

5-2015

Naerisarang (????), Or an Elder's Love for the Young: Vietnamese and Filipina Marriage Migrants as Preservers of the Korean Patriline

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Naerisarang (내리사랑), Or an Elder's Love for the Young:
Vietnamese and Filipina Marriage Migrants as Preservers of the Korean Patriline

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the
College of William and Mary

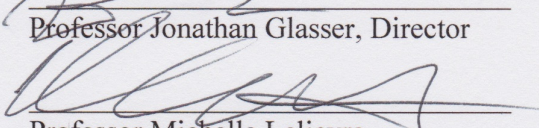
By

Danielle Y. Tassara

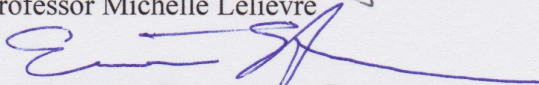
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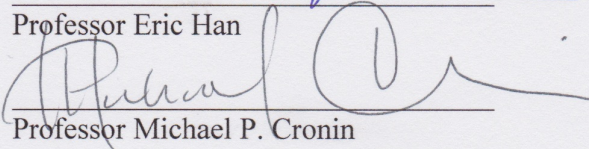
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**Naerisarang (내리사랑), Or an Elder's Love for the Young:
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By Danielle Tassara

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
Chapter 1: Historical Background	
MULTICULTURALISM AND MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	12
BROTHERS AND SISTERS: DESCENDENTS OF TANGUN AND BLOOD IDEOLOGY.....	16
Chapter 2: Identity and Reproductive Politics for Marriage Migrants	
FOOD, IDENTITY, AND NATIONALISM.....	23
THE KOREAN MOTHER-IN-LAW: STATUS, MEMBERSHIP, AND REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS IN THE KOREAN KINSHIP SYSTEM.....	30
Chapter 3: Integration and Exchange in Official Discourse and Government Affairs	
MULTICULTURALIST DISCOURSE AS A TOOL FOR ASSIMILATION.....	40
MUTUAL CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND MARRIAGE MIGRANTS ON DISPLAY.....	49
CONCLUSION	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

Abstract

The idea of maternal citizenship and reproductive duties as a way of both assimilating and othering Filipina and Vietnamese foreign wives in South Korea plays out in both public multiculturalist discourse and within household discussions. Ethnic nationalism, neo-Confucianism, and government/media discourses have helped to structure how migrant mothers and their families are portrayed and how they portray themselves. I argue that even as state and civil society pressures marriage migrants from Southeast Asia to become “Korean” mothers and daughters-in-law, migrants and their families influence how such an identity is defined by taking advantage of the media’s influence and the government’s authority within these roles and utilizing the resources they receive to improve their status in Korea. In short, I examine how Filipina and Vietnamese marriage migrants reproduce and raise “Korean” children, integrate them into Korean society, while at the same time, using their position in society to maintain and introduce to their children the traditions and customs of their home country. I use data collected from participant observation and interviews with these families and organization members in order to examine how national and family identity is shaped by marriage migrants for themselves and for their children while at the same time having to work within severe constraints.

Introduction

On the long plane ride from Washington DC to Seoul, South Korea, I excitedly thought about the homestay family I would be living with for the summer. The family consisted of a mother who moved from Osaka, Japan, and a father from Wonju, Korea. It was an exciting time for the household because the mother was pregnant and due any day. Once I landed and spoke to my homestay father, I was energized to hear the news that my homestay mother had had a second boy not two days before I arrived. The father looked exhausted but happy about his new son. A few weeks later, the Korean father’s Japanese mother-in-law had flown in from Japan to help with the baby for the first month. One night, while getting ready to go to sleep, I heard the sounds of a lullaby and the soft noises of a fussing baby drift through the apartment. I watched the small Japanese grandmother rock the baby back and forth without ever stopping the soothing stream of what I realized were Japanese words. While listening to her sing, I realized that this baby boy and his brother were exposed to something many other children of Korean families

would not be. I began to wonder how something as simple as a Japanese lullaby shapes the children from multicultural families and the roles mothers, mothers-in-law, and fathers play.

Even when studying abroad two years ago and teaching English to the children of a Chinese marriage migrant and their Korean father as part of DASOM, I pondered what it was like for multicultural families to live in a country that many have viewed as being ethnically homogeneous. DASOM was a newly created campus organization at my host university, Yonsei, and whose main mission was to support multicultural families in Seoul and generate a better understanding of marriage migrants and their families. The majority of my time spent with DASOM, during my year studying abroad, included tutoring English to children of multicultural families, assisting in running meetings on topics like diversity in Korea, and helping with a conference at Yonsei on multiculturalism and its impact on Korean society. I spent 12 months as a member and officer in this newly created organization, and it introduced the topic of multiculturalism in Korea to me, which gave me the opportunity to think more deeply about Korean identity as well as my own identity as a multiethnic young adult in the United States. These musings resulted in my choosing multicultural families in Korea as my research topic. Furthermore, my Korean friends and neighbors speak about the emergence of “multicultural families” as a recent and impactful phenomenon in Korean society, which further intrigued me. This study is based on ethnographic research completed in the summer of 2014 in South Korea, over a period of three months during which I collected data concerning Filipina and Vietnamese multicultural families. I conducted interviews as well as participant-observation sessions such as visiting church services, volunteering through a Yonsei University organization called DASOM, English tutoring, and spending time with migrant families like that of my host family.

My host family was somewhat unusual in South Korea since it is not a common occurrence for Korean men to marry non-Korean women. In other ways, the family I came to know is not so different from a growing number of households in Korea. These households usually consist of women from Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam or the Philippines who have been introduced to Korean men through international marriage brokers, local matchmakers, and family members in their home country. These women, sometimes called marriage migrants, foreign brides, or migrant mothers, generally grew up and lived in socio-economic situations that are worse off than those of their Korean husbands. From interviews and participant observation, I believe that most foreign brides marry into a Korean family in order to change their socio-economic status, although in some cases the marriage is carried out for a combination of other reasons. Foreign brides are encouraged by the Korean government to marry and produce children in South Korea in order to stem the rising number of Korean bachelors and widowed men who are facing a shortage of brides. It also counteracts the low fertility rate of Korea and many of the issues that come with a rapidly aging population, such as a shrinking labor force.

The growth in the number of foreign brides, and more significantly their children, has altered the demographics of a society that has historically been perceived as ethnically homogeneous.¹ As the demographics of the Korean population shifts, the Korean government as well as the structure of the Korean kinship system leads to a process that conforms to straight-line assimilation practices first introduced in the 20th century in countries like the U.S. Straight-line assimilation is the integration of immigrant groups within a host society so that the characteristics of both groups eventually, through the generations, resemble each other (Alba et

¹ The Korean National Statistics Office reports that, with the exception of the year 2005, the number of foreigners living in Korea has been increasing since 2000 with the number of children from marriages between Koreans and foreigners almost tripling from 2005 (6,121) to 2008 (18,778) (Kim et al 2012: 244-5). Interethnic marriages account for almost 13.5% of total marriages in Korea (Kim 2011: 1595)

² Boundary blurring occurs when an individual is able to be simultaneously members of multiple groups on both sides of the boundary (Alba et al 2007: 131). It can also mean that a certain set of individuals can sometimes appear as the member of a distinct group at one time, while at other

al 2007: 123). Korean state and civil society pushes marriage migrants from Southeast Asia to become “Korean” mothers and daughters-in-law by following Korean gender norms. Marriage migrants negotiate the boundaries of such an identity by taking advantage of the influence and authority behind these roles. South Korea, experiencing a shortage of Korean-born women to maintain these duties, is dependent on marriage migrants to produce and raise “Koreans” (Kim 2013: 469). I would argue that “straight-line assimilation” (Alba et al 2007: 124) has become the dominant paradigm for Vietnamese and Filipina marriage migrants' experience through the Korean kinship system and through the concept of “maternal citizenship” (Kim 2013: 465) promoted by the Korean government’s policies and multicultural programs. There is the recognized need for mutual cultural exchange in addition to assimilationist practices, which leads to the simultaneous othering and Koreanization involved in maternal citizenship in Korea. Filipina and Vietnamese marriage migrants have agency in the kinship system by having children, especially sons, by wielding cultural influence and gaining economic status through government jobs and resources, and by influencing Korea’s international image. Marriage migrants are both recipients and producers of Korean identity within the Korean assimilation process, also known as “Koreanization.” As a result, marriage migrants in some ways subvert the power structure inherent in Korean nativism by blurring a multiplicity of identities both within and outside the dominant culture, even as they undergo a Koreanization process for themselves and their children.

“Straight-line assimilation” (2007: 126) and other related notions like “boundary blurring” (2007: 132) provides useful conceptual frameworks for understanding marriage migration in the Korean context.² Although Korean society and American society differ in various ways, the

² Boundary blurring occurs when an individual is able to be simultaneously members of multiple groups on both sides of the boundary (Alba et al 2007: 131). It can also mean that a certain set of individuals can sometimes appear as the member of a distinct group at one time, while at other times, appearing like the member of equally distinct group (Alba et al 2007: 131). One example of boundary blurring is when a Filipina marriage

“internationalization” (Kymlicka 2005: 31) of liberal multiculturalism resulted in the return in the international community of these older, ongoing concepts employed in the U.S. An examination of assimilation theory is crucial to understanding such a process in the Korean context. While marriage migrants and their children assimilate, the assimilation process occurs in degrees as they retain membership rights for various ethnic groups. According to Alba and Nee, assimilation in the U.S. is more of a *one-directional* adoption of the “core culture” (2007: 125) of the host society or in this case Anglo-American patterns (2007: 127). Similarly, Herbert Gans suggests that each new generation in a multi-ethnic family represents a new level of adjustment to the host society. According to Gans, each generation illustrates “steps” away from the “ethnic ‘ground zero’” (Alba and Nee 2007: 127) and towards the dominant host culture. The migrant and their family move away from the community and “ethnoculture” they are a member of and closer to “complete” assimilation. Gans called this process “straight-line assimilation,” which builds upon Gordon’s hypothesis of a one-directional adoption of a host society’s traditions, values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Gans ultimately adjusts this argument by critiquing the stance that straight-line assimilation is a trend that would inevitably finish with the eventual total disappearance of “all traces of ethnicity” after several native-born generations (1992: 43). Gans instead transforms the straight-line theory into the “*bumpy line* theory” with the bumps exemplifying various kinds of adaptations to “changing circumstances” and with the line having “no predictable end” (1992: 44). I believe that the structure of the Korean kinship system and, to some degree, the implementation of population planning policies and multicultural centers follows the paradigm of straight-line assimilation while at the same time allowing for mutual cultural exchange. It

migrant told me about teaching her daughter how to set the table and use utensils Korean style as well as Filipino style. These two different practices demonstrates how the marriage migrant is able to be a part of two groups and passes that ability down to her children.

pushes for assimilation into Korean society as the dominant core group, beginning with the first generation of children of multicultural families. While straight-line assimilation may reflect, in part, attitudes of Korean family structure and the Korean national government, I believe Gans' modified bumpy-line theory reflects the reality of multicultural families in Korea, where marriage migrants both benefit and are oppressed by straight-line assimilation produced from Korean multicultural programs and kinship system.

In my thesis, I will examine how marriage migrants act upon ethnicity as a socially constructed boundary through boundary blurring, and how the Korean kinship system and multicultural programs shape ethnic identity. I first contextualize the phenomenon of marriage migration within recent Korean history and wider regional and global political economy. I also evaluate Korea's recently conceived belief of "ethno-nationalism" (Lee 2009: 372), or the manufacturing of a Korean national identity based on ethnic homogeneity, and how it has influenced the notion of blood ideology. After Japanese colonization (1910-1945), a strong "us" versus "them" attitude was established in Korea in order to strengthen internal cohesion against an outside threat. However, many, including the international community, have come to view Korea's ethnic nationalism as exclusionary and the cause of prejudice and discrimination (Han 2007: 11) for anyone marked as an other. This nationalistic attitude led the UN to speak out against seemingly racial and ethnic discriminatory crimes. According to the UN report, the principle of "pure-blooded," which has become an integral feature of Korea, has facilitated various forms legal, "largely invisible" forms of discrimination (UN 2005: 4). The UN committee found discrimination in Korea to be particularly concerning because it seemed that prejudice was "passed down from one generation to the next" (2005: 44). About a decade after the UN report, Korea has come to promote a multicultural policy implemented through

multicultural centers. These centers, as well as the programs they maintain and the discourse they draw on, promote a paradigm of straight-line assimilation while at the same time creating an opening for marriage migrants, who participate in boundary blurring, to construct what it means to be Korean. Official multicultural programs run by the Korean government and the concept of maternal citizenship reflect such a pattern.

I next assess how food, as a “*flexible* symbolic vehicle for Self identity” (James 2005: 375), works both as a way to assimilate marriage migrants and as a way for marriage migrants to undermine the assimilation process. Although other scholars have inquired into the life of marriage migrants, none of them have examined the place of food in their relationships with native-born Koreans. I investigate how culinary practices act as a channel for identity, both new and old. One major site that involves identity-making and culinary practices is the Korean kinship system. The Korean kinship system produces an environment in which Korean family members, mainly the Korean husbands’ parents, can impose ideas of Korean-ness (through Korean food and Korean cooking practices) upon marriage migrants, exemplifying a pattern of straight-line assimilation.³ This is one site in which the Korean assimilation process, or Koreanization, is carried out. At the same time, as daughters-in-law and integral parts of the Korean household, marriage migrants can demand that they bring in some of their own culinary practices and other traditions from their own countries.

I also situate this within a larger theme of gender and reproduction that guides the lives of Korean and migrant women in society. The cycles between married and adult life in Korea are challenging for women, both Korean and migrant. The obstacles that marriage migrants face are very much linked to the same ones Korean women face during their own marriages. Nonetheless,

³ For example, parents-in-law sometimes live in the household of their son. In such cases, the parents-in-law are perceived as holding a large degree of the authority in the family. Even if the parents do not live with their children, holidays that traditionally require adult children to return to their parents’ home in order to demonstrate their respect through activities like ceremonial bowing also reinforce the authority of the parent.

for marriage migrants from Southeast Asia, the situation is exacerbated by their lack of support (having no family in Korea) and lack of experience in managing a Korean household.

After discussing the Korean kinship system, I explore how multiculturalist discourse influences the lives of marriage migrants. The Korean government originally brought the term multicultural “as a solution to female marriage migrants” (Ahn 2013: 37) and as a response to the marriage migrants’ raising of the new generation of “Koreans.” State-led programs and discourse focused on what it means to be a “good” Korean daughter-in-law and perceptions of marriage migrants as the source of new (multi)culture(s) encourages “ethnic hierarchy” (Kim 2013: 469). It continues the pattern of straight-line assimilation even as it carries out “othering” through mutual exchanges of culture. The Korean government shapes the way in which citizenship for marriage migrants is established, both as a cultural status within families and as a legal status within institutions. Minjeong Kim argues that marriage migrants, as biological and cultural reproducers of “Koreans,” are both culturally assimilated and marked by ethnic othering (2013: 455). Nonetheless, she explains that by underscoring the father’s ethnic identity for “mother-citizen practices,” marriage migrants are presented paradoxically as both “ethnicized” and as gendered others (Kim 2013: 458-9). Maternal citizenship is paradoxical because while the government speaks out against othering through these multicultural programs, the consequence is that in some instances the marriage migrant plays the role of “Korean,” and during others she acts as a member from an outside ethnic group. It also reflects “idealized or stigmatized images of motherhood” (Kim 2013: 458), where motherhood is seen as inevitable despite the fact that not all wives become mothers.

The Korean kinship system also influences consumption and production practices (Friedman 1990) through the Korean mother-in-law as an individual who helps foreign brides

transition into their new lives. They also hold authority over on what a marriage migrant can and cannot cook at home, for herself, her husband, and her children. The pressure to cook almost exclusively Korean food falls into the paradigms of both straight-line assimilation and boundary-blurring. It generates contradictory statements about cultural identity as Filipina and Vietnamese marriage migrants are in some cases seen as Others and others labeled as Korean daughters-in-law. At the same time, marriage migrants who insist on cooking Filipino or Vietnamese food or have more freedom to cook food from their home countries can mobilize food in a way that marks out a certain identity, not only for themselves, but for the family members they feed.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

Multiculturalism and Migrant Mothers in Historical Perspective

In the 1970s, the industrialization of South Korea's economy resulted in rural young women (young women targeted by the Korean government as I discuss later in this section) moving to cities like Seoul and a stream of foreign brides coming in to replace them (Abelman et al 2005: 104-5). Even before the 1970s, economic development, particularly in major cities like Seoul, lured youth away from rural villages and towns (Brandt 1971: 160), resulting in fewer people to carry out the manual labor necessary for essential sources of revenue like fishing and farming. As time progressed, however, the movement from rural to urban area(s) became more specialized, with young, female Koreans choosing to move into the city. One factor that comes into play is the globalization of the Korean economy. It altered the notion of what is acceptable for a young marriageable Korean woman.

This shift in views allowed the average young Korean woman greater mobility and was first started by the Korean government. Beginning in the 1960s, Chung Hee Park, South Korea's authoritarian president sought to bring in sneaker and electronics companies from Japan, Europe, and the U.S. in the hopes that it would help Korea achieve rapid industrialization and compete in the emerging global economy (Kim 1997). However, in Korea, sewing at home versus sewing in a factory were two ideologically disparate ideas. The South Korean government had to change what was thought to be natural and decent for a marriageable South Korean woman to do outside the home to incorporate new activities like working in a factory (Enloe 2007: 27). According to Cynthia Enloe, President Park and his economic advisors, making the widespread assumption that women sewing sneakers or assembling electronic devices was more natural than men performing the same tasks, began a campaign in the 1960s and early 1970s to alter Korean

society's view of the young "respectable" Korean woman (Enloe 2007: 27). In order to carry this out, President Park's campaign conflated the ideas of national security, national pride, modernization, and industrial growth in order to convince parents that working under the supervision of a foreman in a factory had the same level of respectability as working under the supervision of parents (Enloe 2007: 27). The young Korean woman could maintain a "respectable" femininity," and an "appealing feminized morality," which would make her attractive on the Korean marriage market (Enloe 2007: 27). Some Koreans placed the blame for the shortage of brides directly on Korean mothers in the countryside rather than the government (Freeman 2011: 36). Rural mothers would push for their daughters to leave for Seoul and warned them away from rural bachelors (Freeman 2011: 36). This occurred even as the sons of the very same mothers were unable to find brides (Freeman 2011: 36). These mothers were no doubt influenced by the national campaign to make it the patriotic duty of young Korean women to work at factories and further industrialize Korea. The government's campaign created an opportunity for foreign corporations to take advantage of this new force of cheap "daughterly labor" (Enloe 2007: 28), and resulted in a void in rural Korean households.

In order to counteract what was rapidly becoming a serious issue for Korea, the government initiated a program called the "Getting Rural Bachelors Married" program in the 1990s, rendering foreign brides from Southeast Asia as a vital source of young eligible women for rural bachelors (H.M. Kim 2007: 1; Kim 2011: xxiii). As a result, marriage migrants like those from Vietnam and the Philippines began to fill the void in Korean households created by the movement of young, unmarried Korean women to industrializing areas like Seoul. At first, it had been local governments and assemblies that implemented and subsidized international marriage programs (Freeman 2011: 48). These programs assisted bachelors' efforts to find future

wives outside of Korea. One example is the nationwide Marriage Aid Program (SongHon Tapgi Program or 성헌 텃기 프로그램) (Freeman 2011: 68). It was one of the earliest programs, and the Research Association for the Welfare of Korean Farm and Fishing Villages (RWFFV) under local governments first initiated it. The principle organizers of RWFFV reasoned that they “must get daughters-in-law back from Seoul” (Freeman 2011: 68). Under the slogan “Bring the sound of crying babies back to the countryside,” the RWFFV began to match rural bachelors with unmarried women in the cities (Freeman 2011: 68-9). Despite brokering over 600 marriages (Freeman 2011: 68), the shortage of brides continued to be rampant in rural Korea.

Today, more and more foreign brides migrate to both rural and urban areas of Korea as a history of selective abortion in favor of males has produced a skewed birth ratio resulting in additional shortages of marriageable women (Kim 2009: 83). Some reports in 2006 even suggest that foreign wives are marrying more and more urban, never-married men (Lee et al 2006: 166). Korean men who foreign brides marry have changed from only rural men to include “urban low-class, divorced, widowed, and disabled men” (H. K. Kim 2012: 540-1). By 2007, more than 11,000 female migrants had married Koreans, and, by 2020, it is predicted that marriage migrants will make up 20% of the total number of households in Korea (H.K. Kim 2007). It is not surprising, then, that the politics of space attached to the rise of international marriages pertains to the local (from rural to urban) as well as to the national and global. It involves the movement of Koreans within Korea from rural towns to industrialized cities as a mechanism that set off the movement of Southeast Asian and other Asian migrants to South Korea.

As a result, bride shortages in the countryside expanded to become a national issue taken over by the national government. By the mid-2000s, the central government had focused on immigration and population planning policies (Freeman 2011: 52). The government began

investing numerous resources for the expansion of multicultural centers that implemented assimilation programs like Korean cooking classes, Korean language classes, and child-rearing hotlines (Freeman 2011: 52; Jeju 2012). The Seoul center, one of the Vietnamese wives told me, for example, at times also offered bilingual education for children from multicultural families.

External influences also set the stage for the movement of Southeast Asian marriage migrants. The rapid acceleration of global migration in general constituted one significant push factor. According to the UN Demographic Yearbook, by the end of 2005, over 191 million people were living outside their native countries (G.S. Han 2007: 38). A UN World Migration Report estimated the number of migrants increased from 84 million in 1985 to 175 million in the year 2000 (United Nations 2004), and it is projected to increase to 230 million in 2050 (Hugo 2005: 2). Asia especially reflects this increase as global migration looms large and countries like the Philippines have an outflow of migration that is so high as to slow national population growth (Hugo 2005: 2). Another factor included the 1990s Gulf War that led Southeast Asian migrant workers to view Korea as “a new, promising destination” (Han 2007: 38). The past few decades of economic hardship have resulted in migrant laborers from Arab and Southeast Asian countries (Al-Najjar 2001; Abella 1995) migrating to Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. Migrations to the Gulf States sped up the development of certain regions of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and most importantly, the Philippines (Amjad 1989; Eelens et al. 1992). As a result, the industrialization of Korea and its economy resulted in it being the ideal location for work and eventually for contract marriage.

Nonetheless, while the overall trend shows a progression towards more and more migrants entering Korea, the movement and flow of migrants into Korea is not a linear progression with Filipina and Vietnamese women moving from one point to another. There are

twists and turns as well so that at times the migration flow to South Korea slows and picks up. According to Caren Freeman, the Korean-Chinese immigrants—called Chosonjok (조선족) migrants—she interviewed in 1998 began to contemplate different areas for migration like Japan (2011: 111). The 1997 Asian financial crisis gave many immigrants pause because of how severely it impacted the Korean economy and its status in the economic world order. Korea seemed at risk, and migration patterns altered as a result (Freeman 2011: 112). Even the international marriage brokers Freeman spoke to blamed the crises and the following IMF bailout for the slow-down in the Korean migration business (Freeman 2011: 111). International and regional factors like the Gulf War and the IMF bailout heavily influenced the movement and exertions of marriage migrants coming in and out of Korea.

One other striking element pertaining to the flows of migration, not just in East Asia, but also in a global context, is the phenomenon called the “feminization of migration” (Shin 2009; Ahn 2012: 30). Female immigrants over time have been absorbed into specific economic sectors and assumed gendered occupations like “sex workers, prostitution, contract marriage, and international marriage” (Constable 2005; Espinoza 2003; Ahn 2012: 30). Therefore, female migrants emerge as more “active players in international migration” by answering the call to offset labor shortages in South Korea in areas like care-oriented services (G.S. Han 2007: 32). According to Ahn, gendering migration in this definite way indicates that “sex(uality) is more likely to be commodified in the global market” (2012: 30-31, 33) and in national and local markets as well. This leads back to the gendered aspect of rural-to-urban migration in Korea.

Brothers and Sisters: Descendants of Tang’un and Blood Ideology

Nationalist discourse plays a critical role in fashioning the identity of marriage migrants and their families as it reinforces the dichotomy between Korean and non-Korean. Marriage

migrants, who are members of multiple groups through boundary blurring, are seen as mothers of Korean children who hold onto Korean identity even as they are labeled foreigner. For example, the Korean cultural programs (like Korean childrearing classes) conducted by Korean multicultural centers impose a Korean identity on the marriage migrants as a way to reinforce internal cohesion and strengthen the Korean nation.⁴ However, what exactly is the Korean nation? In what ways do multicultural families alter or reinforce the way the Korean nation is defined? The imagined connections between individuals in a community have a dynamic role in classifying society and shaping ethnicity, and have real-life consequences for young adults of multiethnic heritage. By employing a theoretical framework based on ethnicity, the social, “imagined” process of identification can be further explored both in terms of each young adult’s individual experience and within the historical “human collective” that is transformed by globalizing processes (Jenkins 2002: 118). We can inspect elements of the “human collective” on the scale of the nation, defined by Benedict Anderson as “an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (2002: 6). According to Anderson, the nation as “imagined” is not imaginary in the sense that it is dreamed up, but rather it is a state imagined and established as a social reality. The collective, human imagination creates the nation, where each member of the nation builds cohesive bonds, despite the “actual inequality and exploitation” that may occur within that nation (Anderson 1983:7-9). Such inequality ties into identity—identity as an ongoing, dynamic process—and the marginalization of the “Other.”

The shared feeling of cohesiveness ties together the members of a nation and results in a rise of nationalistic feelings. Pride in one’s country’s food, for instance, strengthens the bonds

⁴ Almost every marriage migrant who had gone to a multicultural center talked about child rearing classes, educational TV shows, or a hotline for foreign mothers raising children in Korea. One even mentioned how a Korean woman from the center came to her home and taught her what to eat, how to feed her baby, and how to raise her child on Korean and Korean customs. Most said it was simply a way for them to raise children in Korea without the support of their family back home. Moreover, some said it was a way for their children to grow up like other Koreans, without feeling like outsiders, even though that in itself was concerning or upsetting to some marriage migrants who wanted their children to grow up learning Vietnamese or Filipino.

between members and presents the image of a cohesive nation. Other factors play into the construction of a nation, one example being the homogenization of language, the establishment of a national bureaucratic infrastructure, and the expansion of education (Robbins 2014: 106). Each of these act as agents of nationalism. One example in Korea is the establishment of the Korean alphabet system, hangul (한글), by King Sejong in 1443, which replaced a reliance on Chinese characters and came during a period of rising Korean nationalism (Heo et al 2010: 7). Today, Hangul Day is a national holiday celebrated throughout Korea demonstrating how significant linguistic nationalism has become for unifying the nation. Korean friends explained that on this holiday, students in the Korean education system would learn about the alphabet and its history. I also saw groups of elementary and middle school students taking fieldtrips to see the 30-foot golden statue of King Sejong in Seoul, which further reinforced national unity. Such activities are “invented traditions,” which help establish continuity with a “suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm et al 1983: 1) and common ethnic group membership (Robbins 2014: 104).

Teaching history and public education in general also has an explicit link to nation-building (Robbins 2014: 108), which is revealed through the popular Korean myth, Tangun. The foundation myth proclaims a 5,000 year-old mythical history that began with a single nation created by a single race. Tangun is the son of the Heavenly Prince who descended to Earth to help cultivate the land, and a bear who wished to be human. As told to me, the story begins with a bear and a tiger, both desiring to become human, pray to heaven for assistance. In order to become human, the Heavenly Prince declares they must fulfill the tasks of living in a dark cave and eating nothing but garlic and mugwort for 40 days and nights.⁵ While the tiger fails, the bear turns into a woman only to find that she cannot conceive. Praying again to heaven, the Prince

⁵ The numbers varied depending on who told me the story. It could be 40 days or 100 days. Most stories I heard or read have the tiger failing around the 21st day, however.

responds by becoming her husband. The bear-woman, called Ungyo, has a son named Tangun who becomes the first King of Korea. A history professor at Yonsei, Hong Won Suh, once explained to me that it is believed by scholars that the bear and the tiger symbolize two warring clans. The tiger clan lost, and the bear clan used the creation myth to strengthen its claim to the land and the divine purity of their blood lineage. Before I left to study abroad in South Korea, several of my Korean friends on campus told me the myth of Tangun, explaining that it is an essential part of Korean identity and as a result is something I should become familiar with prior to leaving. When I arrived in Seoul, a similar pattern continued, with many of my new Korean friends and sometimes even random individuals in the streets repeating the story as a way of introducing me to Korean culture. The repetition of this story highlights how meaningful Tangun is to Koreans and its importance in the notion of blood ideology, or the idea that all Koreans are related through blood and descend from the single ancestor Tangun (Kim 2008: 25-6). One Korean husband of a Filipina marriage migrant told me that the textbooks in his public school system recounted this tale as well. He said his own son, who is in middle school, continues to learn about the myth from school textbooks, and that he believes it reinforces blood ideology and the marginalization of “mixed blooded individuals” (honhyol or 혼혈) despite talk of inclusivity and multiculturalism.

In addition to creation myths, war is one of the most effective ways of uniting people and groups against outsiders (Colley 1992: 366-7). One example is Great Britain, where patriotism and the unity of the nation were fostered through the Napoleonic Wars (Robbins 2014: 105). I would argue that Korea experienced a similar development during the Japanese colonization period. Starting as early as the 2nd century BC and leading up to WWII, groups of individuals from the modern-day countries of China and Japan have invaded Korea, making the best defense

one involving collaboration against an external force (Young 1993: 29-32). A sense of ethnic and Korean nationalism resulted from interactions with a foreign enemy and the unifying factor that came from defending themselves against external threats (Lim 2012: 17; Robinson 2007: 13; Heo et al 2010: 7). During WWII, the imperialistic aggression of Japan and the resulting Japanese invasion of Korea led to an even further rise of nationalistic sentiments. Japanese rulers implemented a plan that attempted to coerce Korean citizens into conforming to Japanese cultural and religious practices (Berkley Center 2014). At the height of the assimilation campaign in 1937, Japanese colonizers attempted to impose Shinto worship, and Japanese radio broadcasted pro-Japanese propaganda, onto the Korean population (Robinson et al 1999: 63, 68). Furthermore, in 1939, Japanese rulers forced Koreans to accept a new naming system, whereby Koreans had to adopt Japanese last names while relinquishing their own Korean family names (Kang 2008: 345). Japan was attempting to erase the years of history ingrained in a family name—after all, a family name is passed down through the generations and establishes a strong sense of belonging within families. Coercing Koreans to officially register with a Japanese last name was a blow against one facet of Korean identity on the individual, local, and national levels. On the surface and in propaganda at least, the Japanese colonialists' main goal for imperialism involved the Japanization of Koreans. At the same time, while imperialistic propaganda was implemented for the Japanization process for all the Japanese colonies, Japanese imperialists never intended it to be a reachable goal. During the colonization period Koreans were supposed to undergo Japanization, but never actually be Japanese (Robinson et al 1999: 60-1). It was an elusive future at best. The Japanese would never see Koreans reaching the level of Japanese superiority they claimed to exist, because they would need to continue to maintain their exclusively superior position.

In addition to the naming system, Japanese colonialists attempted to alter perceptions of Korean history. After 1910, they attempted to subvert the story of Korean history within the context of the rise of Japanese dominance in East Asia (Robinson 2007:28). Japanese colonialists began to produce textbooks heavily influenced by the notion of Japanese supremacy as a strategy for dominating perceptions of Koreanness. Those textbooks sought to make Korea's racial and ethnic identity subservient to and integrated into the Japanese Empire (Robinson 2007:28; Shin 2006: 22).⁶ Outward historical processes like the colonization by Japan have engendered a stronger sense of what it means to identify as “a Korean” by generating a binary between Korean (han-guk-een sa-ram or 한국인 사람) and foreigner (wae-guk-een sa-ram or 외국인 사람) and producing patriotic sentiments.⁷ Yet there is ambiguity in pinpointing exactly what it means to identify as Korean: The clothes worn? The food eaten? The parentage? The religion followed? Identity, therefore, is presented as a binary, when in reality it is an accumulation of complex and dynamic experiences and, the “tools” used to interpret such experiences. Binaries, like the Korean-Foreigner, stereotype individuals by forcing each individual to choose one discrete category over another, thereby shaping the reality individuals experience (Burgess 2014).

Korea, under the rule and subservience of different foreign leaders especially under Japanese colonization in the 20th century, built a defense by establishing a strong sense of nationalistic pride. As Choong Soon Kim points out, multiculturalism, or the idea of having an outside ethnic group marrying into a Korean family, has strongly influenced Korea throughout its history (2011:12). It became a way of balancing insiders versus outsiders while simultaneously dealing with the flow of immigrants coming into the country. However, in the 1970s,

⁶ Even though in the U.S. and in many European countries, ethnic groups are understood as minority groups, in Korea, ethnic groups are spoken about in reference to both minority groups and the social majority.

⁷ Gi-Wook Shin identifies such an instance when he discusses how the presence of ethnic nationalism is displayed at the Seoul Plaza during the 2002 World Cup. On that day, more than 7 million Koreans gathered together from all over the nation to cheer the Korean soccer team (2006: 17)

acknowledgments of a multicultural heritage halted, and attention centered instead on the notion of ethnic nationalism (Kim 2011:45). Debated and discussed by Koreans, the theory of ethnic nationalism developed as a strategy for determining how North and South Korea would inevitably—because of their shared ethnic background—be reunited again (Shin 2006: 22). Ethnic nationalism in Korea has, since the mid-nineteenth century when the Japanese colonialists invaded, a history of excluding other ethnicities and nationalities in order to strengthen their own internal cohesion (Kim 2011: 152). The North/South Korean divide largely shapes the Korean perception of ethnic nationalism, which in turn influences the role ethnic nationalism plays in the outlook Koreans have regarding foreign brides and their children. The exclusionary perspective on the two Koreas being halves of a collective, racial and ethnic whole (Shin 2006: 195; Watson 2014: 102) can have real-life consequences for the lives of multi-ethnic young adults in Korea, who face discrimination.

Chapter 2: Identity and Reproductive Politics for Marriage Migrants

Food, Identity, and Nationalism

The Korean patrilineal system is housed under a broader process, which a Yonsei Ph.D. student first introduced to me as “Koreanization,” or the manner by which people, places, concepts, and ideas are suffused with and evolve into individuals or customs that are considered Korean. In many ways, it is challenging to study to what degree someone or something is Koreanized because what it means to be Korean can change from individual to individual. For multicultural families, Koreanization plays a role in the relationship between food and kinship. It allows for the production of kinship ties in Korea and the gradual loosening of kinship ties with a migrant mother’s home country. A pattern I found among the marriage migrants was the idea of having the ability to cook Korean food. It is something mothers-in-law seek out when bringing a daughter-in-law into the family. Kathleen, one of the Vietnamese migrant mothers, explained, “For parents-in-law, . . . their daughter-in-law does not understand Korean culture and customs [like cooking Korean food]. They think that Korean daughters-in-law are better than foreign daughters-in-law. They are disappointed with a foreign daughter-in-law.” These mothers-in-law perceive food production as affiliated with the domestic sphere of Korean households, and the act of feeding husband and child as one of the wife’s main duties. When foreign wives first arrive in South Korea, they are generally unprepared for a Korean life-style. They have no practical knowledge about how to navigate Korean society, how to speak Korean, and, most significantly, how to prepare and cook Korean food. Korean cooking is one of the biggest activities a Korean daughter-in-law and mother partakes in. Eating out at restaurants is not only more expensive, but it is considered more harmful to the body’s health and the health of the family overall than eating at home, as some of my Korean friends and many of the Korean

husbands have pointed out. My impression from discussions with marriage migrants is that it is the expectation of not only the husband, but the mother-in-law as well, that a bride will cook for her husband and eventually her children.

While most foreign wives I spoke to knew how to cook food, the recipes they follow and the ingredients they use are from their home country. At times, the migrants' parents-in-law perceive these exotic foods as unhealthy and dirty. One Vietnamese wife, Cecil,⁸ explained:

My mother-in-law thinks that I am not clean. She thinks that in Vietnam, Vietnamese people are very poor so we eat bad food. . . . the first time my mother-in-law's friends came to the house, my mother-in-law did not want me to meet them. I had to stay in my room and wasn't allowed to come out. [But] now I can do everything Korean way, I can cook Korean food for my husband and my children. I can speak Korean well. I can work in the factory and bring up my children [in a Korean manner]. And, I keep my house tidy so I see my mother-in-law change her mind about me. Now she talks to me, and my mother-in-law always praises me to her friends. . . [And] next weekend, my mother-in-law invited her friends to eat Vietnamese noodles [made by me].

Cecil's mother-in-law attempts to restrict the activities of her daughter-in-law by labeling all the cooked dishes as well as her physical person as contaminated. Such actions maintain the ideal order of society of the mother-in-law and further increases social pressures on the daughter-in-law. Only after Cecil's mother-in-law witnesses her daughter-in-law's advancement in her role as a Korean daughter-in-law does she allow something as symbolically powerful as cooking food from Vietnam.

Part of the Korean family dynamic is having a wife and daughter-in-law to cook Korean food and to assist her mother-in-law with cooking for the family, especially during holidays like Chuseok (추석) and Lunar's New Year (설날). By cooking together, with the daughter-in-law taking on the brunt of the manual labor, a closer bond between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law is acknowledged. For the foreign wives who have no knowledge about cooking Korean food, it is challenging to adjust to life in a Korean home, where cooking is such a central feature of

⁸ Christine is a pseudonym in order to protect her identity. All the names presented in this paper have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

being a part of the domestic sphere. Cooking Korean food becomes an integral part of the identity of a good and valuable Korean daughter-in-law. Several Vietnamese wives told me how their mother-in-law rejected her home country's food for being "dirty" or "unhealthy." Therefore, being pressured to prepare certain kinds of food facilitates the Koreanization process. From conversations with Filipina and Vietnamese, I learned that Korean mothers-in-law (or occasionally, sisters-in-law or aunts-in-law) oversee the foreign wives' transition into their new position within the Korean family. However, the language barrier usually prevents the foreign wife and her mother-in-law from establishing a close relationship, and instead generates further frustration and grievances between the two women. A few of the migrants I spoke to said that after settling down in Seoul, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law gradually becomes less tense. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Vietnamese daughters-in-law spoke about fights and shouting matches between themselves and their mothers-in-law. The reasons for pressuring Vietnamese or Filipina daughters-in-law go beyond the Korean mothers-in-law's concern with her daughter-in-law's ability to cook Korean food. It is also a symbolic demonstration of which nation is superior to another through the demand to cook a particular type of food (Korean) rather than other foreign foods (Filipino, Vietnamese). By deliberately choosing one food over another, and portraying the foreign food as unwholesome and unclean, the Korean mother-in-law is attaching nationalistic sentiments to food and declaring Korea and Korean food superior to Vietnam and Vietnamese food. Moreover, the notion of "we are what we eat" leads to the mother-in-law's main concern for her "blood" children and grandchildren, and her adamant protest against eating food that is not "healthy" Korean food.

Furthermore, concern over what food is consumed during pregnancy establishes a link between national and individual identity and food. While conducting an interview in Ansan

(안산), the Filipina mother of a 15-year-old daughter spoke to me about her experience as a pregnant immigrant in a foreign country. Christine described her pregnancy for me:

During my pregnancy, I eat any kind of food, but my favorite food when I am pregnant [is] the Korean food. I like [it] veeery spicy and hot, I didn't find any Philippine food, not like other mothers. Usually other mother say, 'Oh, I want to find some fruits from Philippines, I like I like.' But I'm not. I eat spicy food a lot. . . . It is my favorite, the red soup, I like [it] very much. That is why when I am pregnant, I am thinking that maybe my baby is one hundred percent Korean [because of the spicy food I ate].

The bond between a mother and her child is established through food. Nursing one's baby creates one of the many links between mother and child. Before the baby is even born, another connection is established through the sustenance a mother shares with her unborn child. What the mother eats and drinks, her baby does as well. I believe that in this case, the way nutrients or teratogens get passed along to the baby, food consumed by the mother, as an object representative of the nation, is together passed along with national and cultural identity. Within the context of our conversations, Christine conveys two messages when she talks about her pregnancy. For her, the fact that she has these cravings for spicy Korean food so unlike her own home country's food is because the baby growing inside her is a full Korean. At the same time, the Korean food she consumes, to some degree, is also seen as shaping the unborn child's future identity. How her baby will self-identify is actively influenced by the relationship between food and identity. A Vietnamese marriage migrant expresses similar sentiments about the link between her pregnancy and her daughter's personality and behavior, although she ties it in less with identity than Christine does. Sophie describes her pregnancy, and says, "I didn't eat well when I was pregnant. So because of this [I think] she likes eating a lot. I had a bad morning sickness. So I was eager for some [typical] kind of [home] food, but I didn't [eat well]." Sophie connects her pregnancy to her daughter's "social skills," which were a "little slow in growth than other kids," and, consequently, helps link together pregnancy, food (or in this case a lack of

food), and the future generation. Connections between food and identity can move beyond the individual level and link back to the national. Kang-Dae, in his interview, talks about his education in the Korean public school system in the 1970s and 1980s. He explained:

When we were educated (in school), “Not same stomach ethnic group,” what does that mean? It highly emphasizes the [Korean] nationalism. So, we are [a] single-blooded people, the only thing we could be proud of ourselves was that we are single-blooded . . . I was educated like that [about “pure bloodism”], so I had some rejection of foreigners.⁹

In some ways, the entire Korean nation is portrayed as groups linked together through blood from a single source. Such rhetoric in public education systems results in a nationalistic sense of pride and confidence. According to Kang-Dae, it was during this time that Koreans were presented as undeveloped and backwards.

Koreans express nationalistic sentiments through foods like rice cakes (떡) and kim’chi (김치). Not every Korean eats kim’chi, which is spicy fermented cabbage eaten as a side dish with the main dish. However, kim’chi is a source of pride in Korea, and in some ways, kim’chi is considered the national dish. Media and government programs portray national foods like kim’chi as the epitome of Korean life and identity. For instance, a museum in Seoul is dedicated to the history and variety of kim’chi.¹⁰ Therefore, what it means to be Korean is tied to food and consumption. How Koreans perceive nationalistic symbols like kim’chi can affect the bonds created between individuals and between individuals and the nations in which they were born.

Scorn for kim’chi is often understood to be scorn for Korea as a whole. Food can be used as a tool to uphold a sense of what it means to be Korean, and in some cases further develops a sense of national confidence. Kang-Dae spoke to me about kim’chi during a interview:

⁹ “그 때 우리가 교육 받을 때는 진짜 배다른 민족, 배다른 민족이.” This quote literally means “other nation people.” In other words, it means being born from another nation’s mother.

¹⁰ The Pulmuone Kimchi Museum initially opened in Seoul by Pulmuone Inc. and moved to the Korea World Trade Center during the 1988 Seoul Olympics so that more people inside and outside of Korea could understand the culture of kim’chi. See <http://www.kimchimuseum.co.kr/foreigner/english/intro.asp> for additional information.

In 1970s, (Korea) wasn't able to compete with any other country. There were some stories like, [about] America, you know kim'chi, right? So when someone immigrated abroad . . . because living in Korea is so hard. The people there (in America) eat Korean kim'chi. . . So (when Koreans) make kim'chi, friends say the smell is like garlic, the American friends say the garlic smell sucks, so they hate it a lot. That kind of story was a lot in Korea. So, at that time, the Korean's way of thinking was intimidated. Compared to Americans, like Americans or powerful, advanced country people. (Korean's) life was like that so (the only thing) we can be proud about was, what was the proud thing we have at that time? So the single blood heritage, like the idea was continuously educated to us [in order to] to have something in common.

Today, viewed by many as a modernized and industrialized country, Korean confidence has converted kim'chi from a backward food seen as scorned by developed countries into a food invested with national pride. Therefore, kim'chi and other red, spicy Korean food connected to kim'chi are linked to national identity. A migrant mother who consumes kim'chi and kim'chi soup and feeds it to her family is understood by many to help strengthen Korean national identity.

By becoming a "good" Korean daughter-in-law who acquires skills like cooking Korean food, a marriage migrant can use her role in the family as a producer of "Koreans" and as someone who fulfills domestic labor duties to gain status within the family. At the same time, by cooking food from their home countries in Korea, marriage migrants I interviewed spoke about passing along the "taste" of Vietnamese food or Filipino food on to the children. One example is a birthday party I was brought to by the first Filipina marriage migrant I had met. Still slightly jetlagged from arrival in Korea, I smiled in thanks as one of the Filipina women handed me a cup of wine. There were seven of us in total, squeezing around a small Korean table laden with an entire chicken and an assortment of cups and mugs. Some of us sat on the floor and others on the bed. All of the people in the bedroom, with the exception of me, were from the Philippines and had migrated to Korea to marry a Korean bridegroom. The small two-bedroom apartment rang out with the cheerful noises of women and men gossiping, a Korean TV show playing, and the constant movement of children eating and running about. Two minutes later, I was standing in

the kitchen/dining room, where the owner of the house insisted I take seconds from the piles of Filipino food laid out on the table. On the table, someone had arranged the food in a buffet-style so that starting to the left there was fried fish (*priting isda*), grilled chicken legs (*chicken Inasal*), and a flan-like dessert. There was also Korean white rice with some type of Filipino noodle (*pancit*) dish. It reminded me of some of my family's own Colombian cooking, and it starkly contrasted with the spicy, fermented taste of kim'chi or the many red soups and stews that come out boiling from the restaurant kitchens.¹¹ Even though in everyday life the Filipina women would buy and skillfully cook Korean and Filipino food, during celebrations with other Filipino multicultural families, I mainly saw Filipino food bought and cooked. It became a way for the marriage migrants to introduce and cultivate their children's "taste" of their home country's food.

Even with what seems to be an increasing number of Filipino grocery stores, ingredients needed to prepare Filipino food are still scarce. As a result, one migrant mother, Femia, told me while we grocery shopped at a Korean mall together that sometimes her husband purchases food items to be shipped from the Philippines, and she was able to feed her family Filipino food on occasion. Another Filipina migrant explained during an interview that she and her two young daughters were excited because she had ordered a case of *calamondin*, a sour tropical fruit from the Philippines, and it had arrived that week. She smiled as she explained how her husband disliked the fruit, finding the taste to be too sour, but that he bought her some whenever he could. Her youngest daughter, like her husband, only liked the fruit when it was sweet. However, her oldest daughter would eat the *calamondin* with salt, just like Femia had taught her. Filipina and Vietnamese marriage migrants cooked their food as one way to help their children acquire a taste for the migrant's home country. Food is employed to reconstruct "cultural wholes that become

¹¹ My mother immigrated from Colombia 21 years ago while pregnant with me. She raised my brother and I on a combination of Colombian/Hispanic foods (Sancocho [chicken and potato stew], flan, arroz con leche, etc) and American foods (PBJ, spaghetti, etc).

points of identification for people displaced by migrations caused by larger global processes” (Korsmeyer 2007: 305). Food in these cases not only reaffirms the migrant mothers’ identity in Korea but also helps establish one for the children that involves their mother’s cultural heritage.

**The Korean Mother-in-Law:
Status, Membership, and Reproductive Politics in the Korean Kinship System**

Traditionally, the Korean family has been patrilineal, where one of the biggest concerns of the group centers on producing a male heir to carry on the bloodline and to perform the necessary ancestor worship rituals (Savada 1990: 2). This is especially true leading up to the 20th century although I believe such a strict line of gendered succession has loosened over the past 40 years when women began moving outside of villages and into the cities. The links between father and son are the backbone of the Korean patrilineal system, with the oldest man in the household (*jip* or 집) representing the family to the state and the wider community until his eldest son succeeds him as the representative of the *jip* (Kim 2001: 3). However, while the relationship between father and son is usually stiff and formal, the mother’s close relationship with her children, especially the son, gives her informal influence that elevates her status in the domestic group. It is common for a Korean mother-in-law to employ patrilineal ideology, which stresses loyalty towards parents and brothers, when faced with a potential challenge to her control (Kim 2001: 3-4). One example could be a quarrel between her and her daughter-in-law (Korean or migrant). The mother-in-law would argue for the subordination of the daughter-in-law to husband and household as one way to position herself above her daughter-in-law. Moreover, the customs of the Korean kinship system restrict a wife’s activities outside the household and impose “hierarchies of gender and generation” within it (Freeman 2006: 183). Korean gender norms direct women to handle any household work, which could range from cleaning to maintaining relations with her husband’s family to childrearing (Freeman 2006: 184). While

industrialization of Korea has made some serious social changes, the dichotomy between sex-based roles for domestic work in the Korean kinship system remains in place (Jin 2001: 67). Although it is not seen as socially accepted for the wife to request that her husband or father-in-law assist with the domestic work, lack of help on her husband's part can nonetheless cause marital discord (Jin 2001: 70).

The Korean kinship system, while shaping the individual lives of daughters-in-law and wives, plays a crucial role on the national level. In Korea, the connection between nation-making and kin-making are especially pronounced because metaphors of kinship or blood ties play a critical role in what it means to be Korean (Freeman 2006: 272). The connection between the kinship system and the unification of the nation impacts Korean and foreign daughters-in-law alike, although foreign daughters-in-law are generally less familiar with it.

While the Korean kin-making can serve the critical function of providing a sense of solidarity and a support system within the household, the Korean kinship system also works to fashion proper and valuable Korean daughters-in-law and wives as part of the pattern of straight-line assimilation in Korea. Parents-in-law contribute to the Koreanization process through the patrilineal system reinforced by Confucian ideals. As a result, males have historically been valued over females, a trend common in many patrilineal societies (Sorenson 2014: 178). Such power relations are especially true for "patrilineal procreation," or the notion that a patrilineal society favors male children over female offspring because only males can pass on membership (Stone 2013: 78-9). The patrogenesis theory of procreation argues that men and not women are the "significant genitors of children" (Stone 2010: 276-7) because men are the "life-givers" and women are "mere birthers" (Inhorn 1996: 22). Membership is passed through its male members, where sperm is understood to be the main reproductive agent, and women are seen as "catching"

(Inhorn 1994) and carrying these male-created beings in their wombs (Inhorn 1996: 220; Delaney 1991: 31-2). As a result, the children's most essential identity is passed down through males alone (Stone 2010: 272). From my observations and the stories marriage migrants tell about Koreans' devotion to sons over daughters as well as their general desire for children, I believe that Korean men are seen as passing down membership and shaping the life of Korean identity through reproductive practices. I think that the husbands are viewed as creators of Koreans and ultimately the Korean identity, and the marriage migrants take over in part as carriers of these Koreans. However, I think this distinction between reproductive duties is an ideal produced from ideas of Korean kinship, blood ideology, and ethnic nationalism. Marriage migrants are the solution to the decrease in Korea's population, but they are nonetheless individuals whose own heritage and identity impact notions of what it means to be Korean.

While the eldest male member generally has influence over other members of the household (wives, younger siblings, and so on) through the transmission of membership to the next generation, the parents-in-law in Korea today still maintain most of the power through the Confucian tradition of filial piety (Gupta et al 2003: 161). Confucian ethics consist of three main tenets: Chung, or "loyalty toward one's country and ruler," Hyo, or "filial piety to one's parents who are living and dead," and Uae, or "brotherly love of fraternal respect towards one's contemporaries" (Clark 2013). Within the values and norms of Koreans, filial piety is one of the most significant principles of Confucianism, and it remains central to Korean life (Kim 2000: 2). Filial piety can be further defined as "love of the son for the father" so that the son dedicates himself to his father "with all his heart" (Kim 2000: 2), and such a sentiment includes the love of a daughter for her parents. It identifies the immense debt children have to their parents and by extension, of individuals to their ancestors (Kim 2000: 2). In fact, the significance of filial piety

in Korean culture is exhibited linguistically. For example, Koreans refer to the parents of their friends and even acquaintances as if such individuals were their own parents (Kim 2000: 2-3). Although it is less common today, children, especially the eldest son, uphold the rituals of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship brings together the members in a way that strengthens and unifies the lineage. It reinforces the sense of belonging by retelling a story of shared blood and ancestors, not just for the family but also for Korea as a whole.

For example, the majority of marriage migrants I spoke to, both Filipina and Vietnamese, mentioned having to go to the home of their husband's parents for holidays such as the Harvest Moon Festival (Chusok or 추석). Harvest Moon Festival is a time when many Koreans return to their hometowns to spend time with their family. During that time, individuals get up early in the morning to hold the memorial service called Charye (차례) and visit ancestors (Schulz 2001: 96-7). Although the majority of practitioners of ancestral rites today only carry out ancestor worship on significant holidays and funerals, even one holiday can be a demanding task for wives, as they are responsible for preparing the ritual food (Kim 2000: 5). For some marriage migrants I met, this holiday was one of the few times they had to visit their parents-in-law at their home in what is usually a rural part of Korea. Usually, they would interact with their new parents when they first moved to South Korea or when they became pregnant. For a few marriage migrants, the mother-in-law would come to her son's household and help her new daughter-in-law with the pregnancy or with taking care of a newborn baby. Assistance from the mother-in-law is necessary because the marriage migrant's own family, who would usually support her during times like these, may not be able to afford to come to Korea. Not all mothers-in-law offer assistance. For others I interviewed and who lived all year around with their husband's family, these holidays further enforced the power and responsibility parents-in-law had over children.

Another holiday, one that is probably more contentious than Harvest Moon Festival, is New Year's Day (Sol or 설). It is a popular holiday that many Koreans and migrants have brought up in conversation with me, and which demonstrates the assimilatory capacity of the kinship system in Korea. In addition to dressing up in traditional costumes called Solbim (설빔), Korean families usually hold memorial services like Harvest Moon Festival in the morning to pay respect to their ancestors (Schulz 2001: 95). After paying their respects to their elders who have passed away, the younger generations in the family perform a ceremonial bow (Schulz 2001: 95). They bow deeply, their foreheads almost touching the floor, while they wish a New Years blessing on to their grandparents, parents, and any other elders of the family (Schulz 2001: 95). Such performances by Koreans reaffirm the authority of parents and grandparents through this humble show of respect. However, for marriage migrants from the Philippines and Vietnam who grew up with different traditions and holidays, values, and beliefs, this ceremonial process is a foreign and unfamiliar one. Some marriage migrants did tell me about going to the countryside to visit their husband's family for a variety of reasons. Some explained that they went so their children could get to know their grandparents better. Others told me they felt an obligation, or had very little choice in the matter, being overruled by their husband's family. It depended on which marriage migrant I spoke with. One woman from the Philippines explained that she only visited her parents-in-law's hometown, which was a rural town near the tip of Korea, once or twice before eventually refusing to travel down from Ansan anymore. She gained the power to refuse the longer she stayed in Korea and after having had a son (something which I will discuss more in-depth below). She wrinkled her nose in scorn and shook her head dismissively when I asked if she ever did any ceremonial bowing. "No, no, I do not do that kind of . . . I tell my husband we will not go," she said while making a brushing motion with her hand.

While this Filipina marriage migrant chose to move away from such traditional Korean activities, the vast majority of the other marriage migrants I spoke to attended holiday activities. These holiday activities fall under the straight-line assimilation paradigm dominant in the country. It strengthens ties with their new family, and it relegates the marriage migrant to the same status and position other Korean daughters-in-law must fill. However, the status of a Korean daughter-in-law is modest compared to other members of the family, and such a subordinate role is further weakened by a marriage migrant's powerlessness to transition into it smoothly as I discuss next.

As I mentioned earlier, membership in the Korean kinship system plays a critical role in assimilating marriage migrants into Korean society. Most Korean female members take on the role of subordinate member in the kinship system although status varies greatly according to family background and how strongly the family holds to Confucian traditions in Korea (Gupta et al 2003: 153). Parents-in-law, especially mothers-in-law, play a significant role in the transition of their daughters-in-law, both Korean and migrant, to the new household. Within the Korean patrilineal kinship system, female migrants are expected to fulfill the duties of a traditional Korean wife despite differences in social expectations. At times, marriage migrants are punished for a lack of knowledge regarding established Korean duties and customs including Korean food preparation, expected routine interactions between in-laws, and so on. Despite being complete outsiders, marriage migrants receive treatment that an outside Korean female member marrying into another Korean family would face.

One example is the recent transition of a young Korean woman into her husband's new family and the similar obligations to which she has to attend. I visited a Korean friend's grandmother's home outside of Seoul to help with the kim'chi-making traditionally done after winter. My friend's cousin also came to help at the time, the daughter of the mother in the

household, plus her recently married husband. I was startled by the amount of work the daughter-in-law had to do. She had to clean up and wash the dishes. She had to prepare the food before helping the women of the household cook. She cleaned up after dinner and took out the garbage. Despite this being a holiday, my friend said, this was stressful time for her cousin. My friend was also critical of the fact that her cousin's husband generally failed to do any of the chores his wife had to do and never offered to help with any of the household tasks. She would criticize him by calling him lazy for not helping his wife even though, as the youngest in the household, she had to take on a large portion of the domestic work. The oldest woman in the household, the grandmother, also would instruct the young woman to do certain tasks like preparing meals or making kim'chi. Nonetheless, although the concerns of Vietnamese and Filipina marriage migrants I spoke to are not completely unique to their situation, they do face unique circumstances (language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and outright discrimination) that challenge their transition into the Korean kinship system. Their own distinctly Vietnamese or Filipina cultural logic informs the perspective these marriage migrants have, a position experienced by other marriage migrants like the Chosonjok women (Freeman 2006: 118).

For instance, a Vietnamese marriage migrant in Seoul faced a similar experience where her mother-in-law would demand she do the household chores or would fight with her for talking back to her husband. The marriage migrant explained that she would defend herself against this mistreatment by arguing back, but the language barrier between the two of them meant that arguments persisted and the mother-in-law continues to intervene in the household. As these descriptions reveal, the transition process is challenging for a young woman marrying into a new Korean household, regardless of whether the woman is Korean or from another country. The mother-in-law oversees this transition period although the bias against marriage migrants with

almost no knowledge of Korean customs in areas like cooking makes it potentially more problematic for both the mothers- and daughters-in-law.

Nonetheless, even though the kinship system can stifle young women marrying into a Korean household, functions like reproductive duties can also give marriage migrants power and independence from their mothers-in-law and husbands. For the Filipina and Vietnamese migrant mothers, the “politics of reproduction” (Stone 2013: 4) allow for both oppression and agency, with their social value stemming in some respects from their ability to produce the next generation of Koreans. Korean friends in college, who have dealt with marriage pressures, and migrant mothers I have encountered who interact daily with their parents-in-law, recognize the critical role Korean mothers-in-law play in the transition process from one household to another and their expectations regarding duties like childbearing and childrearing. Similar expectations towards childrearing and relationships with mothers-in-law can be found in other parts of the world. According to Marcia Inhorn, in Egypt, relatives on the husband’s side, especially mothers-in-law, have the highest expectations towards reproduction and the continuation of the patriline (1996: 174). When a wife is found to be infertile, which can occur for a number of reasons, many of which are outside the wife’s control, the mother-in-law resorts to verbal abuse and “may inform her that she is unworthy of even the food provided to her by her husband, since she has produced ‘nothing in return’” (1996: 175). Although none of the marriage migrants I spoke to are barren, Koreans, including older female Koreans, seem to share a similar “preoccupation with the continuation of lineage” (Kim 2000: 5). As a result, one family duty consistently brought up is having grandchildren, especially grandsons. Many Koreans presume that marriage migrants will assume the reproductive duty of having children (Kim 2012: 352).

The Korean government especially views migrant mothers as the solution to chronic low fertility rates and the emergence of an aged population. Kang-Dae (강대), a Korean husband I interviewed, points out that when a woman migrates to South Korea, it is to begin a “multicultural family, [where] they give birth” and fulfill other female reproductive duties such as housework, producing children, and childcare responsibilities. Eventually, after producing children and “actualizing the husband’s familial bloodline” (Kim 2013: 458) the outside female member can begin to establish a stronger relationship with those in her husband’s kinship system. This transition usually applies to both Korean women getting married and to Southeast Asian marriage migrants. Nonetheless, a marriage migrant’s increased value as a key player in reproductive and domestic roles exposes her to oppression from her family-in-law. According to Moen, a woman’s vulnerability arises from the belief that women, because of their reproductive abilities in the household and as a mother, are regarded as valuable commodities within society and thus dominated by men (Moen 1979: 137).

I would argue that the Korean mothers-in-law of the majority of the marriage migrants I met hold similar sentiments towards family building. At times, such thinking can result in oppressive holds over the marriage migrants. One Vietnamese marriage migrant, Hein Thuy, spoke about her daunting relationship with her mother-in-law:

The first time [I came to Korea], I cried a lot. My mother-in-law wants me to be Korean, and I am depressed because of that. If I had known it would be difficult to live in Korea, I would have chosen to get married with Vietnamese man. But I have two children so I have to try my best.

Hein Thuy, pressured by her mother-in-law to do everything the same as other Koreans, has no choice but to comply because of her subordinate role in the Korean kinship system. The patrilineal system is structured in a way that makes it difficult for Hein Thuy to defend herself, especially as her mother-in-law resorts to intimidation by threatening to take her children away.

She explained that “the Korean people know that if a Vietnamese bride has children, then they will continue to live with their family-in-law. If a Vietnamese woman doesn’t have any children, then they will decide to go back to Vietnam [permanently]. So my husband’s family required that I give birth immediately.” In Korean society, legally and socially, she is not powerful enough to win custody of her children, something that her mother-in-law was readily aware of when she pressured her daughter-in-law to have children. As a result, reproduction becomes yet another assimilationist tactic to the point that it holds some marriage migrants hostage in their own home.

Nevertheless, while Stone focuses on the submissive position a woman generally has within a patrilineal society, reproductive abilities and the actual production of grandchildren, especially grandsons, allows shifts in the power relations within the family. Several migrants told stories of how much better their relations with their Korean parents-in-law were after having children. Many stressed the value their parents-in-law saw in having grandsons. It grants them privilege within the family—a mother who gives birth to a boy will find herself well off and well-liked by her new Korean family, and, therefore, will have a greater influence over the members of that family, as one Filipina marriage migrant told me.¹² She is the Filipina marriage migrant who eventually stopped attending highly ritualized holidays like Chuseok. She heavily emphasized how giving birth to her son meant that she had the freedom to live her life and raise her children the way she wanted. She would say how “those Koreans” valued having children, sons especially, and how that helped her live her life the way she wanted to in Korea. Therefore, Filipina and Vietnamese migrant mothers, while having to follow the societal rules imposed on them, still have enough authority due to their reproductive abilities and their motherhood status to struggle against the oppressive aspects of the Korean patrilineal system.

¹² I use “Korean family” in order to demonstrate the assimilation process undergone by many marriage migrants. The marriage migrants I spoke to call their husband’s parents “mother” or “father.” However, it is critical to note the same migrants refer to the family they married into as my “husband’s family.”

Chapter 3: Integration and Exchange in Official Discourse and Government Affairs

Multiculturalist Discourse as a Tool for Assimilation

The term foreign, as both an overly exclusive and inclusive term, is a reflection and producer of Korean ethnic nationalism. In Korea, people I encountered (college students, immigration officers, members of volunteer organizations) recognize the category of foreigner (외국인 사람) as an all-encompassing term. Individuals recognize this category in everyday discourse and in official activities by grouping together a diverse set of people under a single label. People who are called foreigner are individuals who Koreans perceive as having certain traits including coming from another country, not speaking Korean fluently, and not considering Korean customs and traditions as their own. From my experience in Korea, people classified as foreign recognize the categories by using the term foreigners for themselves and when classifying others. For example, during a club meeting at DASOM, I would be as much a foreigner as a marriage migrant and the same applies at the immigration office. While we were stopping to rest during a bike trip, a Korean friend, someone who was a part of DASOM, brought up how she had observed that the many of her Korean friends, colleagues, and family call people foreigner all the time without giving it a second thought. Yet, many of her foreigner friends, people from China, Canada, and other parts of the world, had not always taken the term to be positive. In fact, she recalled how she referred to me a foreigner when we had first met, where she had said something along the lines of, “Oh, as foreigner, Danielle, how do you feel about living among Koreans?” At that point, having lived in Korea for nine months, I had become more used to being called a foreigner even though it had startled me when I had been first called one. The immigration officer I spoke to about my visa referred to me as a foreigner. All the paperwork I filled out for studying abroad at Yonsei or for having my phone service

differentiated between foreigners and Koreans. The many Koreans in the street who came up to inquire about why I had come to Korea would sometimes use the term foreigner, both when we spoke in English and Korean, to talk about me or to discuss the increasing number of “foreigners” coming to Korea, especially Seoul.

While Koreans may treat each foreigner from different countries in different manners, the language points towards a merging of an assorted group of individuals who may otherwise consider themselves distinct from one another. The differentiation between foreigner and Korean creates a dichotomy, so that the term foreigner encompasses any person who is not Korean and blends together a diverse collection of individuals, resulting in an “us” versus “them” perspective on both sides. In this social context and on the national scale, I would argue that the majority of the marriage migrants spoke about themselves and other migrants as one large group. When looking at the more local and everyday contexts, however, I would say that distinct groups emerge, so that the Filipinas would network among themselves as would the Vietnamese women migrants. In fact, one Filipina marriage migrant informed me that the main avenue for interacting with marriage migrants from other countries is the multicultural centers, possibly because of how few marriage migrants there are in each neighborhood or, as several of the marriage migrants remarked in Ansan, the high inflow of Chinese marriage migrants they would encounter in the multicultural centers. One Vietnamese migrant, Cecilia, spoke about learning Korean in a multicultural center, where she met “a lot of friends from Vietnam, the Philippines, and other countries,” and they encouraged each other to accomplish common goals like helping their children with a demanding education system and finding work in a Korean workplace. Without the multicultural centers to bring together the marriage migrants from different countries, for the majority of the marriage migrants I spoke to, after adjusting to Korean life, there is little

opportunity or cause to interact. An added complexity to group-formation and identification was the marriage migrants' experiences with the dichotomy between developed/developing and light skinned/dark skinned. One Vietnamese informant, Kathleen, spoke about how "Korean people separate out two groups. They like to make friend with group one [who perhaps are considered mainly light-skinned] and who comes from developed countries like the British, American, Japanese . . . They do not like group two who come from developing countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines" and discriminate against this latter group. A Korean husband, called Dal Po (달포) who had a married a Filipina, spoke about the discrimination his wife faces while outside and his daughters faced at school because of their different skin color. Sometimes, on the street, people rudely bump into his wife and just leave without apologizing. When she is driving, they yell at her. At other times, his wife gets yelled at and hears "banmal"¹³ from people. He also said that, "my daughter has darker skin color, so her classmates make fun of her. Kids do not lie. But, my daughter does not really care. Even when she fell down and got hurt, she just said, 'Oh, it is blood. Can I have a Band-Aid?' . . . Or when boys [from the children's center] threw her shoes in water, she is very calm."

The same Korean husband explained during an interview that developing and developed country migrants marry into different socio-economic classes, so that Koreans treat each group of migrants differently. Developmentalist discourse employed by Koreans encourages discrimination against foreign brides. It attaches stigmas to the "underdeveloped" countries from which marriage migrants emigrated, including the Philippines and Vietnam. The identification of the majority of the world as "underdeveloped" began during the post-World War II period (Kim et al 2000: 18). Economically, the idea was that the accumulation of "physical capital" as a reflection of "the technical process" would result in a reduction of poverty for those who were

¹³ Banmal (반말) is the lowest form of speaking to someone, and it is rude to use towards people you do not know.

seen as lagging behind (Kim et al 2000: 18-19). The wealth would be distributed through “market interactions,” generating more wealth and higher quality of life for the entire population (Kim et al 2000: 16; 18). This economic process resulted in rapid economic expansion for the world economy. From 1945 to the mid-1970s, known as the Golden Age, a rapid economic growth emerged for industrialized powers as well as countries like Korea, which had only recently reached the point of economic modernization (Kim et al 2000: 18). It left other, less industrialized countries and regions like Southeast Asia lagging behind. Growth in areas like Taiwan and Korea meant improvements in quality of life for the majority of the population, although at the same time it involved “government repression, restriction of personal freedoms, and severe economic degradation” (Kim et al 2000: 18). As a result, when using terms like developed and developing, the gaps between the wealthy and poor get stressed without regard to the nuances of individual countries or individual communities within those countries.

Developmentalist discourse places countries into two distinct worlds and paints the image of rich versus poor (Hite et al 2000:12). It both highlights and further engenders disparity between Filipina and Vietnamese marriage migrants and native Koreans. The Korean husband spoke about how the perceptions of the Korean population in general are colored by this hierarchy of the wealthy and powerful (like the U.S. and Europe), the almost wealthy (like Korea), and the poor and weak (like the Philippines and Vietnam). One example that highlights this is when Dal Po’s wife got bumped into and someone shouted at her “You don’t have enough money, Filipino!” Although she was not totally powerless (she swears at them in English, which she believes intimidates Koreans because they do not usually understand English and associate it with a powerful nation like the U.S.), her supposed lack of money is associated with coming from a less developed country like the Philippines. Developmentalist discourse reflects the

prejudices the average Korean has against migrants and the Korean men who marry them.¹⁴ It attempts to construct a reality where the focus is on only industrialized versus non-industrialized.

Developmentalist discourse and the similarly exclusive notion of Westernization act as a push factor for marriage migrants to leave their home countries and begin an entirely new life, sometimes with only the support of strangers. Both notions imply an exclusion of others. Such discourse socially constructs a goal for improvement, but bases it on U.S. and European ideals. Such thinking is manifested through discussions of the “American Dream” or the “Korean Dream.” For many of the marriage migrants I spoke to, it is about the need to improve quality of life and the lives of family that pushed them into migrating. This encourages women to migrate even as they face discrimination or leave behind the support of family. Many of the marriage migrants I spoke to want to have this dream fulfilled not only for themselves, but more importantly for their children as well. From my observations and discussions with the parents of multicultural children, I believe marriage migrants raise their children Korean both as a response to government assimilation projects, but also in part from the realization that raising a “Korean” will allow their child to succeed in society. One Filipina’s preoccupation with improvement and development reveals itself through a longing to marry an American with blue eyes and blond hair.

My dream is to marry American guy, not in Asian country. That is my dream because *laughs* “Oh, I want American people” because maybe the culture is similar. I don’t want Filipino, uh I don’t want Filipino. I want Filipino, but I want stable job, yes. So my first dream is American. And then I wish, I wish, “Oh I want American guy” . . . And when I wake up in the morning, I eat bread or the same [everyone] in Philippines eats. The same, the same stuff so I want tall guy and I want white complexion and I wish to have blue eyes so . . . I wish I met American guy because after I meet him, we have married and we have children, then my children maybe I picture that I have to have cute baby with the blue eyes and the white skin and the blond hair, oh! . . . That is my dream.

¹⁴ When searching for participants, I had great difficulty finding Korean husbands willing to do interviews. The husbands told me that so many researchers were trying to conduct interviews with them and their families, they were tired of the intrusion. Moreover, a few even mentioned that it is somewhat uncomfortable discussing their marriage because many Koreans assumed the worst about Korean men who marry foreign women (that they are unsuccessful in their career, have some sort of disability, or have some other sort of handicap). Members of DASOM who helped me with this research project reaffirmed this attitude on the part of Koreans when it came to the men who married foreigners. From my observations, I believe that the majority of the Korean husbands I encountered (even the ones unwilling to do interviews) were not physically, professionally, or financially in dire straits although most, but not all, were possibly of a lower socio-economic class.

So when I met my cousin, my cousin introduce me this [Korean] guy, uh my husband but . . . I want to see his face or what he is [like] or something like that so after that he introduce me so after I think oh I like him. So my husband is white complexion, he's tall. . . . so I decided to get married at that time.

She had wished to marry someone who shares her own identity of Filipino, but the need for financial stability (a “stable job”) and improvements in the quality of her life resulted in disregard towards the idea of marrying a Filipino man. Instead, her goal is to marry a man from a “developed country.” Because the Philippines has not reached the objective of being “developed,” or being a wealthy, industrialized nation, and resides in the category of “developing,” she must seek out new avenues to reach her “American dream,” even if it has now transformed into the idea of the “Korean dream.” As a result, this Filipina marriage migrant’s ambitions for the future are influenced by developmentalist discourse. The popular image of wealthy versus poor is exemplified by physical attributes like skin color and eye color. For example, being tall is largely subjective. Being tall in Vietnam may not be the same as being tall in the Netherlands. Yet, it is a decisive criterion for her marriage selection. This reflects how discourse concerning the constrained movement from developing to developed is exhibited in language about non-Asian, European features (light skin, light eyes). Developmentalist discourse generates prejudices against Southeast Asian marriage migrants, but it also serves as a motivation to migrate.

Nonetheless, while the term foreigner and the use of developmentalist discourse can generate a sense of “Otherness” towards non-Koreans and cause divisions within the created category of foreigner, a non-Korean can negotiate these boundaries in their favor. One of the Filipina migrant mothers I interviewed would tell me, “We are foreigners together, and we have to look out for each other.” She would say similar expressions during my visits to her home, and especially when she would urge me to take a gift of food for the commute back to Seoul. By grouping the two of us together, she demonstrates how encompassing the term foreigner is in

Korea. The concept of a foreigner links together two people from very different backgrounds, one from a powerful industrialized country and the other from a poorer Southeast Asian country. It has the potential to positively bring together a diverse set of individuals that perhaps normally would never have had the opportunity to do so. The concept of foreigners allows people to establish relationships and make connections even as they are excluded from the monolithic identity of “Korean-ness.” Moreover, the application of the term foreign wives creates a subcategory within the uniform category of foreigner. At DASOM, regardless of how long ago migrant mother had arrived in Korea, a majority of the club members would call them either foreign wives (wai-guk-eeen sheen-bu or 외국인 신부), marriage migrants (keoyl-roun-ee-yeo-song or 결혼이주여성), or migrant mothers (wai-guk-eeen meo-neu-ri or 외국인 며느리), possibly because of their accents and physical features (darker skin, wider eyes, and so on). Moreover, all three terms in English were used interchangeably, whether the individual speaking was at a club meeting or writing out a flyer for a conference. The Yonsei students’ interactions with the government-sponsored multicultural centers in and around Seoul may have encouraged the use of official terms like foreign wife and migrant mother.

Despite the easy substitution of one term for the other, it is critical to examine the underlying meaning behind them both. A Korean friend in DASOM told me that she herself uses migrant mother in Korean more than any of the other terms, and she felt that many of her friends at Yonsei campus and in her neighborhood use that term in Korean as well. Another friend, an Uzbek student at DASOM who is fluent in Korean, told me that government officials or scholars usually employ the term marriage migrant. She said that from her own experience with multicultural families and from watching interviews, mothers-in-law and other individuals in the marriage migrant’s family use the term migrant mother more often. Migrant mother implies

nurturing, the cultivation of a future generation while foreign wife implies a person who is distant and alien, brought over for the purpose of marriage. A foreign wife's duty is not complete until she has fulfilled her role of having children (especially sons) and continuing her husband's family's bloodline. However, when she transforms from foreign wife to migrant mother, a more complex situation emerges. The marriage migrant has to consider issues like child rearing and integrating herself within the fabric of Korean society for the sake of her children's upbringing.

The motives behind an international marriage—a marriage between a foreigner and a Korean—span from love to financial obligations. One Vietnamese informant, Hyunh, discussed how she fell in love with her husband, Bounmin (본민) over 20 years ago through letters they wrote each other. Their introduction was brought about by family connections and a desire on her husband's part to marry a Vietnamese woman. Hyunh's husband had a friend living in Vietnam and married to a Vietnamese woman. He thought Vietnamese women are beautiful, and, as a result, he spoke to his friend about marrying a Vietnamese woman. Once Hyunh's husband spoke to his Korean friend in Vietnam, the Korean friend spoke to Hyunh's aunt who introduced Hyunh to her future husband. Hyunh and Bounmin wrote letters for a couple years before meeting in person. Because of the language barrier, Hyunh wrote her letters in English instead of Korean. Bounmin, on the other hand, wrote the letters in Korean because he could speak and write only a little in English. Instead, he would send them to an office, where they would translate them from Korean into English. Because this was almost 14 years ago, no post office in South Korea translated Korean into Vietnamese so they used English instead. Despite such obstacles, Bounmin and Huyunh fell in love and decided to meet in person. Once they did meet in person and visited each other's respective countries, they waited another six months before

marrying. Hyunh had felt cautious about marrying a Korean and moving to a new country, and their courtship is one of the longest that I heard about when I was in Korea.

Besides falling in love, economic statuses play a crucial role in marriage migration. Another Vietnamese woman spoke about her craving to travel to foreign countries, and a Filipina migrant spoke about finding a new life and be able to help her impoverished family without having to work 12-hour shifts. In most cases, regardless of the reason for migrating, the migrant has children, creating the so-called “multicultural family.” I first encountered the phrase “multicultural family” at DASOM, where a large majority of the Korean members employed it when discussing English club affairs and the issue of multiculturalism in Korea. Although I never directly asked any of the members, it is my understanding that the everyday use of the term came from government officials and with the multicultural centers. The UN recommended in 2007 that the Korean government adopt an anti-discrimination law as well condemn of words like “full-blood” and “half-blood,” leading to shifts in official rhetoric to include the term multicultural (Choe 2012). One Korean husband and father explains how the term Kosian, Korean and non-Korean Asian, was also employed in Korean. However, because “us Koreans, there is a strong nationalism still remaining, the word’s impression is very bad to hear . . . so the nation forbade that word for the unification of society.”¹⁵ As a result, the official Korean term adopted was “multiculturalism” (C.S. Kim 65), and today it is a concept that is “particularly salient within policy-making circles, academia, and mass media” (Lim 2010: 52).

Multicultural family is applied to any family that includes one Korean parent and one foreign parent along with any children. That foreigner could have migrated from any country

¹⁵ Kang-Dae (강대), the Korean husband speaking, also explained about the word Daihan (다이한), where the “baby born like that, the father a Korean (soldier) and the mother Vietnamese.” This phenomenon is a result of the Vietnam War. Kang-Dae said that these children usually grow up without knowing their father, and, as a “fatherless child,” they are usually treated with “contempt” in the “old days.” Now that Korea has gained prestige and power in the Asian regional order, Kang-Dae claims they are treated differently today. Historical interactions like the Vietnam War were one motivation for Kang-Dae to marry a Vietnamese woman because “we, [Koreans], are a little familiar to Vietnam.”

such as the U.S., Thailand, or the Philippines. Despite the effort to create a term that is inclusive and embraces diversity, many have argued (Junmo et al. 2014; Ahn 2013; C.S. Kim 2013; Kim 2012; Lee 2012; Beckett et al. 2001; Nagy 2014) that the notion of multiculturalism is in fact a “counter concept to Korea’s violent mono-ethnicity” (C.S. Kim 2013 xx). After racial, sexual, and class violence originating from ethno-nationalism based on pure-blood ideology, the Korean government adopted and promoted the term multiculturalism in Korea (Kim 2007: 103). Like the notion of foreigner, multiculturalism produces a dichotomous viewpoint of “us” versus “them,” reflecting how Korean individuals perceive the structure of Korean society. Such perceptions leave the question of where the line is drawn between Koreans and those seen as multicultural. How do multicultural individuals integrate themselves within Korean society while juggling their membership in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world? I will address these questions by examining the “Koreanization” process undergone by migrant mothers, and how it both works through, and clashes against, the notion of the multicultural.

Mutual Cultural Exchange and Marriage Migrants on Display

By employing international marriage brokers, Korean men retain a specific type of purchasing power that highlights the gendered separation between marriage migrants and potential Korean husbands. In her article about mobility and motorbikes “reordering the social stratification in urban Vietnam,” Allison Truitt discusses the relationship between masculine control and purchasing power (2008: 6). Young Vietnamese men, unable to purchase certain brands of motorbikes, have trouble securing a spouse, thereby “conflating market power with sexuality” (2008: 7). Korean men, assumed to be wealthier than Vietnamese men, are attributed masculine control attached to purchasing power, making them more attractive to Vietnamese women. Such an emphasis on masculinity contrasts with the highly gendered roles of marriage

migrants, who are seen as mothers and wives as well as reproducers. Marriage migrants I encountered perceived Korean men as having a stronger potential for upward economic mobility than men from their own home country. The Vietnamese marriage migrants portrayed Vietnamese men as lazy, irresponsible, unsuccessful individuals who are stuck in the same economic and social position.¹⁶ One Vietnamese wife spoke about how she wanted to travel to Korea for the adventure and excitement, but also as a way to avoid being trapped in a marriage with a Vietnamese man whose future would lead nowhere. During interviews, over two-thirds of the women spoke about how Vietnamese men remain jobless or in a low-paying job so that it was the woman in the marriage who would need to support the family financially in addition to performing household duties like childcare and cleaning. Most of the brides came from poor, rural parts of southern Vietnam. Security, both financial and in terms of personal safety, surpassed other reasons (religious, etc) for migrating. While the men who went to the Philippines or Vietnam seeking a wife had the advantage economically, at home in Korea, DASOM members and the husbands viewed themselves as having a low socioeconomic status.

Like most of the Vietnamese marriage migrants, the majority of Filipina women who married Korean bridegrooms did so, to some degree, for financial reasons. Sitting in her car outside of her son's middle school, I talked to a Filipina mother about the differences between the Korean education system and the Filipino education system, and how that was one of her motivations for coming to Korea. Isabel stressed that the high quality of education that her son would receive for free was one of the reasons she chose to leave the Philippines and move to Korea. She felt her son would have an advantage as an individual who attended the Korean education system, which she felt the international community and Korea as well viewed as better

¹⁶ Although she married a Korean bridegroom and currently lives with him and his parents, she is in a slightly different position than most of the Vietnamese marriage migrants I met. Like them, she is young (in her 20s), but she doesn't have any children.

quality. Moreover, as an individual who can draw from his multi-ethnic heritage as well as a variety of languages (English, Korean, and Tagalog), he would excel as a student and future employee. The school is a large, well-kept building that has clean windows on every floor and in every classroom. There was no graffiti or any other sign of vandalism, and the grounds around the school looked clean and orderly. There was a small soccer field next to the school that had green grass and what looked like sports equipment. When the school day finished and her son emerged from the building, several children began playing outside under the supervision of the teachers while they waited for parents to pick the children up. Isabel explained that every day, after school, the children were allowed to play for an hour on the fields under the supervision of adults. It came at no additional cost, and it helped the children live a healthier life. Although the neighborhood showed no signs of a high crime rate, for safety reasons, there was a chain-linked fence that surrounded the property with three different entrances for children and parents. Outside of the school property were groups of children from middle and high schools walking together on the well-maintained sidewalks. All these resources in the education system are readily available for her son because she chose to marry and live in Korea.

Having such resources available heightens the “masculine” purchasing power Korean bridegrooms bring with them to foreign countries like Vietnam and the Philippines even if they have other disadvantages like age (too old), height (too short), or physical features (displeasing facial features). While it is challenging for bridegrooms to find Korean women to marry, the way the Korean husbands I spoke to talked about their experiences in Vietnam or the Philippines made apparent how much higher in social and financial importance they rose when they visited their brides’ home countries. Korean men who marry foreign women are stigmatized by members of their local communities who are biased against marriage migrants and whose

attitudes are often reinforced by negative portrayals in the Korean media. In contrast, in countries like the Philippines and Vietnam, which are wealthy, Korean men carry more clout through the “masculine” purchasing power they enjoy.

Korean men who fly to a foreign country like Vietnam for the purpose of marrying display such masculine control through the bride selection process. One Vietnamese woman described the pre-marriage process to me. She told me how she and the other Vietnamese women lined up before a (much smaller) group of Korean men. One wife said that there were almost forty women and only three Korean men at the matchmaking. A Korean husband said that for him there were about seven Korean men and 30 Vietnamese women. The matchmaking process, according to the Vietnamese migrants and two of the husbands I interviewed, involves the potential brides lining up for the men to pick. Consequently, the potential Korean husband had the “purchasing power” that gave them authority over these women on display. When I asked a Korean husband about the marriage process, he said, “To explain it simply, it was almost like selling and buying products . . . mostly the man has the power [of] choosing the woman.” The migrants do have agency in choosing whether or not to accept the man’s invitation for marriage. However, several of the women I spoke to described the pressures from family, from the brokers, and from friends that pushed them towards one decision or another.

In addition to commodification, marriage migrants are further put on display in ways that act both to their advantage and disadvantage. Individuals like government officials, marriage brokers, and matchmakers put marriage migrants on display as “objects of culture” for the public (Kim 2011: 1583) and transform them into commodities. Rituals, holiday celebrations, and festivals, in addition to programs at multicultural centers, place marriage migrants on display and exhibit “cultural paternalism” (Kim 2011: 1600). According to Anthony Ozele’s research on

Nigerian women and education, paternalism is the practice of treating individuals in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them their rights or responsibilities (2007: 6). Cultural paternalism is demonstrated in the cultural classes organized by multicultural centers. After learning Korean, a substantial number of marriage migrants choose to work at multicultural centers. The centers provide these women with jobs and training. At times they become translators, but for a large portion of the marriage migrants, they teach “cultural classes” about their home countries to Korean students in elementary school in order to promote mutual cultural exchange. Marriage migrants have agency to choose whether or not they want to teach the class. However, the socioeconomic status they marry into pushes for wives to take whatever safe work is available.¹⁷ Such treatment of marriage migrants’ language, dance, songs, food, traditions, and customs relegates each migrant’s identity to a lower rung within an ethnic hierarchy and further promotes the hegemonic power of Koreanness. At the same time, as maternal citizens, marriage migrants have more power to act as mediators between these two ethnic groups and help foster mutual cultural exchange.

Furthermore, these classes can be a source of pride for participants. Not only is it a way to spread their “home culture” and influence the Korean perception of foreigners, but it also demonstrates their proficiency in Korean. One Filipina mother expressed a concern that if she did not or could not work, then her fifteen-year-old daughter would not be able to speak proudly about her mother to her friends. Another Vietnamese mother shared a similar concern about her nine-year-old son. Only those who can teach in Korean for two hours are hired by the multicultural center to teach these classes. In addition, teaching in Korean especially grants

¹⁷ From conversations I had, it seems like work through multicultural centers was less likely to overwork the women or to have issues over salary. One Filipina marriage migrant told me her frustrations with working in a Korean restaurant near her home. Her boss would call her in at random times without any advanced warning and would threaten to fire her if she did not come. Moreover, she was constantly dealing with her boss, the owner of the restaurant, trying to pay her below minimum wage. This was a difficult time for her already since she was supporting her family on her salary and her husband had been laid off from his construction job.

authority and power to that individual even if they are a “foreigner.” One marriage migrant explained that she got a schedule that sent her to a new school every two weeks. Sometimes that included dressing up in Filipina or Vietnamese clothing as well. A school contact would request the migrant mother to wear “traditional,” non-everyday clothing. If teaching is a performative event or show for the audience consisting of students and Korean teachers, then the migrant mothers can actively shape the perceptions Koreans have of foreigners. Education is a critical tool for stopping the cycles of prejudice and discrimination. At the same time, especially in instances where the foreign wives dress up in traditional clothing, it is almost as if the Korean government is providing an exotic individual for the audience to gaze upon. “Looking [as a] learned ability and the pure and innocent eye is a myth,” so that reality is constructed not only linguistically but visually as well (Urry et al. 2011: 1). Therefore, while the migrant mothers can influence the common perceptions of foreigners, the audience, through the “touristic gaze” (Urry et al. 2011: 16), also influences the identity-making process of migrant mothers and, to some degree, their children.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism, as a discourse and a policy, has simultaneously encouraged ethno-nationalist discourse and progressive action towards a more diverse and open nation. The Korean government’s implementation of a multicultural policy and its promotion of a multicultural society are in part motivated by an effort to move away from its global image as an ethnically homogeneous and to an extent xenophobic nation. While discourses and policies concerning multiculturalism may have been brought about by a desire to produce a more ethnically diverse nation, it segregates foreigner from Korean as much as it provides an opportunity for ethnically diverse individuals to create their own space within Korean society. This segregation occurs, in

part, due to the fact that it limits visibility of ethnic diversity to specific locations like the cultural classes or at multicultural centers.

The obligation to foster a more diverse and open nation comes into conflict with the need to reproduce “Koreans” and integrate them into Korean society. Broadly speaking, the desire for offspring is a powerful motivation for Korean husbands to marry so that even though they may not start a marriage for reasons like love, they do so with the hopes of finding someone to be a loving mother to their children. This thought process, I believe, reflects a widespread trend of making it necessary to enter into marriage and pass down to children membership in Korean society. The repeated discussions concerning the shortage of marriageable women points to a more basic ideological assumption, where marriage in Korea is seen as both normal and necessary and further spurs the perceived need for young marriageable women. This urgent need creates a space for marriage migrants’ agency. It gives marriage migrants the influence to shape national and family identity by playing out their roles as maternal citizens although at the same time having to work within and being influenced by severe constraints.

The politics of reproduction in Korea creates an opportunity for marriage migrants, and to a lesser degree, their children for “boundary blurring” (Alba et al 2007: 131). While I would argue that marriage migrants are actively pressured into becoming a part of the dominant core group in Korea, their membership in two or more groups allows them to play a crucial role in reshaping parts of Korean identity even as they reproduce it. Such a role is passed down to their children, although for some more than others.

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