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**“Daughters-in-law of Korea?”:
Policies and Discourse on
Migration in South Korea**

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Abstract

How is the traditional concept of the relationship between nation and women reinforced or modified in discourses on immigration? To explore that question, this paper examines the ways in which perceptions of and attitudes towards immigration are gendered and racialised in South Korea, one of the main countries into which contemporary inter-Asian migration is flowing. The paper studies recently introduced governmental policies along with public/media interest in migration and ethnic diversity. It argues that South Korea's project of multiculturalism actually works as a nation-building project. This is because South Korean policies and studies about immigration and ethnic minorities prefer to target marriage-migrant women, instrumentally defining them as the mothers of South Korea's next generation. The paper also points out that although marriage-migrant women are expected to serve as wives and mothers within Korean families, they are still posited as "others" in the overlapping hierarchical relationships between husband and wife and between sending and receiving countries.

Key words

marriage migration, gender, nation, Asia, South Korea

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Rapidly increasing numbers of immigrants have engendered demographic, cultural, and social changes in South Korea, making immigration one of the hottest topics of national discourse. Numerous policies, support programs for immigrants, and academic studies on the issue have appeared during the last decade. Although South Korea is traditionally known as one of the very few racially and ethnically homogenous states in today's world, these discussions about immigration and ethnicities have challenged the myth of "one blood". As the country's strongly—and proudly—held idea of ethnic homogeneity has been contested, South Korean society has inevitably been redefined as a multi-ethnic society. In addition, South Koreans' self-criticism concerning their own biased and discriminative attitudes toward ethnic minorities has grown.

Despite such positive signs, however, current South Korean discourse about these phenomena does not seem to promote cultural diversity and social cohesion. Indeed, the government's policy on immigration and ethnic diversity—which is called the *Damunwha* policy—has often been criticised precisely because it aims to assimilate immigrants into Korean culture rather than respect and preserve their native cultures. Will South Korean society have to forgo its long-held emphasis on ethnic homogeneity as it faces social/demographic change and greater ethnic diversity? This paper explores the contradictory features of South Korean discourse and policies on migration, highlighting the ways in which the agenda of "multiculturalism" has taken the form of another nation-building project.

To understand South Korean migration discourse, this paper continues an ongoing discussion of the feminisation of migration. Since the work of Castles and Miller (1993), the term "feminisation of migration" has commonly been used to describe the increasing migration of women. But the term refers not only to the increasing number of migrant women and the changing pattern of migration; it also characterises migration as a gendered phenomenon. While the increase in women's migration (including independent migration) gives them a significant role in the labour market as well as in families, the concept of the feminisation of migration is needed to explain the fact that a large proportion of these women work in job categories that derive from traditional gender roles, such as domestic workers, care givers, entertainers, sex workers, and other service employees (Piper 2008). The feminisation of migration has been studied from various angles, including quantity (the number of females migrating), system (the gender division of the global labour market), and the motivations for migration as well as the process itself (economic reasons, patriarchal values of the cultures of origin, migration agents, settlement in the new environment, etc.).

This paper aims to broaden the range of factors that have been used to explain migration as a gendered phenomenon. Specifically, it aims to change the focus from migration as movement and settlement to a focus on host societies' national discourses on migrants and migration, exploring how such discourses develop and how they reflect the national desires of the host country. Looking beyond the motivations for and processes of migration, the paper aims to show how perceptions of

and attitudes towards immigration are gendered. South Korea, where marriage migration and multiculturalism have become hot-button issues, serves as the paper's case study for exploring gendered and racialised ways of conceiving migration and their implications for the feminisation of migration, with a particular focus on hypergamy, femininity, and "national hierarchy."

Understanding Marriage Migration: Women, Nation, and Hypergamy

Since feminist scholars claimed to consider gender to be a key factor in understanding migration, there have been many gender-sensitive studies that explore the ways in which gender informs migration (Phizacklea 1983; Pedraza 1991; Chant 1992; Buijs 1993; Hondangneu-Sotelo 1999; Kofman et al. 2000; Willis & Yeoh 2000 among others). These studies developed in response to "the feminisation of migration" (Castles & Miller 1993), in which women are playing a larger role than ever in migration throughout the world.

Asian female migrants in particular are considered to manifest features of the feminisation of migration, given that their countries of origin are the primary source countries for domestic and care workers as well as for marriage migrants, including the mail-order brides who move to Europe and North America. However, it is important to note that such women also migrate within Asia. Public and academic attention has recently turned to migration within Asia, with special attention paid to migration for purposes of marriage. High rates of international marriage can be found across Asia—for example, 5% in Japan, 32% in Taiwan, 17% in Singapore, and 14% in South Korea (Jones and Shen 2008), and studies have shown significant demographic and social changes in those Asian countries that have many marriage migrants.

Along with other significant issues surrounding marriage migration, such as mail-order brides, commercial marriage agencies, violence against migrant women, and women's standing (as free agents or victims), the perceived dichotomy between women's labour migration and marriage migration should be addressed as part of any attempt to understand migrant women's complicated status and identity formation. As Piper and Roces (2003) point out, migrant women cannot always be strictly categorised as either wives or workers; rather, they straddle the two positions, simultaneously identifying themselves with multiple positions and roles. This is because a marriage migrant can become a worker, and a migrant worker can marry a native of the host country. Piper (1997) and Kojima (2001) in fact argue that international marriage migration is actually labour migration, given that the migrants' movements result from the need for care workers within host countries and that they also serve reproductive functions. In Taiwan, for example, working-class men in farming households expect their foreign spouses to assist with agricultural production and also to produce the next generation. This can be seen as "a class specific solution to the alleged shortage of reproductive labour" (Lan 2008: p. 834). Challenges to the strict distinction between marriage migration and labour migration significantly affect our understanding of migration—and not only

because it is useful to accurately identify trends such as wife-turns-worker and worker-turns-wife. It is also useful to challenge conventional gender roles for women and the public/domestic dichotomy, both of which tend to frame marriage-migrant women simply as mothers and wives of the nationals in the host country. I will discuss this tendency below, focusing on the South Korean case.

The concept of hypergamy should be examined in connection with marriage migration. In its generally accepted meaning, “hypergamy”, in which women usually marry men of higher social status, is considered a normative concept; and it encompasses not only class background but also geographic parameters such as urban vs. rural settings (Oxford 2005). Hypergamy is generally accepted as a normal pattern for international marriage migrants.

In East Asia, research has typically focused on cross-border marriages that are, at least in part, the consequence of regional economic imbalances that juxtapose the strong economies of Taiwan and South Korea, for example, with the less developed economies of China and South east Asia. (Williams 2010: p.124)

It is generally accepted that international marriages in Asia are based on such economic gaps between countries and are therefore hypergamous marriages.

Yet migrant women’s pursuit of upward mobility is not limited to such economic factors. It is also based on to their desires with respect to life style and married life. Women’s motivations for migrating cannot be fully explained by economic factors (that is, direct financial benefit) alone; migration should also be considered as an expression of their desires for greater career development opportunities, for adventure, and for “modern” and cosmopolitan life styles (Y. Kim 2010). International marriages are often assumed to be strategic, the result of calculating potential gain. Marriage is certainly one of the very few ways for women from developing countries to escape poverty and make better lives for themselves and their families, but that does not mean that the decision to marry is always straightforward and easy. There are multiple motivations for migration and marriage that should be considered on several broad levels, including economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. In a study of Philippine women marrying in Japan, for example, international marriage-migrant women’s motivations were found to include not only the prospect of economic benefit, but also fantasies of living in foreign (and “modern”) countries (Suzuki 2005). Hypergamous marriages for women do not merely convey economic benefits; they also include the symbolic capital which can be obtained through marriage (Kalpagam 2005).

Meanwhile, “how hypergamy is measured, and by whom, can be a very subjective matter” (Williams 2010: p. 56). It turns out that migrant women’s actual social status after marriage in the host country often does not match their expectations, because their husbands do not really lead lives of privilege (Suzuki 2005; Constable 2005). Many marriage migrants in South Korea find themselves in this situation, for their husbands’ economic and social status, as farmers in rural areas and as workers in urban areas, cannot guarantee that the brides will enjoy a higher status in South Korea than they

had in their home countries. For this reason, we need a more nuanced understanding of the role of hypergamy in international marriages. The gap in economic wealth between host and home country is not the only important factor for fully understanding an individual's motivation for international marriage and the actual life that unfolds after marriage. Marriage migrants' social status is also important for understanding the hypergamy found in international marriages, as the hypergamous pattern itself includes hierarchical power relations between husband and wife and between native and migrant. It is important to ask who considers a migrant's marriage to be hypergamy and to understand how power relations affect a migrant's status and life.

One of the most common forms of prejudice found in both public and academic attitudes toward migrant women consists of the othering and victimisation of these women. Representations of Asian women are particularly problematic in this regard.

In newspapers, magazines, talk shows, and among the general public in the United States, images of so-called 'mail-order brides' tend to echo two different but interconnected stereotypes of Asian women. One is the sweet and innocent, sexual-romantic 'oriental doll' or 'lotus blossom': the other is the conniving, devious, and shrewd 'dragon lady.' These two images did not originate with contemporary Asian brides, but rather are deeply rooted in much older popular stereotypes of Asian women. Such images have long been reproduced and popularized in what Renee Tajima describes as simplistic, inaccurate, persistent, and unchanging images of Asian women over time in Hollywood films. (...) These images underlie the simplistic, dualistic images of mail-order brides as either willing and helpless victims of controlling western men, or alternatively as shrewd foreigners out for a green card and a free meal ticket through marriage fraud and immigration scams that dupe innocent U.S. men. Inaccurate though they are, such popular images of Asians and Asian-Americans are rarely far from the surface of representations of so-called mail-order brides. (Constable 1995)

Such popular images of Asian mail-order brides are not confined to the United States. Indeed, as will be discussed below, stereotypes of marriage migrants exist in Asia as well. Gendered stereotypes of Asian women, the presumption that women migrate specifically to marry, and culturally accepted images of their countries of origin all contribute to the othering and victimisation of these women. In Japan, for example, most people conceive of "foreign wives" from other Asian countries as coming from poverty and of marriage-migrant women as simply poor people. This image correlates with another preconception of foreign brides: that they are women who choose marriage solely for material comfort (Piper 1997). In an examination of the media's representation of marriage-migrant women in Taiwan, Hsia (2007) points out that the media characterise the foreign-bride phenomenon

as a social problem by portraying the brides as passive victims or materialist gold-diggers and the grooms as “socially undesirable.” The images of foreign brides cast them as the “inferior others,” reflecting national anxiety that the “quality” of the Taiwanese people is deteriorating.

At the same time, in many countries the portrayal of marriage migration, especially in national policies toward migration and population, appears to reflect the relationship between nation and gender. As many feminist scholars have pointed out, a nation has a highly gendered series of symbols reflecting a male-dominated hierarchical structure. Nationalism consists of gendered discourse, positing women as crucial to the construction and reproduction of nationalist ideologies (Brah 1993; Mayer 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997; Parker et al. 1992; Kandiyoti 1994). In myths of motherhood, women become icons of the national territory and values, but at the same time they are treated as people who need the protection of males or who should be caretakers for children, the nation’s future citizens (Boehmer 2005). Women have had a role in ethnic and national processes not only as “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities” but also “as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups” and “as [central participants] in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989, p. 7).

An emphasis on women’s direct roles as the biological and cultural reproducers of nationhood can be found in national population policies. Low fertility rates are often considered to be alarming signs that a country is in danger of a decreasing or an ageing population, and so women are encouraged to bear children for the sake of the country’s future. Because the reproduction of the nation is considered women’s duty, nationalist appeals and threats usually target women (Brown and Ferree 2005). Because of women’s role in both biological and cultural reproduction, the selective control embodied in governmental policies targets women by ethnicity: women from certain ethnic groups are encouraged to have more children than those from other ethnic groups, with the latter actually being discouraged from reproducing (Maroney 1992; Heng & Devan 1992). When biological reproduction is necessary to deflect the threat of a low birthrate, “foreign brides” who reside in the country through marriage migration become a solution. However, in general, immigration is also considered a cultural threat to the national identity of the host country. Therefore, when a country finds itself with a significantly low fertility rate, if ethnic diversity is still a new issue—as it is in contemporary South Korea—there are likely to be many controversial debates and negotiations.

Immigration, International Marriage, and the Multiculturalism Project in South Korea

As noted earlier, South Korea, which is one of the very few countries today that are considered to be ethnically homogeneous, has only begun serious and active discussions of ethnic diversity and immigration during the past few years. Attention suddenly turned to the issues of “race” and immigration during the past decade. When the American football hero Hines Ward visited South

Korea, he triggered a discussion about the issue of “race” in South Korea, both in the media and in the public. Ward, who was born to an African-American serviceman and a South Korean woman, was awarded the Super Bowl’s MVP award in 2006, and the South Korean media and public were excited by his success. This enthusiastic welcome reflected not only pride in a Korean’s success in the United States; it was also rooted in the desire to be competitive in the globalised world, a desire that had swept through contemporary South Korea (Y. Kim 2009; 2010). At the same time, the visit triggered discussions about “race” among South Koreans. It called public attention to ethnic minorities and “mixed race” Koreans, who had always existed but had previously been invisible in South Korea, and it caused Koreans to reflect on their indifferent attitudes towards these issues.

The sudden attention to multiculturalism is also related to demographic and social changes in contemporary South Korea. South Korea has rapidly shifted from being a “sending” country to being a “receiving” country on the international migration map. There were large emigrations of Koreans, including plantation workers, to the United States in the 1900s; of Korean nurses and miners to Germany in the 1960s; and of Korean construction workers to the Middle East in the 1970s; but the flow of labour migration that started in the 1980s changed South Korea into a receiving country. The number of foreign residents in South Korea increased to 1,208,544 in 2010 (an increase of 4.6% from 2009, equal to 2% of the Korean population). As stated in their purpose of entry, migrant workers constitute a large portion of these foreign residents, at 556,948 people (46.1%). 92.2% of the workers work in low-skill jobs. Marriage migrants account for 136,556 foreign residents (11.4%), and there are 82,096 international students (6.8%) (Source: *Statistical Year Book 2009*, Korea Immigration Service, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea). Although the size of the foreign resident population seems to be small, the demographic change was enough to attract media and public attention and to force South Korea to face its multi-ethnic issues.

Current immigration policies and discourses focus on the growing prevalence of “foreign brides”. The increasing number of international marriages is one of the most striking statistics on the contemporary South Korean population. In 1992, the number of international marriages registered in South Korea was 5,534, or 1.3% of the total number of marriages (419,774). However, that number increased to 43,356 in 2005, with the percentage of the total number of marriage (314,304) reaching 13%. Since 2005, international marriages have remained at more than 10% of all marriages, although the actual number has decreased slightly (to 33,300 in 2009) (Source: *Statistical Year Book 2009*, Korea Immigration Service, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea).

The demographic changes that have turned South Korea into an ageing society are the key factors justifying special immigration policies. An increasing average life expectancy and a falling fertility rate have made the rapid ageing of the Korean population a serious concern (A. Kim 2009). The falling fertility rate is taken especially seriously, as it threatens the country’s very future. The total fertility rate in South Korea in 2005 was 1.08, one of the lowest in the world. Worse yet, the rate

dropped rapidly compared to other countries, declining from 1.47 in 2000 to 1.17 in 2002, the largest two-year drop on record for the entire world (A. Kim 2009). Such population statistics have led to the acceptance of international marriage as a solution for the fertility rate problem.

The vast majority of Korean couples in international marriages involve Korean husbands and non-Korean wives. Couples with non-Korean brides and Korean grooms have outnumbered couples with Korean brides and non-Korean grooms since 1995, and they made up 75.5% of all international marriages to Korean spouses in 2009. In the past, couples with Korean brides and non-Korean grooms dominated, for example at 62.8% in 1992 (Source: Statics Korea <http://www.Kostat.go.kr>). The figures for 2009 show China (45.2%), Vietnam (28.8%), and the Philippines (6.5%) sending the most non-Korean spouses, followed by Japan (which had a colonial relationship with Korea in the past), Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia, and Uzbekistan (Source: Statistics Korea). Whereas the majority of non-Korean husbands who are married to Korean women, along with other male migrants such as workers, are considered temporary, these “foreign wives” are perceived by the government and public as permanent settlers in the country.

The recent increase in the number of international marriages of South Korean men to foreign women can be traced to the early 1990s, when bachelor farmers found it difficult to find spouses. Marriage to foreign wives was considered a solution for bachelors in rural areas who wished to marry, with many local governments promoting marriage campaigns for these men. In addition, commercial international marriage agencies played an important role in the boom of international marriages. Permit requirements for registering commercial marriage agencies were eased in 1998. As a result, the number of these agencies increased from 77 in 1998 to more than 2,000 in 2005 (Kim and Chun 2007).

With these changes in marriage patterns, population statistics, and attitudes and policies concerning “race” and ethnicity issues, immigration and multiculturalism have become important social issues in South Korea. The new term *damunwha* (a term originally created by activists for migrants’ rights, but now actively used by the government) is a key to understanding these social changes, and its use has swept through South Korean media, policy-making bodies, and academies. The term literally means “multiculture” or “multiculturalism” and refers, in common usage, to the primary agendas of immigration policies and Korea’s movement towards a harmonious multi-ethnic society. However, it is also used as a rhetorical rubric and applied in a limited sense to refer to specific policies and programs.

Indeed, the national discourses on multiculturalism and immigration arose suddenly and are entirely government-driven. Many policies and support programs, including public campaigns, provided by the government have appeared since 2006. Rather than developing naturally through productive discussions from below, the policies and programs were driven from above, by the government. As I will discuss later, they have been criticised as mere rhetoric that is actually likely to

push immigrants toward assimilating majority Korean norms and culture rather than encouraging the coexistence of different cultures and respecting diversity.

A number of policies for the social integration of marriage migrants and their families, collectively entitled the “Grand Plan”, were announced in April 2006. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family took the lead role, with the participation of other ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, Labor, Social Welfare and Health, along with local and central government departments. The Grand Plan envisions “a social integration of foreign wives and an attainment of a multicultural society.” The major policies are as follows:

- (1) regulation of international marriage agencies and protection of foreign wives before entry into Korea;
- (2) support for victims of domestic violence;
- (3) support and orientation for newly arrived foreign wives, such as offering Korean language and culture classes;
- (4) support for children of international marriages in schools;
- (5) providing social welfare to foreign wives;
- (6) raising social awareness of multicultural issues; and
- (7) making a comprehensive support system to attain the goals (Lee 2008: p.116)

In addition to the central government, local governments also developed their own campaigns for bachelor farmers’ weddings and support programs for immigrant women, not only because of the central government’s policy, but also because their own interests in international marriage—for increasing their populations and contributing to their local economies in the future—were at stake (H. Kim 2008). Although South Korea’s shift from a sending country to a receiving country has occurred over a short period, many scholars and activists have voiced certain criticisms of the Korean discourse on multiculturalism: the government-driven discourse has swept through the country extremely rapidly, is excessively ambitious, and is too abstract. In fact, the policies and programs tend to be mere displays for showing off governmental achievements (H. Kim 2008). In addition, when the Grand Plan was first enacted there were problems such as the duplication of programs and events by different agencies and a lack of training for the officers in charge of implementing these policies.

Marriage Migrants for Reproduction of Korean Nationals?

As mentioned above, migration, women, and nation-building are often related, particularly when linked with reproductive issues. These relationships surface in a special way in the South Korean *damunwha* project. *Damunwha* policies and discussions exclusively target marriage-migrant women. Indeed, international students, highly skilled migrant workers, and low-skilled migrant workers—the largest groups of foreign residents in South Korea—are not considered targets of the policies (H. Kim 2008). Migrant workers are still strictly controlled with respect to their entry and residence

status, are excluded by support programs and policies, and are socially discriminated against, while marriage migrants have benefited from the close governmental attention.

The exclusive attention to marriage-migrant women clearly indicates Korea's priorities regarding migration policy. That is, the overarching goal is the reproduction of Korean nationals, based on the idea of "purity of blood" and understood exclusively as the paternal line. The United Nations recently advised South Korea not to use the myth of "pure blood," fearing the possibility of racial discrimination and exclusivity, and South Korea's desire to adhere to the global (cultural/social) standard—as well as to be globally competitive—has had the effect of rendering the myth unacceptable in the country. But while the idea of *damunwha* seemingly accepts the weakening of the importance of ethnic homogeneity and the privilege of "pure blood," it still preserves the paternal line (H. Kim 2008). Discriminatory attitudes toward different groups in immigration policies are, according to Won (2008), determined by the standard of "Korean blood". Although the belief in a "racially homogenous country" has been weakened, Koreans have not actually discarded the notion of "Korean blood." Therefore, marriage-migrant women, who are expected to produce children having the same blood as their Korean fathers, are treated differently than other foreigners and immigrants.

Indeed, marriage-migrant women and their children are actively incorporated into the target group of the *damunwha* policies. While migrant workers, who are thought of as completely ethnically different than Koreans, are usually excluded from the policies, marriage-migrant women receive treatment equivalent to that of native Koreans because they give birth to Korean fathers' children. It is clear that the Korean National Act (modified in 2004) relaxed conditions for conferring citizenship on marriage migrants. Marriage-migrant women who want to obtain South Korean citizenship must either remain in South Korea for two years after marriage to a Korean spouse, or wait until three years have passed following marriage in another country and one year has been spent in South Korea. These regulations are far more relaxed than those for other migrant groups who seek Korean citizenship: other groups require a five-year residency, fluency in the Korean language, and proven knowledge of Korean culture (Won 2008). Unlike women, marriage-migrant men, that is, foreign men who marry Korean women, are generally not mentioned in special policies and support programs and therefore face the stricter regulations (Moon 2006; Won 2008).

Immigrants have recently enjoyed an improvement in living conditions, receiving higher basic living subsidies along with access to health services. Marriage migrants are eligible for benefits under South Korea's basic social security policy. That is, even if they have not yet received Korean citizenship, they can receive the minimum cost-of-living subsidies and receive financial support for medical care. However, this is allowed only if they have a child. This serves as another example that reveals the South Korean government's attitudes towards migrant women—they are viewed solely as child-bearers, as this measure only supports those migrant women who currently live with their children

and does not apply to those who have given up their marital status or do not have children (Moon 2006).

Such tendencies underscore the state's view of immigrant women as mothers of Korean children. This attitude is evident in family-focused policies and programs. The focuses of many support programs for marriage immigrants have recently broadened from the immigrant women to their families, implying more than just the result of recognising the emerging second-generation issues. Recently, the project of multiculturalism has been discussed by the government and the media within the framework of "the family." The term *damunwha family*, which refers to a family consisting of more than one Korean and other members of non-Korean ethnic origin, is one of the most frequently used keywords in policies and projects related to immigration. Issues concerning immigrant women are thus addressed within the context of family rather than treated as a matter of the individual. In part, this is a strategy to make the general public accept immigrants more readily (Lee 2005). While the public view of immigrants still includes some negative attitudes, thinking about them within the context of the family serves to link immigrants to familiar matters that South Korean society as a whole is facing, such as a low birth rate, an increasing divorce rate, and an ageing population. This way of thinking therefore also turns immigration issues into "Korean" issues. Treating immigrant women's issues as family issues is helpful for promoting the *damunwha* project because it makes the project look as if it is about current Korean society and the future generations of Korean nationals. In this context, marriage-migrant women are considered as members of the Korean family rather than as individual migrants coming from different backgrounds and situations. In fact, the title commonly used to refer to marriage-migrant women, a term replacing "foreign wives," is "foreign daughters-in-law."

Another example of the emphasis on marriage-migrant women's role as producers of future generations of Koreans can be found in their support and training programs. Both central governmental institutions and local governments provide many programs and projects that support international marriage-migrant women. However, these programs focus mainly on conventional gender roles. The most common support programs help marriage-migrant women adapt to Korean society and understand Korean culture in areas such as language, cooking, traditional manners, and family relations (including titles and roles of family members and relatives), while others support immigrants' networking and provide female welfare in the form of medical check-ups, counseling, shelters, job training, and gestures that offer comfort (such as travel to visit their home families) (H. Kim 2008).

Othering Women, Creating Hierarchy

If the role of marriage-migrant women is defined as the production of South Korea's future generations, and if they are expected to be in charge of not only biological reproduction but also

cultural reproduction (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989), as discussed earlier, then certain conditions and qualities for these women are to be expected.

Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of their collectivity, of its boundaries; as carriers of the collectivity's "honour" and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture. Specific codes and regulations are usually developed, defining who/what is a "proper man" and a "proper woman", which are central to the identities of collectivity members. (Yuval-Davis 1997: p. 67)

If such traditional images and roles are filled by immigrant women, how do they embody the identity of "proper women"? Descriptions of South Asian candidates in international marriage agencies reveal the standards and preferences that reflect the viewpoint of the South Korean majority. The following descriptions are drawn from introductions of South Asian women of various ethnicities that are meant to appeal to Korean men seeking brides on marriage agency websites.

<Introduction of Vietnamese women>

Strong points of Vietnamese brides

Physical appearance: Vietnamese women look like Koreans as they have almost the same skin colour. In addition, they are most charming due to their slim body and long legs. They have attractive eye shapes and always smile so that they are never inferior to Korean women in physical appearance. Most of them are still innocent and pure. The children of Vietnamese women are born with Mongolian spots on their bodies, and the children cannot be distinguished from Korean children.

Personality: Vietnamese women are very diligent. Some of them take charge in their family's life. They place their priority on their family. Thus, there is almost no possibility of a Vietnamese bride causing trouble in a family.

Marriage: The average age for Vietnamese women's marriage is between 18 and 25. As they do not mind age gaps, a Korean groom's age does not matter to these women. In addition, given that women aged between 23 and 24 have the highest possibility of giving a birth to a healthy and bright baby, you will meet a bride of the best age. They are different from Korean women, who do not want babies because they are concerned to preserve their

attractive body shapes and who think about only their own comfortable lives despite the seriousness of the low rate of birth.

(<http://www.nwlove.co.kr/vietnam/bride.asp>, retrieved at 17 Feb. 2011)

<Introduction of Philippine women>

- Philippine women are inherently warm and kind, and they always smile.
- As English is an official language in the Philippines, the children produced by these women can easily learn English.
- They think that raising children is the most important thing to do, as they grew up in a family-centred culture.
- Given that many women take charge in their family's lives, they are very diligent about maintaining their livelihood.
- They combine the Eastern and the Western styles of beauty.
- As divorce hardly occurs in their country, they seem to serve only one husband for their entire lives.

(<http://www.nwlove.co.kr/philippines.asp> retrieved at 17 Feb. 2011)

Apart from Korean Chinese, that is, Korean descendents who have settled in China and have Chinese nationality, Vietnamese brides are preferred because of their physical appearance. Similar skin colour means that not only are Vietnamese brides difficult to distinguish from Koreans, but their children, too, will appear Korean, as the advertisement straightforwardly states: "the children cannot be distinguished from Korean children." Physical appearance similar to that of Koreans is considered an important condition for better adaptation to Korean society on the part of the women and also for ensuring the children's ready acceptance as Koreans.

Other than physical similarity, the conditions for brides being proper members of "Korean" families are found in the descriptions of their personalities and in the emphasis on dutiful wives/mothers/daughters-in-law. Some descriptions of these women are based on South Asian culture and life styles—such as "many [of them] take charge in their family's lives," "they place their priority on their family," and "divorce hardly occurs in their country"—and portray them as diligent and dutiful family members. Even English fluency is mentioned as a benefit. The expectation that a bride will be a dutiful wife/mother/daughter-in-law reveals a preference for a woman who will maintain the Korean patriarchal family structure, which has its basis in Confucianism (Moon 2006). The idea that South Asian women can maintain Korean traditions within their family is linked to a presumption that these women are obedient and passive, and to a stereotypical image of purity and innocence, as seen in the descriptions "most of them are still innocent and pure" and "Philippine

women are inherently warm and kind, and they always smile.” Indeed, these images of Southeast Asian women parallel conventional Western views of Asian women, views which have long been criticised as Orientalist. With such Orientalist attitudes, Southeast Asian women are also described as extremely feminine—this is evidenced by the fact that another popular image of these women sees them as exotic and sexually attractive. They are thought of as diligent and kind, the type of women who are likely to be good family members, and at the same time as exotic beauties with “slim bod[ies] and long legs.”

Although recent policies and discourses concerning marriage-migrant women show some effort to help these women and to raise the general public’s consciousness about migrants’ rights, these women are still othered and are often described with stereotypes. Due to its long history of ethnic homogeneity, South Korean society has not easily accepted people from other ethnic backgrounds or who are not physically similar to the majority Korean population. In the case of marriage-migrant women, this exclusionary attitude reveals a complex process of othering. That is, as noted above, the majority of Koreans expect these women to more easily and quickly integrate into Korean families and society than women from other migrant groups, while still hesitating to completely accept these women as “we/us.”

Victimisation is a very common way of othering these migrant women in South Korea. Images depicting migrant women as poor, combined with the encouragement of majority Korean people to be kind to these women, turn migrant women into subjects who require Koreans’ help. In a Korean publicity campaign advertisement titled “the Happiness Giver” (created by the Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation and aired on television in 2009), for example, a marriage-migrant woman from the Philippines is described as a person who needs help from her Korean neighbours:

For Jun-ho’s mom, who is not yet used to reading Korean, Min-ji’s mom read an instruction note (from the school) to her every day: Your love makes Jun-ho grow up as a boy who will have a bright future in Korea (narration of the public campaign advertisement “the Happiness Giver,” KOBACCO).

Like other common characters in public campaign advertisements about *damunwha*, the migrant woman called “Jun-ho’s mom” is from Southeast Asia and is living in the countryside (this is not explicitly stated in the advertisement, but the set looks like a typical house in a rural area). She has difficulty understanding the note sent from her son’s school, but her neighbour kindly reads the note to her. The clear message of this advertisement is to encourage Korean people to show kindness to migrants through neighbourly love, and it hints at stereotypes of marriage-migrant women as people who are poor, in trouble, and in need of help, emphasising their contribution to Korea’s future by focusing on the woman’s relationship with her son.

As such, South Korean media and the public view international marriage as a match between men from wealthy countries and women from poor countries, based on a strict hierarchical dichotomy:

Due to the tendency of hypergamy, Korean women usually marry men who are from leading countries or have higher socioeconomic status than they do. Most marriage-migrant women are from poorer countries than South Korea (Lee and Kim 2007).

Hypergamy in international marriage is not only determined by the respective statuses of individual men and women. It is also influenced by the relative statuses of their countries of origin. In the discourse on international marriage, the conventional idea of hypergamy—women’s tendency to marry men from higher socioeconomic levels—overlaps with the relationship between developed and developing/undeveloped countries. That is, positions within the global economic order work internationally in the formation of hypergamous relationships. Hierarchical gender relations and relations based on the relative economic statuses of two countries intersect here.

By emphasising the rise in marriage migration and South Korea’s recent popularity as a destination for migrants, the Korean majority somehow confirms its superiority and feels proud. The traditional views of the direction of migration from relatively less developed countries to more developed countries and of hypergamy serve to strengthen the concept of Korean superiority. In this way, the idea of “superior South Korea and inferior others” results from a hierarchical notion and in turn serves to construct new forms of racial and gender hierarchies.

Meanwhile, the typical images of farmers’ wives and residents of rural areas convey another form of othering. Identifying Korea with developed urban areas, the South Korean majority’s stereotype situates marriage-migrant women in rural areas—that is, as inhabitants in the locale of the minority who require sympathy. National statistics indicate that 35.9% (2005) and 41% (2006) of the men working in the agricultural sector marry foreign women. In other words, about 40% of Korean male farmers have international marriages. This statistic is frequently cited as proof that a high number of bachelors live in the countryside. However, the statistic does not establish that international marriage is only a rural phenomenon, as working in agriculture does not necessarily entail residing in the countryside. In fact, a high proportion of migrant women (75%) live in urban areas, including in metropolitan suburb (*Kyongki-do*) (Lee and Kim 2007). That is, bachelor farmers are incorrectly thought to be the dominant group among internationally married Korean husbands, and this contributes to the widespread othering of the rural from the point of view of urban residents.

This idea arises from public and media attention paid to international marriage, which has focused on the issue of farmers’ difficulty finding brides. As mentioned earlier, issues arising for marriage-migrant women living in rural areas, such as isolation, are surely important. However, the

overrepresentation of international marriage as a rural phenomenon is also connected with the traditional Korean image of male farmers and the countryside. Conventional notions remain rooted in the beliefs that these men are less competitive, have fallen behind, and are failures. These beliefs are the result of the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of South Korea, often called “compressed modernisation” (Chang 1999). The image of bachelor farmers is connected to the hierarchical dichotomy of urban-rich-modern vs. rural-poor-pre-modern. At the same time, this image of being less competitive—and therefore less desirable—is linked to images of “victimhood”, as bachelor farmers are often the object of sympathy, men who are viewed as being willing to preserve their hometowns and agriculture while missing out on opportunities to find partners. The stereotypes of bachelor farmers and rural areas therefore make marriage immigration seem inevitable. At the same time, the stereotypes locate migration and migrants in less privileged positions on the hierarchical scales of urban / rural and Korea / sending countries. The nostalgic image of home as the place where family and memories are located is a rural image. Since most Koreans perceive their countries of origin as less developed, marriage-migrant women seem to fit squarely within the confines of these stereotypes.

An interesting change has occurred in the depiction of Korean husbands. In the early stages of the international marriage boom, rural bachelors were mostly described as “victims” who failed to marry due to social changes such as industrialisation and urbanisation, and there was an implication that “selfish” Korean women who avoided hard lives in the countryside were also to blame for their single status. However, as international marriage has become more familiar to Koreans, Korean husbands married to Southeast Asian women have begun to frequently appear in the media as “perpetrators.” Their image has changed to that of criminals or patriarchal husbands who commit domestic violence and insist on traditional roles for the women in their families. This stereotype is not only found in the media coverage, but also in policies set by the government and by NGOs who tend to prioritise issues of domestic violence (H. Kim 2008).

All of this is related to perceptions of masculinity. As hapless bachelor farmers, men married to foreign spouses seemed to suffer from a *lack of masculinity* when they sought to marry. But over time the image did not remain so weak and pathetic. As Korean husbands married to foreign spouses began to appear in the media because of domestic violence issues, they came to be seen as patriarchal and violent. While perceptions of the husbands have changed, migrant women are almost always perceived to be in low positions in the hierarchy, remaining simply “women from a poor country.”

Conclusion

As this paper has revealed, contemporary migration in South Korea is gendered and racialised by the dominant discourse and policies about immigration. The discourse and policies, which are reflected in

a large number of services for immigrants and public campaigns for majority Korean people, have the potential to exploit and distort the concept of multiculturalism (particularly with the special term *damunwha*). In fact, the multiculturalism project actually works as a nation-building project, given that South Korean issues of immigration and ethnic minority preferentially target marriage-migrant women who marry Korean men and instrumentally define them as mothers of the next Korean generation who will presumably solve South Korea's population shortage problem. If such preference with respect to immigration is the standard for judging who is to be accepted as a member of South Korean society, it goes even further in setting a standard for deciding who can become a proper Korean woman and wife and mother of Korean nationals insofar as immigrant women are expected to adapt to traditional Korean norms and cultures before as well as during marriage.

In a situation where immigrant women will inevitably replace native women (for example, as a solution to an ageing population), the perception of women's role as embodying national values and serving as biological and cultural reproducers, defined in the traditional relationship between nation and women, will apply to immigrant women as well. Marriage-migrant women are required to be close to native women in various aspects including physical appearance, language, and manner. By limiting marriage-migrant women's roles to serving to their Korean families while blaming native Korean women as selfish "modern" women avoiding this duty, patriarchal nationalist discourse enforces the traditional gender role for a woman as "a wise mother and good wife."

However, even though such discourse demands that marriage-migrant women be proper *Korean* women, it does not place them in a position equal to that of majority Koreans. There are many efforts to raise awareness about marriage-migrant women and their families, but these women are mostly described using victimised and othered images in public campaigns, reports, support programs, and commercial business. Given a strong belief in hypergamy as a normal marriage pattern, marriage-migrant women are situated in the overlapping hierarchical relationships between husband and wife and between sending and receiving countries. A hierarchical dichotomy of femininity-traditional-poor-brides vs. masculinity-modern-rich-husbands serves the Korean desire to establish South Korea at a higher position than other Asian countries in the international order hierarchy. Because of this, the concept of immigration itself tends to be formed using such hierarchical concepts of gender and ethnicities/nations. In fact, the tendency not to consider residents who are Western, who hold highly-skilled jobs, or who are middle class as normal "immigrants" (in contrast with marriage-migrant women from Asia) is rooted not only in South Koreans' desire to preserve their paternal blood line, but also in a conventional image of immigrants as poor people suffering from hardship.

The emphasis on diversity of family forms, including family members from different ethnic backgrounds, was originally intended to raise awareness respecting different cultures; but it still recognizes marriage-migrant women only as "daughters-in-law" of South Korea. This title seems to

reflect well the majority Korean view of marriage-migrant women, who are expected to meet the conditions for being proper Korean women but are never accepted as real Korean women.

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