Vietnamese women *in loco parentis*. Brokers even require that Korean husbands and families of Vietnamese brides treat them as their in-laws. Their parental roles sometimes resulted in violence against the brides, which was often accepted by their husbands and family-in-law.<sup>120</sup>

Love Agency, co-owned by Mrs. Choi, 51, and Mr. Lee, 50, was one of the large marriage agencies in Kyöngsang Province and had 14 couple managers who recruited Korean men. It was so well-known that in November 2008 the government of Happy City and a nationwide philanthropic group asked the agency to arrange for the mothers of

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<sup>120</sup> Those who had a conflict with a Vietnamese bride at home let the brokers exercise certain degrees of physical punishment onto Vietnamese women while the brokers were visiting their home. In Korea, corporal punishment by parents has been accepted as a way to discipline a child at home. However, I argue that the husbands and family-in-law were in complicit with the marriage brokers by letting them hit Vietnamese women who were adults.

Vietnamese brides to visit Korea to attend an event called “Mum I Missed You.” Love Agency had a business partner in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which worked exclusively for Love Agency. Mr. Lee was traveling back and forth between Korea and Vietnam organizing matchmaking meetings for groups of Korean grooms in Vietnam. Mrs. Choi was in charge of office administration, management, counseling, and documentation. She was also taking Vietnamese brides to doctors as needed. Mr. Lee and Mrs. Choi regularly visited their clients to supervise the settlement of Vietnamese brides or to solve family conflicts. Love Agency owned a grocery shop in the basement of the building. A couple manager made about US \$4,000 to 5,000 per match, and usually accompanied Mr. Lee when the groom went on the marriage trip. Love Agency shouldered the rest of the expenses for the marriage trip, which was about US\$13,000. Mr. Lee told me that they paid about US\$1000 per marriage to the Vietnamese broker, but the price could vary depending on the marriage agency.

In the next section, I discuss how Korean brokers at Love Agency used the rhetoric of parental roles to intervene in Vietnamese women’s settlement in Korea. By forming fictive kinship with Vietnamese brides, the brokers as parents claimed the rights to discipline and punish Vietnamese brides. In the name of parental protection the brokers construct a surveillance system.

### **Marriage Brokers and Making Fictive Kinship**

Marriage brokers at Love Agency claimed to have ethical responsibilities to take care of Vietnamese brides. Mr. Lee and Mrs. Choi acted as if they were biological parents of Vietnamese brides. They asked Korean husbands to bring their Vietnamese

wives to their office on the day they arrived in Korea. At the office, they emphasized their parental roles for Vietnamese wives, and care services to the Korean husbands and families. Vietnamese brides usually took a night flight to Korea, and their husbands brought them to Love Agency around 9:00 am. In one meeting, Mr. Lee told a bride to call him Dad. He continued telling her husband that the agency was willing to help the bride's settlement. He told the bride through an interpreter:

I am your Korean daddy. Don't worry about the new environment. I will help you to smoothly settle in Korea. Now you live with your parents-in-law, you need to make efforts to become a good wife and good daughter-in-law. Once you gain trust from your husband and parents-in-law, you will receive rewards, like helping your parents in Vietnam. Follow their ways. [To the groom] I have a few things to tell you. Be patient with her in the beginning. Tell your parents she needs time to adjust to Korea. Let her call her parents frequently. Don't force her to eat Korean food. But don't worry. She will eventually enjoy it. If you have any conflict, you should let us know first. As her daddy, I can scold her. [Observation at Love Agency 09-17-2008]

The care services that the agency provided their clients justified its intervention into the bride's settlement. Mr. Lee explained the role of a wife and daughter-in-law to the bride, urging her to follow Korean ways for rewards since he knew most Vietnamese women want to help their parents in Vietnam financially. He took advantage of Korean husbands' apprehensions about their new wives' adjustment to Korea. In addition, he encouraged the bride to depend on the agency because he knew she did not have a social network.

To justify care services, Mr. Lee often compared the agency to the cultural centers and NGOs in Happy City. Mr. Lee threatened the husbands and families that the bride would be vulnerable to bad influences from materialistic brides if they sent her to those organizations. Instead, he encouraged them to send the brides to the agency. By receiving permission from their Korean customers, the agency was able to supervise the

bride's settlement. Brokers play a quasi-parental role in relation to Vietnamese brides, which limits the women's sense of agency. The brokers at the agency volunteered to act as parents, which also made it possible for the brokers to intervene in family conflicts. In extreme cases, the brokers physically punished brides.<sup>121</sup>

Many marriage agencies held Vietnamese women's passports to prevent them from running back to Vietnam. Love Agency advised Korean husbands that the agency should keep the passports at the office so that the brides would not have access to them. They sometimes took a bride's passport with her husband's consent on the day she arrived. Korean husbands and families, worried that new brides would try to return to her family, acquiesced to the brokers' plan to keep them from traveling. By manipulating care for Vietnamese brides and service to Korean customers, marriage brokers justify their intervention in the bride's settlement.

Trust of Korean families sometimes works against the agency. Some families blame conflicts on the agency for making a bad match. For example, Siren's mother-in-law blamed the agency for pairing Siren with her son and asked the agency to refund the money she paid (see Chapter 4). When a bride ran away, it was difficult for the agency to avoid the blame from the Korean husband or his family, even if the bride was being abused at home. To appease their Korean customers, Love Agency offered them a 50 percent discount if they wanted to marry a different Vietnamese woman. However, in most cases, Korean husbands and families are complicit in the agency's control of

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<sup>121</sup> Mr. Lee and Mrs. Choi shared stories about how they physically punished some Vietnamese brides at their homes or office because they were too stubborn to listen to their advice according to them. One day, when we visited a Vietnamese bride's home, Mr. Lee took her to another room to scold the bride who wanted to attend her brother's wedding in Vietnam. I heard something was hit and then the bride was crying.

Vietnamese brides. In the following sections, I discuss the disciplinary system based on the agency's quasi-kinship with Vietnamese women.

*A Care Provider: Vietnamese Women's Reproductive Health*

Within a few weeks after a bride's arrival in Korea, Love Agency would advise her husband or his family to take her to a gynecologist/obstetrician (OB/GYN). Marriage brokers persuaded Korean husbands that a pregnancy would guarantee a Vietnamese bride's rapid and seamless adaptation to Korea. They claimed that a woman's maternal instinct and attachment to her children would prevent a bride from running away.

Mrs. Choi knew that most husbands were not familiar with OB/GYN clinics. According to my conversations with them, they were reluctant to participate in their wives' reproductive health which they considered a woman's private business. Since they had married late in life, most husbands expected to have a child soon, and assumed that their wives felt the same.<sup>122</sup> The husbands said they felt awkward about taking their Vietnamese wives to an OB/GYN clinic. One man said, "I don't want to go there. It's a women's place. I feel awkward." Some families living in rural areas welcomed marriage brokers who offered to take brides to a clinic. Thus, the marriage agency justified its control of Vietnamese brides' reproductive health.

By assuming a mother's role, Mrs. Choi managed Vietnamese brides' reproduction. Feigning a mother-daughter relationship enabled the Love Agency to supervise women's ovulation, pregnancy, childbirth, and contraception. Under the

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<sup>122</sup> Some husbands planned not to have any child. A Korean husband in a social gathering asked me how to calculate his wife's ovulation day to avoid pregnancy.



supervision of the marriage agency, Vietnamese women usually became pregnant within six months of their arrival in Korea. At the meeting for the local government, marriage agencies, and NGOs, a broker presented a chart that showed that Vietnamese women had the highest fertility rate among foreign brides in Korea. This high fertility may have resulted from marriage agencies' efforts to encourage the women's pregnancy immediately after they come to Korea.

The management of Vietnamese women's reproductive health is not limited to the agency. The government of Happy City designated a few OB/GYN clinics to provide reproductive health services to foreign wives. Mrs. Choi accompanied them on their visits to the clinic. At these appointments, the agency gathered information about a bride's menstrual cycle, use of any contraceptive pill, and any previous pregnancies. By doing so, Love Agency prevented a family from blaming the agency for selecting an infertile bride. By proving that the bride was fertile, the agency was able to blame the husband for the wife's inability to conceive. Vietnamese brides told me that they felt nervous about visiting the clinic because it was their first gynecological examination and they did not speak Korean fluently enough to speak to a doctor without an interpreter. With the doctor's acquiescence to the agency's scheme, Mrs. Choi had easy access to Vietnamese women's medical information.

During So-ra's appointment, Mrs. Choi discovered that So-ra, 24, was using birth control. So-ra's uncle was a physician in Vietnam, and had advised her to take the birth control pill until she was sure that her marriage was strong. Her uncertainty about her marriage to Jong-tae, a 35-year-old factory worker, was based on his comments on a child during his second visit to her home village in Vietnam. So-ra said, "I was worried

about our marriage because he said he did not want to have a child unless I adapt in Korea. . . . After he returned to Korea, I talked to my parents about my concerns. My uncle told me to take the pills.” She knew that a pregnancy might be a problem if their marriage ended. After finding that So-ra was on birth control, Mrs. Choi immediately told Jong-tae and accused So-ra of not being committed to the marriage. He disagreed with Mrs. Choi on this point but asked So-ra to stop the birth control because he mistrusted pills from Vietnam. In a social gathering, he said:

I was wondering why So-ra started having skin breakouts. When I saw her in Vietnam, her complexion was fine. After she came to Korea, she began to have pimples. Now I can figure that those pills were the cause of her skin problem. If she wants, she can take pills made in Korea.

Under pressure from Mrs. Choi and Jong-tae, So-ra had to stop taking the birth control pills. She became pregnant within a month.

A marriage agency’s intervention in Vietnamese women’s reproductive health is not confined to ensuring pregnancy. Mrs. Choi did not take Pantien, 34, to a doctor’s office. Pantien had married a 63 year-old widower who owned an herbal medicine shop in Happy City.<sup>123</sup> He had four children who fiercely opposed their elderly father’s remarriage. They did not want a step-sibling. Mrs. Choi did not take Pantien to the OB/GYN clinic because she doubted that Pantien would become pregnant. However, Pantien became pregnant with twins within three months of coming to Korea in 2006. Her husband’s children were furious. Consequently, Pantien’s husband asked the agency to persuade her to consider an abortion. Instead, Mrs. Choi told Pantien that there was something wrong with the fetuses and advised her to terminate the pregnancy. Pantien

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<sup>123</sup> I met Pantien at the Senior Citizen Center in July 2007. I met her again at Love Agency in 2008.

became pregnant again in 2007 and this time she did not tell anyone until she was five months along. She gave birth to a healthy daughter. However, under pressure from her step children, husband, and marriage brokers, she had a hysterectomy.

The Happy City government has mobilized its resources to help foreign wives settle in Korea. The OB/GYN clinics designated by Happy City provided free health services to foreign wives who did not have national health insurance. In a study by Seol, H. Lee, and S. Cho (2006), many foreign wives and their Korean in-laws reported that they did not know a foreign wife could be a dependent on their household's health insurance. Even when Korean husbands knew this, they did not want to incur their wives' medical expenses until they were eligible for national health insurance. It takes three months for a foreign wife to become covered by Korean health insurance. Many OB/GYN clinics in places like Happy City had gone out of business during the economic recession and because of the declining birth rate. The gynecological clinics lobbied the government of Happy City to become service providers for foreign brides. They maintained a close relationship with a marriage agency that would recommend them to foreign wives and Korean families. An OB/GYN clinic initially provides free services to foreign wives, but the women will continue to return to the clinic for reproductive health care. It is notable that reproduction is the only free health care service that the government offers to newly-settled foreign wives. The state focus on foreign wives' reproductive health shows that the women's social membership and citizenship are directly related to their reproduction. Local marriage agencies take advantage of free reproductive health services in the name of care services for their clients.

### *A Mediator: Family Conflict*

Marriage brokers act *in loco parentis* for Vietnamese women on social occasions. Attending their weddings in Korea as *honchu* (parents of the bride or groom) is one example. Since weddings in Vietnam are not formal, many Korean husbands had a wedding ceremony for parents, relatives, and friends, once their wives joined them in Korea. Because of travel costs, the parents of the bride could not afford to attend her wedding. The brokers at Love Agency played the *honchu* roles in wedding, and they brought a group of Vietnamese brides as bridesmaids. During the ceremony, the brokers sat in the seats of the bride's parents, escorted the bride to the groom, lit candles for the couple, taking family photos, and prepared *pyebaek* (a newlywed couple's formal greetings to their families in a private room right after the wedding ceremony). Through their social presence as the bride's surrogate parents, marriage brokers earn the trust from the bride's Korean in-laws.

At the Love Agency, the couple managers were required to visit the homes of the Vietnamese women they matched. Occasionally the families invited them to have dinner with them. Usually families called the brokers when there was some difficulty with the bride. Sometimes families brought a bride to the agency to settle an argument with her. Yet, the families living in rural areas preferred the broker's visit because of transportation was inconvenient. For potential customers, the Love Agency used their in-law relationships with Korean families to distinguish their care-service that from the services offered by women's centers or civil organizations. The agency's role as a mediator is possible through its role as the bride's parent.

Korean in-laws used the broker's visit to reiterate their expectations of the bride. During the broker's visit, the family's complaints usually pertained to food, fashion, international calls, housework, communication, personality, hygiene, manner, employment, and remittances. Korean families gave a bride confusing messages about her active and passive assimilation to Korean culture and custom. They expected a Vietnamese bride to submit to the rules of the patrilineal family (see Chapter 4). Marriage brokers sided with the families, and instilled those rules in the bride. In some cases, they physically punished a bride as if she was a child. Mr. Lee explained why they sometimes "had to beat" a bride:

What kind of a parent wants to beat his own child? I rarely touch our brides. But sometimes I have to when a bride is so spoiled or ungrateful to us. But even when I hit her it is more like a symbolic act. I exaggerate the sound or action, like hitting her back with my hand. It sounds so loud but it doesn't hurt her that much. I sometimes use a sofa cushion to exaggerate my action. It looks very rough. I am just trying to give her a lesson.

In a study by Côté, Kérisit, and Côté (2001), husbands and in-laws constantly remind the sponsored woman of the "sponsorship debt" that she owes them for their bringing her to the host country and keeping her there. Mr. Lee's statement shows the discourse of sponsorship debt applied to his parental role for Vietnamese women. He used violence and shame to remind a Vietnamese bride of her debt when he mediated familial conflicts.

Using violence did not always keep Vietnamese women in their marriage. Tai, 22, married Sang-kyōng, 45, in July 2007, and joined him in January 2008. Sangkyōng had been to Vietnam organizing tours for his customers, so that he thought that he knew enough about Vietnam and expected his marriage to Tai to succeed. As a college dropout, he said, "I am not like the uneducated men. Those men find a bride in a group-based match-making. . . . I picked the most beautiful and smart-looking bride out of the

pictures that the agency had.” To his disappointment, his marriage did not go well. Tai had a serious argument with him about getting a job, and ran away. She came back after working at a factory in Kim-hae City for a month. Sangkyŏng allowed Tai to work. When Tai tried to run away again, Sangkyŏng appealed to the agency. Mrs. Choi locked Tai in her house for a few days. Mrs. Choi described the night she brought Tai to her house:

I had to rim her out. I have known Sang-kyŏng for a long time. He is not a person who would just take her salary without any reason. Tai is so selfish. She does not appreciate how hard Sang-kyŏng works for her and how much he cares about her and her family in Vietnam. What kind of a man would allow his Vietnamese wife to work right away after marriage? How many husbands would accept a runaway bride? Last night he called me to appease Tai. She was threatening to leave him. Someone needs to discipline her. If her mother was there, she would have done the same thing that I did.

When Tai returned home, Sang-kyŏng found a factory job for her, had her pay deposited into his bank account. He promised to send a large sum to her parents instead of the small monthly remittance. He promised her that she could check her bank book whenever she wanted. She discovered, however, that he was withdrawing her money without telling her. He explained that his business was failing so he had to use her money to pay bills, but he was going to reimburse her soon. She was angrily packing when Mrs. Choi arrived at their home. The interpreter who witnessed the incident stated that neither Mr. Lee nor Sang-kyŏng tried to stop Mrs. Choi until Tai’s face was covered with blood and bruises. Mrs. Choi and Mr. Lee asserted it was their parental responsibility to guide Tai into the right path. Their discipline and punishment failed, however. Tai fled from Mrs. Choi’s house. When I met Sang-kyŏng a month later, he was filing for divorce.

Marriage brokers’ voluntary role as mediators in family conflicts serves the interests of the Korean families. When brokers visit a bride’s home, a bride is prohibited

from participating in the conversation between the brokers and her in-laws. As her family members expect her to be an active listener, the brokers ask her to be quiet. Mr. Lee sometimes talked to a bride in a different room. When we visited a bride's home, Mr. Lee told her husband and mother-in-law that he needed to talk with her privately. While we were in the living room, I heard Mr. Lee shouting and the bride sobbing. She came back to the living room with swollen eyes and did not say a word while we were there.

*An Educator: Domesticating Vietnamese Brides outside the Home*

Marriage agencies offered a range of care services to their customers. One of the care services Love Agency provided was a safe place for Vietnamese brides. It rented two floors in the same building: the second floor for its office and the basement for a Southeast Asian grocery store. There were kitchenettes on both floors. The agency let Vietnamese brides use the kitchen and the lounge in the grocery for social gatherings. However, the agency installed security cameras in the store so that brokers could monitor the women. Knowing that the agency would watch Vietnamese women, Korean husbands and families were comfortable sending the women to the agency during the day.

Marriage brokers made the agency into a learning space for Vietnamese wives. I often observed marriage brokers asking the brides to prepare lunch or serve drinks to them or guests. Brokers took it for granted that brides would wash the dishes and clear the table after meals or guest visits. Mrs. Choi viewed Vietnamese women's domestic labor at the agency as a learning opportunity:

The mothers-in-law in rural areas don't know how to teach Vietnamese brides how to cook and clean properly. It's important to keep the kitchen clean, but rural mothers don't have such a concept. Vietnamese women don't have it,

either. They make the kitchen so messy and dirty. I have to scold them very often.

Like the senior women in the cultural assimilation program (Chapter 5) who reinforced middle-class womanhood, Mrs. Choi asserted she was correcting Vietnamese women's womanhood by having them perform domestic chores.

Mrs. Choi was strict with the Vietnamese women who regularly came to the agency. She told them that Love Agency was providing them with a free lunch and space. The brides who did not comply with Mrs. Choi's requests knew they would not be welcomed at the marriage agency, and could lose what access they had to their network and its resources. One day during lunch time, I saw five brides prepare lunch for two brokers and two guests including me. The small kitchen was crowded, but each woman had a task: making kimchi soup and Vietnamese fish paste, delivering side dishes to the table, setting chopsticks and spoons, and arranging the table and chairs. The dining table was full, so we were separated into Korean and Vietnamese groups. While eating, Ms. Choi commented on the soup, the presentation of the food, sanitary issues, and manners. After lunch, the brokers asked the brides to bring coffee. Feeling uncomfortable, I tried to help them clear the table, but Ms. Choi ordered me to sit down. She claimed to be teaching the brides how to be wives.

The exchange between brokers and Vietnamese women is far from equal. According to my observation, Korean husbands and the families of the brides brought gifts to the agency to as signs of gratitude. Farmers brought fruit, vegetables, rice, or crops that they had harvested. For example, during the *Kimchang* season (a cultural practice of making a large amount of kimchi for the winter time) in November, the agency received so many kimchi boxes from their customers that it had to give them to



their acquaintances. Some husbands living in the city sent holiday gifts to the agency. The agency sometimes pressured the husbands who sent their wives to the agency during the day time to pay for their care. The agency never ran out food or supplies because of the food and gifts that their customers brought. Marriage brokers at the agency bragged about their parental roles for Vietnamese women and close ties with customers.<sup>124</sup>

The brokers impose kinship ties on Vietnamese brides. By defining their relationship as a parental one, the agency requires obedience from the brides. By infantilizing the Vietnamese women, the agency is able to take advantage of emotional support that the brides usually lack in Korea. In the beginning, the agency gives the impression that the brokers are helping the brides as their biological parents would. The brides might trust these brokers' good intentions. The brokers refer to themselves as mom and dad. Similar to Mr. Lee, 72-year-old Mr. Chin told a bride he matched, "Like your real dad, I am really concerned about you smoothly setting in Korea. But you also need to listen to me as you do to your parents. Everything will be fine as long as you listen to me." Mr. Chin could have exaggerated his role for the sake of the husband and an outsider like me. After the bride left, Mr. Chin bragged to me about the agency's care-services. He added, "I think of the Vietnamese brides as my real daughters. As a father, I think I should scold and correct them when they go in a wrong direction."

In this section, I have discussed the management system that marriage agencies develop in the post-marriage migration of Vietnamese women. I examined the disciplinary mechanisms that Love Agency developed by forming fictive-kinship ties with Vietnamese women. I showed the marriage brokers' rhetoric and practice of

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<sup>124</sup> The brokers said they gave the Vietnamese brides free lunch and space. In a way, Vietnamese women provided the agency their domestic labor.

parental protection in their control of the women's reproductive health, intervention into the women's family life, and domestic labor at the agency. In the next section, I will discuss the ways that Vietnamese women use the fictive kinship ties for their own interests.

### **Vietnamese Women: Faking Fictive Kinship**

Vietnamese brides do not have many places to go when they are newly settled in Korea. Sung (2012) notes that the social network of foreign brides in Taiwan is limited to their husbands, in-laws, and other wives from their native country. The Vietnamese brides in my study had small social networks and limited freedom of movement, particularly during the early years of settlement. Those who were living in the outskirts of the city or in remote villages usually stayed home, because they did not know how to use public transportation, or did not have bus fare. The women who lived in and near the city could take Korean classes in women's centers. However, a Korean husband or his family was generally reluctant to send a Vietnamese bride to the women's centers, influenced by marriage brokers' advice. In some cases, Vietnamese women preferred a marriage agency to women's centers because they did not like either studying with other groups of foreign wives or the curriculum. Vietnamese women came to Love Agency for social network, legal advice, Vietnamese food, or to ease their homesickness. In response to the agency's control, Vietnamese women devised individual and collective strategies to circumvent discipline and punishment, and to be the agentive actors of their own lives (Bélanger and Linh 2011).

*A Band of Sisters: Developing Social Networks*

The newly arrived Vietnamese women formed a social network through Love Agency. Every day, a group of Vietnamese women gathered at the grocery store where a Vietnamese cashier was working. They came to the store and stayed for a few hours during the daytime because marriage brokers rarely came down although the brokers watched them from their office through surveillance cameras. Often, a group of Vietnamese women purchased groceries from the store, and cooked Vietnamese food together. When Mrs. Choi and Mr. Lee were not in the office, which was very rare, they used the kitchen on the second floor. They sometimes purchased Vietnamese snacks or fresh tropical fruits brought by Mr. Lee from Vietnam, and shared goods and foods they brought from their home visits. In addition, the lounge at the grocery store was a place to watch Vietnamese TV dramas and music videos without any interruption from a Korean. Through these activities, Vietnamese brides became a band of sisters based on age, hometown, or length of marriage. The women who lived in rural areas quickly learned bus schedules, sometimes asking their husbands or father-in-laws for a ride to the agency.

At the agency, Vietnamese wives took advantage of the contacts with Koreans. Tsai (2011) similarly observes that foreign wives in Taiwan have built networks with native Taiwanese. The Love Agency was one of the few places in which Vietnamese women had contacts with Koreans. When I was introduced to Vietnamese wives at Love Agency, many of them expressed an interest in me. A few called me *unni* (big sister), asked to exchange phone numbers and invited me to their homes. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was sometimes confused when I received text messages and phone calls from Vietnamese women I barely knew. They said “I love you,” “I miss you,” “Come visit

me,” and “I like you.” I later realized that these phrases were the first Korean words they learned, and they used them to show their interest in getting to know me. They had few opportunities to meet people outside their network and the agency, so that anyone who was interested in getting to know them would be a resource.<sup>125</sup>

As the foreign wives at the Senior Citizen Center took advantage of their relationship with senior women, some Vietnamese wives at Love Agency took advantage of my interest in them as a way to maximize their mobility or to strengthen their network. As our friendship developed, it became easier for Vietnamese women to ask their husbands or mothers-in-law about meeting with me outside the agency. The following is an example.

I met Han, 24, who was very friendly on a picnic organized by Love Agency. She spoke Korean fluently, and expressed interest in my research. I was surprised when she invited me to her home after a 15-minute conversation. When I visited her home, I found she had also invited two friends from her village. As soon as I greeted her mother-in-law, Han asked her to allow us to visit her close friend who lived a 20-minute drive away. The mother asked me to bring Han home by 5:00 pm. I realized because of the inconvenient bus schedules, she needed a ride to see her friend. She also wanted someone that her mother-in-law could trust.

At her friend’s house, Han became a different person. She was not interested in conversation with her friends, and spent most of the time on the Internet in another room. Her friend, Long, 22, was living with her husband, and she invited her friends to come over without any in-laws keeping an eye on them. As 5:00 pm approached, I was anxious

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<sup>125</sup> The relationship that Vietnamese women built with Koreans could be fictive, too.

about getting Han home on time. Han and her friends dawdled. We were 30 minutes late, and Han's mother-in-law scolded us. After her friends went home, Han became reserved while I was talking with the mother. The mother reported our lateness to Mrs. Lee and Mr. Choi who became very upset with me.

Han took advantage of any available resources although my relationship with Han ended after the incident. Long and the other two friends were somewhat complicit in Han's plan for their social gathering, by getting a ride from a stranger. In a casual conversation with Han, I asked her what she would do after becoming a Korean citizen. "Driver's license!" she said. My research interest in the life of Vietnamese women was Han's opportunity to consolidate her social network to defy her mother-in-law at the expense of her relationship with me.

Tacit rules among Vietnamese women maintained their social network at the marriage agency, however. By spreading rumors, they could exclude any bride who was disrespectful to them or who sowed discord in the group. For example, Vietnamese women were sensitive about remittances and showing off wealth. If a bride broke the rules, the other brides ostracized her.

One day at the grocery store, I noticed that Rung, 22, who had been in Korea for only two months, looked sullen. She was watching TV alone while the other six wives were playing Monopoly. Rung had come to the agency every day, but had not joined any of the women's groups. She had been bragging about how much money her husband and in-laws gave her for pocket money, taxi, and food. Her family in Vietnam had recently won US\$10,000.00 in a lottery, and she boasted about it to everyone at the agency. At a social gathering, Min-hŭi, 21, explained to me that Rung had become a troublemaker.

According to her, Rung was hurting other women's feelings because she was so insensitive to their financial struggles:

Every time Rung comes to the agency, she shows off something. Her husband buys fried chicken for her every night, he gives her 10,000 won (about US\$8.00) every day, her parents-in-law give her money to take a taxi, and her family in Vietnam is building a huge modern house with the lottery they won, and so on. Today she bragged about her new cell phone that her husband bought for her. But she shares nothing with us. This is why we don't like her. I wish she did not come to the agency anymore.<sup>126</sup>

Rung's arrogance made the other brides uncomfortable. They either ignored her or gossiped about her when she was not around. When a few brides shared the gossip about Rung with their husbands, some husbands became very upset with Rung because their wives were actually comparing them with Rung's husband. A Korean husband, Ho-sik, 36, and his wife, Mai, 19, got into an argument because of Rung, and Ho-sik called Mr. Lee and told him to keep a closer eye on the brides. Otherwise, he would not send Mai to the agency anymore. After receiving more complaints from Vietnamese wives and their husbands, Mr. Lee called Rung to the office and reprimanded her. No Vietnamese woman comforted Rung, who left the office in tears. She was ostracized from the women's groups at the agency and eventually stopped coming.

#### *Performing a Favorite Child: Searching for Resources*

Vietnamese brides knew that the agency had resources they might need, so they tried to maintain good relationship with brokers. In an emergency, they might have to ask the brokers for help even if the brokers sided with their in-laws. They also knew the consequences of causing trouble for the agency. Thus they found ways to manipulate

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<sup>126</sup> This quote indicates the disappointment of most brides who thought their life would be enhanced by cross-border marriages.

fictive kinship ties with marriage brokers. Sometimes, they called Mrs. Choi and Mr. Lee Mom and Dad and pretended to appease them.

Vietnamese women could gain a variety of resources from a marriage agency. They texted each other about when Mr. Lee was expected back from Vietnam. Mr. Lee usually brought tropical fruits and goods to sell in the grocery store. The day after Mr. Lee's return, more brides came to the agency to purchase tropical fruits, fermented eggs, ham, duck ham, or other products that were hard to find in Happy City. Sometimes, a few Vietnamese women flirted with Mr. Lee to get free Vietnamese snacks or fruits. One day I saw Dau, 23, and Tu, 24, trying to cajole Mr. Lee into giving them a durian<sup>127</sup>:

Dau: "Ah, Daddy, [smiling] I want to eat durian. It smells so good. Let's eat together."

Mr. Lee: "I don't like it. It stinks. If you really want it, ask the other brides to chip in to buy one."

Tu: "Daddy, it's too expensive. We don't have money."

Mr. Lee: "But I treated you guys to snacks last time! Ask your husbands."

Dau: "You are our Daddy! You should buy it for us."

Mr. Lee: "I can't win with you guys! Bring a knife to cut the durian."

On that morning, Xeong, 20, working at the grocery store, contacted her friends about Mr. Lee's return date and his mood. A few women living close to the agency arrived at the store within 30 minutes. Dau and Tu persuaded Mr. Lee to get the durian by treating him like their father. Mr. Lee was in a good mood after matchmaking four couples in

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<sup>127</sup> People in Southeast Asia consider the durian as the king of fruits. Its husk is covered with thorns, and the edible flesh has a strong odor. A durian costs 45,000 dong (about US\$2) per kilo in Ho Chi Minh City in comparison to 15,000 won (US\$15) in Korea.

Vietnam. They also knew that Mr. Lee would be more generous to them in the presence of an outsider like me. They learned to mimic the kinship ties that the marriage agency created. Thus, Dau and Tu acted like girls around Mr. Lee. In some cases, the brides flirted with husbands who visited the agency to get them to buy snacks, and when that did not work, they compared them to other husbands.

The Happy City government and civic organizations asked Love Agency to participate in events related to Vietnamese women's settlement and multicultural families. Its infrastructure spread across business, social, and familial ties in Happy City. Therefore, Vietnamese women did not want to be excluded from the agency and miss out on possible opportunities such as employment.

Vietnamese women knew the benefits of being popular at the marriage agency. For example, the owners of the agency were often invited to meetings with government officials or civil organizations that helped foreign wives and multi-cultural families. To show off their solicitude for Vietnamese women, the owners brought a group of Vietnamese brides to those meetings. They suggested having the meeting at pork or duck BBQ restaurants, which they used to show off how much they cared about their clients. For the meetings, they chose their favorite brides who could be considered role models for other immigrant women. The brokers took the brides to events for multi-cultural families. At the "Happy Festival for Multicultural Families," the brides were to have received gifts and prizes, like a set of bowls and pots. For another event, they selected a few Vietnamese brides to take to a singing festival for foreigners in Happy City. The



agency not only received permission from the families of the selected brides but also they offered transportation. The brides practiced singing for a week to win prizes.<sup>128</sup>

The families of the women usually welcomed opportunities provided by the agency, such as free meals, so they allowed their wives and daughters-in-law to go to the events even during dinner time. It was an opportunity for a Vietnamese bride to go out, eat for free, and spend time with their friends, even if they were supposed to behave according to the brokers' expectation. At meetings, they intentionally called Mrs. Choi and Mr. Lee Mom and Dad. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to observe many Vietnamese women regularly come to the marriage agency to please the brokers in the hope of benefitting from more resources and opportunities.

#### *Dissonance between Sisterhood and Competition*

Vietnamese brides build networks and help each other, manipulating the kinship relationships that brokers constructed for them. At the marriage agency, the women bond by sharing secrets, acting collectively, and supporting each other, especially during the early stage of the settlement when they have few places to go. However, they have to compete for limited resources offered by the agency, which sometimes interferes with their friendships.

The competition among Vietnamese women over limited resources weakens their solidarity, and a bride can be excluded from their social network. Hyun-mi, 25, was one of the marriage brokers' favorite brides. I noticed, however, that she did not have any close friends in the agency. She usually spent time with brokers in the office, and did not

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<sup>128</sup> The agency's selection of a group of favorite brides for the governmental or civic events has disciplinary effects on the brides.

often come to the grocery store. According to Mrs. Choi, Hyun-mi was lucky because she was married to a man from a wealthy family. She was one of the role models, because she was easy-going and friendly but also obedient to their parents-in-law. On a picnic for 30 couples organized by Love Agency, Hyun-mi volunteered to sing a Korean popular song. The Korean husbands were impressed with Hyun-mi's outgoing personality, and some of them wished that their wives were more like her. Mrs. Choi and Mr. Lee invited her to weddings as one of the bridesmaids and to numerous social and cultural events for marriage migrant women sponsored by the local government and civil organizations in Happy City. Although Hyun-mi had been in Korea for about two years, Love Agency promoted her as a model Vietnamese wife. She did her best to be popular with the brokers, but the agency's favoritism eventually excluded her from the Vietnamese women's social network.

The agency used the brides' network for their own benefit. The agency paid a finder's fee to any bride who introduced her friends, sisters, and cousins to the agency. Bélanger (2010) observes a social network formed by a pioneer immigrant spouse acting as a go-between who finds a husband for her sister or a friend who subsequently migrates. The brides who did not work or make their own money were tempted to make introductions and make money through the agency.

Some women used matchmaking for other reasons. In the summer of 2008, the Love Agency was helping a philanthropic group that planned to invite 15 Vietnamese brides' mothers to Korea. The rumor was that the agency had assigned five slots for the event. The Vietnamese woman had to have lived in rural Korea for more than three years, given birth to at least one child, and lived with parents-in-law. Once the news spread,

more Vietnamese women came to the agency's office in the hope of impressing Mr. Lee and Mrs. Choi. Yo-han was one of them. She introduced her younger sister to the agency. Without getting a US \$150 commission, she pleaded with Mr. Lee to find a good man who was relatively young, financially stable, and not the first son in the family. Struggling with her own marriage, Yo-han wanted a better match for her sister. Mr. Lee promised Yo-han he would find the best husband for her sister and added Yo-han's mother to the guest list. Han, 24, a close friend of Yohan's, living in the same village, also came to see Mr. Lee, and was very upset when she found the agency had not included her mother even though she met the criteria.

Some of them mobilized their family members to persuade the brokers to choose them. Hyun-mi frequently visited the agency despite the inconvenient bus schedules. She asked her father-in-law who was an influential person in his village to visit the agency, with two boxes of tomatoes he had recently harvested and to express the family's strong interest to invite Hyun-mi's mother to Korea. The agency complied.

Hyun-mi was not qualified for the event according to the selection criteria. Moclan, 30, one of the older wives, complained to me about the agency's selections. "Hyun-mi has been in Korea for less than two years. She also went to Vietnam last year." Another older wife, Noc, 26, added, "I have lived with my mother-in-law in the village for more than four years! I have a two-year-old son. I have not been back to Vietnam for two years. I don't understand why Mr. Lee chose Hyun-mi."

Animosity between Hyun-mi and older brides at the agency deepened. Hyun-mi told the other brides, "Vietnamese women are easily jealous of each other." At the event, Hyun-mi, as a role model, represented the Vietnamese wives in Happy City, reading a

letter to her parents in front of the audience. By succeeding in competition for a limited resource, Hyun-mi jeopardized her friendship with other Vietnamese women.

Job opportunities at the agency made Vietnamese women compete against each other. Love Agency hired two Vietnamese women for the office and grocery store. Many Vietnamese women expressed their desire to work there. Their Korean families were afraid of runaway brides so they did not want them to work, especially in the places they did not trust. Therefore, working at the marriage agency for Vietnamese women was a win-win situation: bringing in some income without a family conflict. When the job vacancies were announced in winter 2007, many brides visited the agency in the hope of impressing Mr. Lee and Mrs. Choi.

In the summer of 2008, the agency hired Dau, 21, and Trang, 24. Both of them were living in rural areas. Dau had been in Korea for less than a year, living with her mother-in-law. Trang had been in Korea for three years, living with her parents-in-law and a brother-in-law. The brokers hired Trang for the office job because of her fluency in Korean, her physical attractiveness, her three-year old daughter, knowledge of Korean food, and outgoing personality, which, they believed, would impress people coming to the agency. For example, the brokers told the customers that a child between a Vietnamese bride and a Korean man, like Trang's daughter, was as cute as any other Korean child. In contrast, Dau had been in Korea for less than a year, and her Korean was not fluent. But the agency hired her based on her looks, believing that Dau could pass as Korean, and because of her amiable personality. Trang was well-liked by the other women because she was older, and no one resented Trang for getting the office job.

In contrast, many brides complained that Dau had gotten the other job by flattering the brokers.

Not only do Vietnamese women have to risk their friendship and social networks when competing for the jobs at the agency, but they could be easily replaced at the brokers' whim. Dau and Trang worked at the agency for four months, and were then replaced by the other two brides who had a closer relationship with the brokers. Dau and Trang were very upset when they found out they were going to lose their jobs within a month. Although they were underpaid, they enjoyed the economic independence and mobility. Dau and Trang, who enjoyed shopping for new clothes, could go downtown and enjoyed spending time in the city. They could not protest the brokers' decision although they were very disappointed. Concomitantly, their experience of economic independence and freedom from domestic chores propelled them to seek additional employment opportunities. Trang struggled to get permission from her parents-in-law who wished her to stay home, but eventually she found a factory job near her village. Dau's mother-in-law opposed Dau's intention to continue working after she quit the job at the agency. In spite of her mother-in-law's opposition, Dau started working as a helper at a restaurant in a town near her village.

For Dau and Trang, economic independence was important but they found factory or restaurant work demeaning. Dau was too embarrassed to tell anyone except her close friends that she was working in a restaurant. I did not see Dau in the agency for several months. On the day that Dau visited her friends at the agency, she was dressed as a young urban woman, in full make-up, big earrings, necklace, manicured red fingernails, a mini skirt, and high heels. Her outfits shocked the brokers because she was defying their

authority by abandoning the image of the innocent and naïve rural Vietnamese bride. It also meant that she was no longer welcome at the agency. In a way Dau had taken revenge on the brokers for the layoff and asserted her independence. Dau did not come to the agency after that. Tang and Wang (2011) explore the ways in which employment empowers foreign wives, by improving their language skills, social networks, and financial independence, even though it is likely to increase family strife. After losing jobs at the agency, Trang and Dau wanted to find other ways to gain access to resources and to expand their own social networks outside of the marriage agency.

### *Moving Beyond the Marriage Agency*

When a Vietnamese wife has a child or finds a job, she rarely comes to the agency unless she needs immediate help with something like a visa. Gradually, marriage brokers' fictive kinship with Vietnamese wives withered when Vietnamese wives stopped coming to the agency. Giving birth in her patrilineal family guarantees a Vietnamese wife more mobility because it is a proof of her commitment to the marriage. As long as she performs her domestic chores, she is allowed to spend her free time during the day wherever she likes. The family's control over her slackens. In Happy City's downtown, it is common to see a group of Vietnamese brides with their children walking or shopping together. Marriage brokers had told the wives' families that Vietnamese migrant workers might target a Vietnamese bride for sex if she wandered around downtown even with a child on her back. Mr. Lee stated that migrant workers "seduce our naïve brides to make them their sex toys." He then impersonated a migrant worker who was trying to convince a Vietnamese bride to run away with him: "Your husband is too old. Leave him. I can

make you happy. I will help you to find a job.” However, after a bride gave birth to children, Korean families were less suspicious that she would run away. She did not have to obey the agency’s rules as she had before.

Cell phones made it possible for Vietnamese wives to build their own network beyond the agency. Korean husbands and families would purchase a cell phone for a Vietnamese wife to keep track of her by calling her, reading the texts that she sent and received, or checking the numbers that she called (Some couples reported that they did become closer by texting and calling each other during the day). Women devised ways to circumvent the surveillance of the family and the agency. For example, they used an English key pad to text each other in Vietnamese so that their families and marriage brokers did not understand what they were saying.

When Vietnamese wives were allowed to go out without their husbands, they tried to do so as much as possible. Rather than coming to the agency, they went downtown in groups of two or three even when they had only enough money for bus fare. Wives who had started working could make excuses to spend more time outside the home. After starting to work at a factory, Li, 24, came downtown whenever she could. She began a new kind of social life that she had never imagined. She met other Vietnamese people, and had an affair with a Vietnamese migrant worker. She did not consider a divorce.<sup>129</sup>

Vietnamese wives knew the consequences of running away or getting divorced. Like Li, many of the wives were ambivalent about running away because they were

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<sup>129</sup> Li’s case shows how marriage and emotional and sexual satisfaction can co-exist with two men.

aware of hardships that it entailed.<sup>130</sup> Trang told me, “I don’t know why people think we want to run away once we start working. We don’t want to run away. How about kids? We know we will have so much trouble after running away. I know what kind of life an undocumented worker has in Korea.” For Vietnamese wives, getting a job is not necessarily an escape from their marriages.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the fictive kinship ties between marriage brokers and Vietnamese women in post-marriage migration. Marriage brokers maintain a management system to monitor Vietnamese women’s settlement and intervene in the women’s family business. By creating fictive kinship, marriage brokers can manage women’s private lives, even their reproductive health. By assuming parental roles, they gain the trust of the Korean in-laws and are allowed to discipline and punish a recalcitrant bride.

A marriage agency can be a hub for foreign wives to build their own social network, especially during the early settlement process since it provides a variety of resources. At a marriage agency, Vietnamese women can individually and collectively act against and exploit fictive kinship ties with marriage brokers for their own interests. I showed that the women’s social network at the agency follows tacit rules. Because of the limited opportunities at the agency, Vietnamese women have to compete against each other, which sometimes weakens their solidarity. Once a Vietnamese woman has a ground for her social network, she no longer needs the marriage agency and moves on.

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<sup>130</sup> The runaway brides I knew left their children behind. Li and Trang expressed their concerns about the future of their children if they ran away with children.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this dissertation has been to discuss how commercialized marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women developed, as well as to elaborate on the kinds of politics that influenced the social integration of Vietnamese in South Korea. To explore these topics, I proposed three research questions: 1) What national and international factors enabled the commercial marriages between Korea and Vietnam 2) In what ways are Vietnamese women exposed to different politics of subject-making in Korea? 3) How did the women develop strategies to negotiate daily politics and achieve social membership in different social settings? This concluding chapter summarizes my major findings and addresses the contributions of my study to the relevant research fields.

#### **Key Issues and Contributions**

This dissertation examines the politics of cultural proximity embedded in cross-border marriages between Korea and Vietnam, as well as reinforcing patriarchal gender roles for Vietnamese brides. I have argued that the commercialization of cross-border marriage migration between Korea and Vietnam is a social site where the idea of cultural proximity between the two countries is constructed. I have shown that the notion of cultural proximity was imbued with exclusionary and disciplinary politics of culture that encompassed both public and private spheres of Vietnamese women's settlement in Korea. My empirical study revealed the ways that the politics of cultural proximity was

articulated in different social contexts where Vietnamese wives negotiated patriarchal gender roles, ethnic identity, and social stratification.

My inquiry into cultural proximity in relation to the marriage migration phenomenon comes from the regionalization process in Southeast/East Asia. The economic integration in the region has transformed the political relationships among nation-states, for example, the normalization between socialist and capitalist countries. I explained that the changes in the political and economic relationship between Vietnam and Korea in the 1990s had spurred labor migration and marriage migration. I argued that the notion of cultural proximity was constructed in Korean people's imagination and views of Han-Viet marriages and Vietnamese women's assimilation in Korea. I showed the workings of the politics of cultural proximity at the sites of transnational encounters.

My research shows that the myths of racial purity in Korea are changing. The emergence of multicultural discourse in Korea, due to marriage migration, indicates the national identity based on racial purity is in transit. In response to marriage migration, the Korean government has implemented multicultural policies to integrate marriage migrant women and their children into society. However, many scholars have critiqued the multicultural policies since the underlying ideas in these guidelines are based on compulsory cultural assimilation and hierarchical views on ethnic differences. Those views negatively construct multiculturalism in which immigrant women and interracial children are viewed as problematic social members rather than contributors to the society. I argue that the views and practice of compulsory cultural assimilation in relation to Vietnamese women's settlement indicate the myths of racial purity are still reinforcing the idea of the ethnically homogeneous nation.

My study challenges the stereotypes of men involved in international marriages. My analysis of Korean men's narratives of becoming a normal man was to reorient the assumed male experiences in traditional migration studies. Studying gender should not be limited to the study of women. Very little research has revealed the multiple positions and strategies that those men have in their marital lives. My study of Korean men shows the construction of masculine subjectivities and identities across transnational topographies of marriage and family. Men's views on international marriages and foreign spouses indicate the ethnocentric national identity is stretching. However, they still desire normalcy in their intimate relationships, as their imagination of cultural proximity between Korea and Vietnam indicates.

My study contributes to the understandings of the formation of the transnational family in rural Korea. Gender and generational dynamics in rural families have been changing. Vietnamese women's entry to rural families reveals that the patriarchal ideology, combined with the ideas of hypergamy with transnational mobility between Korea and Vietnam, defines marriage migrant women's membership in family. A Vietnamese bride realizes that earning the trust of Korean in-laws is important to achieve membership and access to resources beyond her home. I argued that different from popular ideas about runaway brides, running away or leaving marriage was not an easy decision at all for Vietnamese wives. They often chose to negotiate the disciplinary practices at home in order to craft their lives in Korea.

Previous scholarships on cross-border marriages have revealed the structural and institutionalized inequalities of a global capitalist economy in relation to women's marriage migration. In addition, the western notion of marriage based on romantic love

has been disseminated and reinforced by global media and literature. When the notion of economic mobility is conflated with the western notion of romance and marriage, non-western forms of marriages are lacking love, demoralizing, and suspicious. In this framework, the women involved in international marriages are portrayed as opportunists or victims of the sex industry or abusive husbands. In my study, Vietnamese women who chose commercially arranged marriages expressed their desire to improve the economic conditions of natal families through marriage migration. However, the women's motivations for international marriages should not be reduced to the economic motivation. Additionally, expressing economic mobility in marriage should not be interpreted as fake marriages. Many Vietnamese women managed to continue their marriages to Korean men, and their marriages tell us that romance, love, and marriage do not have to be linear.

Recent studies have critiqued the stereotypical representations of the foreign brides and their assumed transnational mobility through marriage migration. Many Vietnamese women came with preconceived expectations about Korea. The women's experiences tell us their marriage migration does not necessarily guarantee them transnational mobility. For those who settled in rural areas, their class positions were not upgraded. In fact, for those who had to stay home, their economic independence was downgraded. For many immigrant women, the social views on foreign brides and inability to speak Korean fluently contributed to downgraded self-worth. Although Vietnamese women's social ties in Vietnam were not entirely severed by marriage migration, they found ways to settle in the Korean society when they perceived their migration was hard to reverse. Vietnamese women experienced conflicting forces of disempowerment and empowerment through their interactions and relationships in the

social arenas, such as family, community, and work. The women were disempowered by patriarchal family gender norms in Korea, but they felt a sense of empowerment from their awareness of new abilities in adapting to a new environment, finding a job, and upgrading their status in the natal families.

My analysis of a cultural assimilation program contributes to the assessment of multicultural policies and programs that serve marriage migrant women. Assimilation programs, usually state-sponsored, provide one of the limited resources available for immigrant women in the host society. Following public campaigns to replace the term foreign brides with immigrant women, the programs and centers have made efforts to empower these immigrant women. My study shows that a cultural assimilation program can be a disciplinary site gendering both senior Korean women and Vietnamese women. The senior Korean women's assumption of the immigrant women's entry at the lower rungs of the economic stratification systems in Korea shows the construction of Southeast Asian wives as "unfit" mothers.

Intra-Asian marriage migration has been known for two characteristics: feminization of marriage migration and mediated marriages through marriage brokers or social networks. There has not been much discussion about the role that the marriage agencies play in women's settlement process. My study showed that both men and women who were married through matchmaking services depended on a marriage agency for resources and information, especially during the early years of the women's settlement. By creating fictive kinship, the agency intervened in family affairs and volunteered for overseeing Vietnamese brides' settlement. The agency's control of limited resources and surveillance had disciplinary effects on Vietnamese wives. Many

women took advantage of the marriage agency until they no longer needed the agency to develop their own network.

Broadly, this dissertation contributes to the study of transnational migration, citizenship, and gendered agency in cross-border marriage migration in the disciplines of humanities and social science. In particular, my research called attention to the transformation of family, reproduction, and citizenship in the interplay of state intervention, transnational migration, cultural assimilation, the impact of the market economy on marriage practice, and the gendered agency of individuals who cross borders to marry. Most literature on global marital migration has had a tendency to be attentive to the routes between the West and the East. By focusing on cross-border marriage migration from Vietnam to South Korea, my dissertation challenged troubling presumptions about West-East trajectories. The results of my study are critical and timely as industrializing countries in Asia have been facing regional migration.

### **Suggestions for Policies on International Marriages**

The South Korean government has revised the laws to control the numbers of international matchmaking businesses. At present, a marriage agency must hold a license to continue their matchmaking service. To eliminate malpractice of matchmaking businesses, the government should require matchmaking agents to attend ethnical programs to acquire and maintain a business license. Moreover, the government should consider introducing an educational program, addressing cultural differences, and providing legal processes, multi-cultural centers, and medical benefits for their spouses, which is mandatory for prospective Korean grooms. A mandatory education program for

Korean men may help the men understand the benefits and challenges in commercially arranged international marriages and help prepare them for the settlement of their foreign spouses.

During my fieldwork, I observed there was not much networking between local centers and the NGOs that provided programs to marriage migrant women. Multi-cultural centers should be the hub for those centers and NGOs in order to be more effective and systematic in providing services to these women. Legal service, day care, shelter, and employment opportunities at multi-cultural centers would serve marriage migrant women's interests. It would be important to provide transportation services or bus fares to marriage migrant women to attend any programs they need. Those services help the women to become independent from marriage agencies after marriage migration.

The illegality of group matchmaking in Vietnam makes the marriage process more difficult for Vietnamese women. Marriage brokers or hotel owners already know how to prevent their houses or hotels from police raids. It might be more effective to find ways to make the matchmaking process more transparent in order to reduce maltreatment of prospective brides. In Vietnam, international human rights groups and NGOs have circulated pamphlets and brochures, for instance, at the Korean embassy in Ho Chi Minh City. These provide the information about help centers for prospective marriage migrant women. The government should require prospective brides to take an educational program in local communities, which will provide more accurate views on matchmaking processes and international marriage migration.

## **Future Research**

In my study, I have tried to show the ways Vietnamese wives engage in daily practices that sometimes challenge the opposite forces of power structures, but other times reproduce and reinforce existing social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and class. The women's conflicting experiences in the settlement process exemplify the complexity embedded in the lived experiences of marriage migrant women. In this light, I would welcome scholarship increasing interest in the complexity and empirical variations in marriage migration and settlement processes. The reconfiguration and negotiation of power relations of gender, ethnicity, and class is an aspect of the complex process. Very recent sociological studies provide interesting insights into the ways that emigrant daughters experience enhanced status and power at home mostly through remittances. Their findings show that young women's marriage migration has resulted in a skewed marriage market and an increased preference for having girls to boys. For future research, therefore, it would be interesting to know how women's cross-border marriage migration affects gender and sexual politics in the sending countries. Research on the impact of marriage migration on the sending countries would provide another piece to the puzzle that would help us to understand the complex picture of marriage migration. Studies of women's participation in the workforce, divorce, political empowerment, and inter-ethnic/racial children's identity negotiation would require further research.



## APPENDIX 1

### Statistical Data: International Marriage and Divorce in South Korea

**Table 1. International Marriage Registration by Nationalities of Foreign Wives 2003-2013**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total</b>	18,751	25,105	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163	25,142	26,274	22,265	20,637	18,307	<b>100.00</b>
<b>China</b>	13,347	18,489	20,582	14,566	14,484	13,203	11,364	9,623	7,549	7,036	6,058	<b>33.1</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	1,402	2,461	5,822	10,128	6,610	8,282	7,249	9,623	7,636	6,586	5,770	<b>31.5</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	928	947	980	1,117	1,497	1,857	1,643	1,906	2,072	2,216	1,692	<b>9.6</b>
<b>Japan</b>	844	809	883	1,045	1,206	1,162	1,140	1,193	1,124	1,309	1,218	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Cambodia</b>	19	72	157	394	1,804	659	851	1,205	961	525	735	<b>4.0</b>
<b>US</b>	322	341	285	331	376	344	416	428	507	526	637	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	345	324	266	271	524	633	496	438	354	323	291	<b>1.6</b>
<b>ETC</b>	1,544	1,662	1,744	1,813	2,079	2,023	1,983	1,858	2,062	2,116	1,906	<b>10.4</b>

**Table 2. International Marriage Registration by Nationalities of Foreign Husbands 2003-2013**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total</b>	6,025	9,535	11,637	9,094	8,980	8,041	8,158	7,961	7,497	7,688	7,656	<b>100.00</b>
<b>US</b>	1,222	1,332	1,392	1,443	1,334	1,347	1,312	1,516	1,632	1,593	1,775	<b>22.9</b>
<b>China</b>	1,190	3,618	5,037	2,589	2,486	2,101	2,617	2,293	1,869	1,997	1,727	<b>22.6</b>
<b>Japan</b>	2,250	3,118	3,423	3,412	3,349	2,743	2,422	2,090	1,709	1,582	1,366	<b>17.8</b>
<b>Canada</b>	219	227	283	307	374	371	332	403	448	505	457	<b>6.2</b>
<b>Australia</b>	109	132	101	137	158	164	159	194	216	220	308	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	12	10	28	47	61	61	49	67	93	180	279	<b>3.6</b>
<b>ETC</b>	1,023	1,098	1,373	1,159	1,218	1,254	1,267	1,398	1,530	1,611	1,746	<b>22.8</b>

**Table 3. Numbers of National and International Marriages 2003-2013 (Unit 1,000)**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total Marriages</b>	302.5	308.6	314.3	330.6	343.6	327.7	309.8	326.1	329.1	327.1	322.8	<b>100</b>
<b>International Marriages</b>	24.8	34.6	42.4	38.8	37.6	36.2	33.3	34.2	29.8	28.3	26.0	<b>8.0</b>
<b>Korean Man+ Foreign Woman</b>	18.8	25.1	30.7	29.7	28.6	28.2	25.1	26.3	22.3	20.6	18.3	<b>5.7</b>
<b>Korean Woman+ Foreign Man</b>	6.0	9.5	11.6	9.1	9.0	8.0	8.2	8.0	7.5	7.7	7.7	<b>2.4</b>

**Table 4. International Marriage Divorce by Nationalities of Foreign Wives 2003-2013**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total</b>	547	1,567	2382	3933	5609	7901	8246	7852	8349	7878	7588	<b>100.00</b>
<b>China</b>	247	835	1425	2538	3654	5398	5562	4705	4783	4204	3797	<b>50.0</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	28	147	289	610	895	1078	1292	1552	1931	1992	2057	<b>27.1</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	43	108	140	165	213	268	285	299	328	395	435	<b>5.7</b>
<b>Japan</b>	89	114	116	147	157	205	227	259	292	254	259	<b>3.4</b>
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	16	67	75	105	112	160	174	174	133	141	158	<b>2.1</b>
<b>Cambodia</b>	0	4	6	19	99	178	109	167	192	180	152	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	12	42	36	33	59	85	113	128	137	129	133	<b>1.8</b>
<b>ETC</b>	85	250	295	316	420	529	484	568	553	583	597	<b>7.9</b>

**Table 5. International Marriage Divorce by Nationalities of Foreign Husbands 2003-2013**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total</b>	1465	1733	1789	2203	2685	3079	3227	3236	3146	3009	2892	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Japan</b>	1113	1309	1306	1466	1587	1556	1628	1638	1466	1396	1196	<b>41.4</b>
<b>China</b>	34	43	123	319	647	1041	1064	1025	1139	1051	1080	<b>37.3</b>
<b>US</b>	219	260	217	235	257	238	263	277	270	233	249	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	9	15	25	33	35	32	35	38	51	49	55	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Canada</b>	19	11	21	29	24	34	29	43	32	52	48	<b>1.7</b>
<b>Taiwan</b>	4	11	11	12	16	23	36	29	24	23	33	<b>1.1</b>
<b>ETC</b>	67	84	86	109	119	155	172	186	194	205	231	<b>8.0</b>

**Table 6. Numbers of Divorce 2003-2013 (Unit 1,000)**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Percent
<b>Total Divorce</b>	166.6	138.9	128.0	124.5	124.1	116.5	124.0	116.9	114.3	114.3	115.3	<b>100.00</b>
<b>International Divorce</b>	2.0	3.3	4.2	6.1	8.3	11.0	11.5	11.1	11.5	10.9	10.5	<b>9.1</b>
<b>Korean Man+ Foreign Woman</b>	0.5	1.6	2.4	3.9	5.6	7.9	8.2	7.9	8.3	7.9	7.6	<b>6.6</b>
<b>Korean Woman+ Foreign Man</b>	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.2	2.7	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.9	<b>2.5</b>

All tables modified from Korean Statistical Information Service (2014).

## APPENDIX 2

## Interview Respondents

## 1. Vietnamese Wives in 2008

Name	Entry Year	Age (Spouse)	Education (Spouse)	Job [in Vietnam] (Spouse)	Household Type	Child (Age)
<i>Ara</i>	2008	26 (43)	9 (12)	Factory [Factory] (Factory)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Bich</i>	2005	30 (41)	12 (12)	None [Factory] (Factory)	Joint Rural	M (3), M(1)
<i>Cam</i>	2008	28 (45)	8 (12)	None [Garment] (Security)	Joint Urban	*F (14), Pregnant
<i>Dau</i>	2008	23 (43)	6 (12)	Helper [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Eun-ju</i>	2003	25 (42)	6 (12)	None [None] (Tent Shop)	Joint Urban	F (5), M (1)
<i>Feng</i>	2007	22 (37)	12 (16)	None [None] (Office)	Joint Urban	Pregnant
<i>Ga-vông</i>	2007	12 (46)	9 (12)	None [Factory] (Factory)	Joint Rural	F (3 months)
<i>Hae-jông</i>	2005	24 (40)	6 (12)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	F (3)
<i>Han</i>	2005	24 (40)	6 (12)	Factory [Hair Salon] (Factory)	Joint Rural	M (3)
<i>Hvun-ju</i>	2005	26 (43)	9 (12)	Factory [Maid] (Store Helper)	Joint Urban	M (2)
<i>Hvun-mi</i>	2006	25 (40)	6 (14)	None [Garment] (Office)	Joint Rural	M (8 months)
<i>Li</i>	2006	24 (42)	6 (9)	Factory [None] (Junk Shop)	Couple Rural	None
<i>Lien</i>	2006	23 (41)	12 (12)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	F (1)
<i>Long</i>	2005	22 (41)	9 (14)	None [None] (Restaurant)	Couple Rural	F (2)
<i>Mai</i>	2008	19 (36)	6 (12)	None [None] (Truck Driver)	Joint Rural	Pregnant
<i>Min-hui</i>	2008	21 (36)	6 (12)	None [Cashier] (Office)	Couple Urban	Pregnant
<i>Mi-vông</i>	2007	21 (43)	6 (12)	None [None] (Unemployed)	Joint Rural	M (6 months)
<i>Moclan</i>	2004	30 (45)	9 (12)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	M (2)
<i>Noc</i>	2004	26 (40)	9 (12)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	M (2)
<i>Pantien</i>	2005	34 (63)	3 (6)	None [None] (Hural Shop)	Couple Urban	F (1)
<i>Rune</i>	2008	22 (41)	6 (12)	None [None] (Bus Driver)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Siren</i>	2008	19 (42)	6 (9)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	None
<i>So-ra</i>	2008	24 (35)	9 (12)	None [Garment] (Factory)	Joint Urban	Pregnant
<i>Su-ae</i>	2005	32 (40)	6 (9)	None [Garment] (Unemployed)	Joint Rural	M (2)
<i>Su-mi</i>	2008	20 (41)	6 (12)	None [None] (Farmer)	Joint Rural	Pregnant
<i>Tai</i>	2008	22 (45)	9 (12)	Factory [Garment] (Tour)	Couple Rural	None
<i>Tan</i>	2008	22 (33)	12 (14)	None [None] (Paint Shop)	Joint Urban	None
<i>Trang</i>	2005	24 (42)	9 (12)	Factory [None] (Delivery)	Joint Rural	F (3)
<i>Tu</i>	2007	24 (42)	6 (12)	None [Garment] (Factory)	Couple Urban	F (8 months)
<i>Tuyen</i>	2006	26 (46)	5 (12)	None [Hair salon] (Factory)	Joint Rural	F (2 months)
<i>Tuvtet</i>	2008	20 (40)	9 (12)	None [None] (Farmer)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Uu</i>	2008	39 (59)	4 (6)	None [None] (Security)	Couple Rural	None
<i>Xeong</i>	2008	20 (41)	9 (12)	Helper [None] (Office)	Couple Urban	*F (13), Pregnant
<i>Xiu</i>	2005	23 (41)	6 (9)	None [Garment] (Factory)	Joint Urban	M (2), Pregnant
<i>Yo-han</i>	2003	25 (43)	6 (12)	None [None] (Delivery)	Joint Rural	F (5)
<i>Yu-lin</i>	2005	28 (40)	4 (12)	None [None] (Factory)	Joint Rural	M (2)

The names in italics indicate those who received Korean citizenship. In terms of children, F=female child, and M=male child. \*F means a daughter from her husband's previous marriage. Joint household is referred to a family composed of two- or three- generations.

## 2. Korean Husbands in 2008

Name (Spouse)	Age (Age)	Education (Spouse)	Job (Spouse/in Vietnam)	Household Type	Child (Age)
<i>Chong-hun (Hune)</i>	53 (29)	9 (4)	Construction (None/None)	Couple Urban	*F (25), *F (21)
<i>Jae-min (Min-hui)</i>	36 (21)	12 (6)	Construction (None/Helper)	Couple Urban	Pregnant
<i>Jong-tae (So-ra)</i>	35 (24)	12 (9)	Factory (None/None)	Joint Urban	Pregnant
<i>Hosik (Mai)</i>	36 (19)	12 (6)	Truck Driver (None/None)	Joint Urban	Pregnant
<i>Hui-chôl (Tav)</i>	39 (21)	14 (6)	Factory Manager (None/None)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Hvun (Dau)</i>	43 (23)	12 (6)	Factory (Factory/Restaurant)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Jae-sik (Nea)</i>	51 (27)	9 (6)	Farmer (None/Helper)	Couple Rural	None
<i>Sang-kvông (Tai)</i>	45 (24)	14 (9)	Tourist Office/Factory/None)	Couple Urban	None
<i>Si-ho (Bung)</i>	34 (21)	12 (6)	Factory (None/None)	Joint Rural	Pregnant
<i>Sôk-ûi (Hong)</i>	38 (22)	12 (6)	Farmer (None/None)	Joint Rural	None
<i>Yôn-hu (Cam)</i>	40 (22)	12 (6)	Factory/Farmer (None/None)	Joint Rural	Pregnant
<i>Yông-su (Lien)</i>	39 (24)	12 (6)	Factory (None/None)	Joint Urban	Pregnant
<i>Yu-han* (Xeong)</i>	41 (20)	12 (9)	Clerk (None/None)	Couple Urban	*F (13), Pregnant
<i>Wu-hvôn (Noc)</i>	42 (22)	12 (6)	Bar manager (None/None)	Joint Urban	Pregnant

The names in italics are those who were divorced during my fieldwork. \*F means a daughter from her husband's previous marriage. Joint household is referred to a family composed of two- or three- generations.

## 3. Marriage Brokers, Senior Korean Women, Program Staff, and Korean Mothers-in-law

Name	Age	Respondent Category
Ms. Bang	50	Marriage broker
Mr. Chin	72	Marriage broker
Mrs. Choi	51	Marriage broker
Mr. Lee	50	Marriage broker
Mrs. Ha	69	Senior Woman
Mrs. Kang	65	Senior Woman
Mrs. Pak	67	Senior Woman
Mrs. Roh	72	Senior Woman
Mrs. Sô	67	Senior Woman
Ms. Kim	27	Program manager
Ms. Min	35	Program director
Mrs. Hwang	69	Mother-in-law
Mrs. Ko	73	Mother-in-law
Mrs. Ma	66	Mother-in-law
Mrs. Mvông	70	Mother-in-law

## APPENDIX 3

### Interview Guidelines and Marriage Trip Itinerary

#### 1. For Vietnamese Women

##### *Personal information*

1. Tell me about yourself: age, educational attainment, hometown, current occupation, Korean citizenship, children, and household type

##### *Life and Family in Vietnam*

2. Were you living with your parents? How many siblings do you have? What do they do for living? Are you close to your family members? How do you see your role as a married daughter in your family now? Do you support your family financially? Does your husband help you to send money to your family in Vietnam? How often do you send it to the family?
3. Did you have a job in Vietnam? What did you do before you got married?
4. Did you know anyone who was internationally married in your village? Did you know about Korea? How and where did you learn about Korea?

##### *Matchmaking Process*

5. What made you decide to internationally marry? Why did you choose a Korean man? How did you find matchmaking services?
6. How long did you stay in Ho Chi Minh City before you got married? Where did you stay? How would you describe your experiences at matchmaking meetings? Did you meet only Korean men?
7. Did you know about your husband's background at the time of marriage?
8. Why do you think your husband chose you? What made you accept his proposal? What was your first impression on him?
9. How would you describe the five days you spent with your husband? How did you feel when he was going back to Korea after the five days?
10. Tell me about visa application and second interview process. Did you feel different about marriage when your husband visited your hometown for the second interview?
11. Before you joined your husband, what did you imagine about your marriage and life in Korea?

##### *Life and Family in Korea*

12. What was your first impression of Korea when you arrived?
13. Did you know whether you would live in a rural or urban area? Was your residential area similar to or different from what you expected? Do you like living in the urban or rural area? Why?
14. What would be the greatest and the most challenging experience that you have had in Korea?
15. Where and how did you learn the Korean language?
16. Can you describe your typical day? Are you allowed to visit your friend or Love Agency?
17. Who do you live with? How do you get along with your Korean in-laws?
18. Do you have a job? Do you work on the family's farm? Who is responsible for domestic work at home?
19. Did you ever have any conflict with the family? What is the conflict about? How did you solve the conflict?
20. How often do you visit your family in Vietnam? How do you contact your parents?
21. How do you feel about your legal status? What would be like when you become a Korean citizen?
22. What do you think about Korean people's attitudes toward Vietnamese brides? Do you think Korean people treat you fairly at home and in public?
23. What do you think about Korean women and their roles in the family? Do you think they are similar or different from Vietnamese women? How would you compare Korean men with Vietnamese men?

24. What opportunities did you expect to have when you came to Korea? Did you accomplish any of them? Do you plan to pursue them?
25. How do you like your life in Korea? What do you miss about Vietnam?

### ***Network***

26. Did you know anyone in Korea before you came? Do you have any Korean friend? Do you have Vietnamese friends in Korea? How did you meet them? Do you see them regularly? Where do you usually meet them? What do you do when getting together?
27. Have you been to women's organizations in Happy City to learn Korean? Why or why not? What do you think of them?

### ***Ending Questions***

28. Do you have any suggestions for the government's role in assisting foreign wives to smoothly settle in Korea?
29. What is the most important thing in marriage and family?
30. Overall, are you satisfied with your marriage?
31. What plans do you have for the next three years?

## **2. For Korean Men**

### ***Personal Information***

1. Tell me about yourself: age, educational attainment, family, occupation, and household type

### ***Marriage***

2. What did you think about international marriage? What do you think about other people's responses to international marriage? What made you decide to choose a matchmaking service to marry? Why did you choose to marry a Vietnamese woman? Did you expect any advantages or disadvantages from your marriage through a matchmaking service?
3. Since your marriage is through a matchmaking agency, why did you exclude an option to go China, the Philippines, Uzbekistan, or else? Did you consider marrying a white woman?
4. Did you know anyone who married a Vietnamese woman? What did you know about Vietnam and Vietnamese women before your marriage trip?
5. What did you think about the marriage process in Vietnam? Were you satisfied with the ways the agency set up the arranged meetings for you? How did you think about choosing a spouse within two hours?
6. What was your first impression on Vietnamese women? Why did you choose your wife among them? Why do you think your wife agreed to marry you? How did you communicate with your wife? How did you feel when you had to return to Korea after the five-day trip?
7. How was your second visit to your wife's hometown?
8. What do you think about international marriage now? Would you recommend it to your acquaintances? Why or why not?

### ***Life and Family in Korea***

9. What did you tell your family about your wife before she came to Korea? What was your family's response to your wife when she came?
10. How is she settling in Korea? Is your wife getting along with your family?
11. How would you help her to smoothly settle in Korea? Where do you want your wife to learn Korean and Korean culture? Do you plan to send her to women's organizations?
12. Do you do any domestic chores at home? Do you expect your wife to stay home? Would you mind if she wants to work?
13. How do you see your role in your family? Who manages your income? Would you let your wife manage it? Do you plan to move out from your parents' house?

14. Do you feel you need to financially help your wife's family in Vietnam? How often do you plan to visit your wife's family? Do you expect anything from your wife in return?
15. Are you familiar with naturalization process? When are you planning to help your wife to get Korean citizenship?
16. How is your life different before and after marriage? Do you think your wife is satisfied with her life in Korea so far? Do you think your wife's personality is the same as you expected?
17. What do you think Korean people's ideas about foreign brides and Vietnamese brides? Do you think they are fair enough?

### ***Ending Questions***

18. How do you think the government assistance for foreign brides and multicultural family?
19. What is the most important thing in marriage and family?
20. What plans do you have for next three years?

## **3. For Senior Women**

### ***Personal Information***

1. Tell me about yourself: age, educational attainment, occupation, family, community activities, and residential type

### ***Senior Center Activities***

2. How long have you participated in the senior center? What kinds of programs have you been involved?
3. What motivated you to participate in the cultural assimilation program for foreign brides?
4. How do you see your role in community? How about your role in the program?
5. What kinds of strengths do you see in the program? In what ways do you think the program would better serve foreign brides?
6. How would you access foreign brides' learning in the program?
7. Do you see your partner bride outside the center? What do you do when you see her outside the center? Have you met her husband or family?
8. What did you think about Vietnamese brides and international marriage before you participated in the program? Have you changed your thoughts about them?
9. Do you have any suggestions for the government policy on foreign brides and multi-cultural family?

### **Approximate Script of Written Consent**

I would like to interview you as part of a research project on cross-border marriages in Korea and Vietnam. I, EunSung Lee, am conducting this project solely. During the interview, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. This study estimates to involve about ten women, ten men, and four employees of marriage agencies.

The purpose of this interview is to gain information about persons involved in or interested in cross-border marriages in Korea and Vietnam. My goal is to learn how persons make sense of and understand their experiences in the process of international marriages. Especially I want to learn what motivates persons to engage in cross-border marriages between Korea and Vietnam. I will ask about your background, your experiences, and your understanding regarding cross-border marriages.

You will not be paid for this interview. This interview will last about thirty minutes and involves no foreseeable risks or discomfort. You are free to decline to be interviewed or to answer particular questions. You may end the interview entirely, or interrupt it at any time for any reason. At the end of the interview, you may put your name into a group of contacts who could be asked for further consultation or a follow up interview. These future meetings would be of the same length and structure as the first and would involve additional questions or a discussion of my research in general. If you submit to being contacted for a follow up interview, you will have the same ability to decline participation as you had for the first interview. These may be one or two follow up interviews, which would take place at your convenience.

Data analysis based on this interview maybe published in scholarly or popular journals or books. Personal information such as names or ages will not appear in any publications. Notes from the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Only I will have access to the notes and interview transcript. Notes will include a pseudonym, or “make-believe” name for each person interviewed. Only I will have access to the code for these pseudonyms, which will be stored in a separate and secure location.

This study will be a potential benefit to scholars and lay people interested in international marriage practices.

If you have any questions, I may be contacted at any time. While in Korea, my address and telephone number is 660-32 Sunggun Dong, GyeongJu City, 054-749-6627. I can also be contacted via E-mail at [papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu). If you have questions after the study, I may also be reached at the aforementioned email address or 294 Crowells Rd Apt B, Highland Park, NJ 08904, USA or 01-(908) 307-9206.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 732-932-0150 ex. 2104  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Subject Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Audio Release (optional)**

You can voluntarily agree to audio taping of this interview. At any time during the interview you may ask to have the taping temporarily or completely stopped without any penalty. The tapes will only be available to me, the researcher, for the purposes of transcription and coding. The tapes will be identified by number and not by name.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Approximate Script of Written Consent in Korean

본 연구원은 한국과 베트남의 국제 결혼에 관한 연구의 일부로써 당신을 인터뷰하고 싶습니다. 저, 이은성, 혼자만이 이 연구를 실행할 것입니다. 인터뷰동안에, 당신은 원하시면 언제든지 이 연구 참여를 거절할 수 있습니다. 이 연구는 대략 열 명의 남성, 열 명의 여성, 그리고 네 명의 국제결혼 상담소 직원을 포함합니다.

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당신의 인터뷰에 대한 보상은 없습니다. 이 인터뷰는 30 분 정도 소요될 것이며 위험이나 불편함은 도모하지 않습니다. 당신은 인터뷰를 거절하실 수 있고 혹은 특별한 질문들에 대한 답변을 거부하실 수 있습니다. 당신은 인터뷰를 끝까지 응해주실 수 있으며, 혹은 언제든지, 어떤 이유에서이든지 인터뷰를 거절 하실 수 있습니다. 인터뷰 끝에, 당신은 당신의 이름을 연락처란에 기입하실 수 있으며, 당신의 연락처는 차후 상담이나 인터뷰에 쓰일 수도 있습니다. 이러한 차후 모임은 처음 인터뷰와 동일한 맥락이며 첨가된 몇몇의 질문이나, 제 연구에 관한 토론을 포함할 수도 있습니다. 만약 당신이 차후 인터뷰에 응하시는 연락처를 기입하신다면, 당신은 처음 인터뷰처럼 언제든지 참여를 거절하실 수 있습니다. 차후 인터뷰는 한번 혹은 두번일 것이며, 당신에게 편이한 곳에서 인터뷰가 행해질 것입니다.

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이 연구는 국제결혼 관련 관습에 관심있는 학자들과 일반인들에게 잠재적 기여를 할 것입니다. 당신은 질문이 있으시면, 저에게 언제든지 연락하실 수 있습니다. 한국에 있을 동안, 저의 주소와 전화번호는 “경주시 성건동 660-32” “054-749-6627” 입니다. 또한 이메일 [papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu) 로 저에게 연락 하실 수 있습니다. 연구가 끝난 후, 질문이 있으실 경우, 언급한 이메일이나 혹은 294 Crowells Rd. Apt B, Highland Park, NJ 08904 USA 혹은 전화 01-908-307-9206 으로 연락하실 수 있습니다.



당신은 또한 당신의 권리에 대한 질문이 더 있으실 경우 연구 심사위원회 (아래주소)에 연락 하실 수 있습니다:

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서명:\_\_\_\_\_ 날짜:\_\_\_\_\_

연구인 서명:\_\_\_\_\_ 날짜:\_\_\_\_\_

#### Audio Release (선택사항)

당신은 자발적으로 이 인터뷰 녹음에 동의하실 수 있습니다. 인터뷰동안 언제든지 아무런 위약사항없이 당신은 일시적으로 혹은 완전히 녹음을 정지하실 수 있습니다. 녹음 테잎들은 저만이 쓸 수 있으며, 사본과 암호화 목적을 위해 쓰일 것입니다. 녹음 테잎들은 이름이 아닌, 번호로 확인될 것입니다.

서명:\_\_\_\_\_ 날짜:\_\_\_\_\_

## Approximate Script of Written Consent in Vietnamese

### Phụ lục 4 – Phác thảo Bản cam kết đồng ý

Tôi xin được phỏng vấn bạn trong khuôn khổ dự án nghiên cứu hôn nhân xuyên biên giới ở Hàn Quốc và Việt Nam. Tôi là EunSung Lee. Nghiên cứu này sẽ do tôi tiến hành độc lập một mình. Trong quá trình phỏng vấn, bạn có quyền rút lui khỏi cuộc nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào. Theo dự kiến, nghiên cứu này sẽ thực hiện phỏng vấn 10 phụ nữ, 10 nam giới, và 10 nhân viên của công ty môi giới hôn nhân.

Mục đích của cuộc phỏng vấn này là nhằm thu thập thông tin về những người liên quan hoặc quan tâm đến hôn nhân xuyên biên giới Việt – Hàn. Mục tiêu của tôi là nhằm tìm hiểu quan điểm, sự hiểu biết, cũng như kinh nghiệm thực tế của những người liên quan này về những cuộc hôn nhân mang tính quốc tế. Tôi đặc biệt muốn tìm hiểu động cơ nào mà những người này tham gia kết hôn hoặc môi giới kết hôn giữa Việt Nam và Hàn Quốc. Tôi sẽ hỏi bạn những câu hỏi về thông tin/ hoàn cảnh cá nhân, những trải nghiệm, và sự hiểu biết của bạn về hôn nhân xuyên biên giới.

Bạn sẽ không được trả tiền cho việc tham gia vào cuộc phỏng vấn. Phỏng vấn sẽ kéo dài khoảng 30 phút và sẽ không gây cho bạn rủi ro hay bất tiện gì. Bạn hoàn toàn có quyền từ chối không tham gia phỏng vấn, hoặc không trả lời câu hỏi phỏng vấn nào đó mà bạn không muốn trả lời. Bạn có thể chấm dứt hoàn toàn cuộc phỏng vấn, hoặc đề nghị dừng phỏng vấn ở bất kỳ thời điểm nào vì bất cứ lý do gì. Sau khi kết thúc phỏng vấn, bạn có thể để lại tên trong danh sách liên lạc để tôi có thể tiếp tục liên lạc với bạn nếu như tôi cần thêm thông tin, hoặc tổ chức phỏng vấn tiếp theo. Nếu có những cuộc gặp gỡ tiếp theo này thì thời gian và cấu trúc của buổi gặp cũng tương tự cuộc phỏng vấn ban đầu, và có thể thêm vài câu hỏi hoặc thảo luận về nghiên cứu của tôi nói chung. Nếu bạn đồng ý ghi tên vào danh sách những người có thể liên lạc cho phỏng vấn tiếp theo, thì cũng như trong cuộc phỏng vấn lần thứ nhất, bạn có toàn quyền từ chối tham gia hoặc rút lui khỏi cuộc phỏng vấn bất cứ lúc nào. Có thể sẽ có một hoặc hai cuộc phỏng vấn tiếp theo như vậy, tùy theo điều kiện lúc nào thuận lợi cho bạn.

Những thông tin phỏng vấn sẽ được xử lý, phân tích, và lồng ghép trong khuôn khổ nghiên cứu của tôi và có thể sẽ được đăng tải trên các tạp chí khoa học hoặc xuất bản thành sách. Những thông tin cá nhân như tên, tuổi, sẽ không xuất hiện trên bất cứ xuất bản phẩm nào. Những ghi chú từ cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được đảm bảo giữ kín hoàn toàn. Chỉ một mình tôi có thể tiếp cận những ghi chú và bản ghi lại phỏng vấn. Ghi chú sẽ mang những tên đã được thay đổi. Chỉ một mình tôi có thể biết mã hóa của những tên giả này. Bản mã hóa sẽ được cất giữ riêng biệt, đảm bảo tuyệt đối an toàn.

Nghiên cứu này có thể đem lại những thông tin bổ ích cho các nhà nghiên cứu và khiến mọi người quan tâm đến thực tiễn hôn nhân quốc tế.

Nếu bạn có câu hỏi gì, bạn có thể liên hệ tôi bất cứ lúc nào. Địa chỉ của tôi ở Hàn Quốc là 660-32 Sunggun Dong, thành phố Gyeongju, điện thoại là 054-749-6627. Bạn có thể liên hệ với tôi bằng thư điện tử tại địa chỉ: [papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:papaya90@rci.rutgers.edu). Nếu bạn có câu hỏi gì:

sau khi kết thúc nghiên cứu, bạn có thể liên lạc với tôi qua địa chỉ thư điện tử nói trên, hoặc tại 294 Crowells Rd Apt B, Highland Park, NJ 08904, USA; điện thoại: 01-908-307-9206.

Bạn cũng có thể liên hệ với Ban Tạp chí Quốc tế (Institutional Review Board) nếu có câu hỏi gì thêm tại địa chỉ:

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 Tel: 732-932-0150 ex. 2104  
 Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Chữ ký ..... Ngày.....

Chữ ký ..... Ngày.....

**Ghi âm (không bắt buộc)**

Trên cơ sở tự nguyện, bạn có thể cho phép ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn. Bạn có thể đề nghị tạm dừng hoặc tắt hoàn toàn ghi âm bất cứ lúc nào trong quá trình phỏng vấn. Băng ghi âm sẽ chỉ được sử dụng bởi tôi là người nghiên cứu với mục đích là ghi lại nội dung phỏng vấn và mã hóa. Các băng ghi âm sẽ được nhận dạng bằng cách đánh số chứ không phải bằng cách ghi tên.

Tên (chữ in) .....

Chữ ký ..... Ngày.....

### Marriage Trip Itinerary Example from Love Agency

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Matchmaking and Finding a Bride</b>
<b>07:00</b>	Meeting with other grooms at Kimhae Airport in Busan, Korea
<b>14:00</b>	Arriving at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
<b>14:30</b>	Meeting a group of women at the lobby
<b>15:30</b>	Meeting 10-100 women at brokers' houses until the man finds his bride
<b>16:30</b>	Man, woman, and the woman's parents sign the marriage contract
<b>15:00</b>	The couple goes to a hospital to get blood check and mental health test
<b>18:00</b>	The bride(s) going to a nearby market to buy wedding rings and necklace, underwear, clothes, shoes, and fruits
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Wedding Day</b>
<b>08:00</b>	The bride's parents arrive at the hotel, meet the groom, and sign the contract
<b>10:00</b>	Bridal make-up
<b>12:00</b>	(Group) wedding ceremony and banquet
<b>14:00</b>	Taking outdoor wedding pictures in a public park
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Honeymoon to the Mekong Delta</b>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>City tour and Shopping</b>
<b>9:00</b>	Visiting Korean embassy and submitting documents
<b>14:00</b>	City tour
<b>17:00</b>	Couples go to a nearby market for shopping
<b>20:00</b>	Men leave the hotel to catch a red-eye flight (at 12:00 am) to Korea
<b>20:30</b>	Brides go to the broker's house
<b>Day 5</b>	<b>Returning to Korea</b>
<b>00:30</b>	Fight to Pusan, Korea
<b>06:30</b>	Arrive in Pusan

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