

“International Marriage and the State in South Korea”

Hye-Kyung Lee

hklee@pcu.ac.kr

Professor, dept. of Sociology & Media Information, Pai Chai University

Abstract

With globalization, the number of individuals traveling, working or studying abroad is rising globally, and so is the number of international marriages. However, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of ‘mail-order brides’ through matchmaking since the 1970s in the Western world and since the 1990s in several Asian countries. The so called ‘mail-order bride’ phenomenon has become an important route for international migration, especially for gendered migration. Since official relations with China began in August 1992, the number of Korean Chinese women who came into Korea for marriage with native Korean men, is about 100,000 between 1990 and 2005. The number of Japanese women who married Korean men is approximately 17,000, while the numbers of Filipino women who married Korean men is about 6,000. Recently, the nationalities of these foreign wives of Korean men expand to include women from Vietnam, Russia, and Uzbekistan. In 2005, among a total of 250,000 foreign spouses in Korea, 160,000 of them were women. The Korean state had contributed to initiate these international marriages by importing Korean Chinese women for their unmarried rural citizens. As international marriages have become a social issue, the state tries to cope with these new issues through changing the laws and policies. Utilizing several government statistics, a nationwide questionnaire survey of nearly 1,000 foreign brides with various nationalities, which was conducted in May and June 2005, and some interviewed data of foreign wives and government personnel, this paper analyses 1) patterns and trends of marriage migration to Korea; 2) the issues and problems of foreign brides, such as their status and citizenship, economic situation, access to social security and ‘fake-marriages’ issues; and 3) recent changes in governmental policies towards them. Special focus will be on what factors influenced the recent governmental action and how the ideology that “A married daughter is no longer a daughter (出嫁外人)” is still reflected in recent policies even in today’s more progressive society.

Introduction

International marriage was not popular until the early 1990s, and it was female phenomenon, some Korean women married foreigners such as Japanese and Americans. However, from the mid 1990s, the situation changed from a female phenomenon to a male phenomenon. In other words, more Korean men than women tend to marry foreigners. From 1990 to 2005, 250,000 Koreans registered their international marriages, about 64 percent (160,000) were Korean men with foreign wives.

International marriages, like other marriages, are regarded as private and not a concern for the State. However, international marriages have a 'citizenship' and 'partnership' issue to the fore of 'homogeneous' and 'patriarchal' Korean society and even to the fore of inter-states relations. Therefore, the Korean state began to intervene in order to control the process of the influx and to support the social integration of international married families in Korea. The first policy was the revision of the Nationality Law in 1997 and the recent one was the 'Grand Plan', a number of policies for the social integration of foreign wives and their families (I will refer to this as the 'Grand Plan') in April 2006. The revision of the Nationality Law in 1997 was a symbol that we accept that we are becoming a multi-cultural society, and the announcement of the 'Grand Plan' in April 2006 was the stepping stone to a successful multi-cultural society.

This paper analyses 1) patterns and trends of marriage migration to Korea; 2) the issues and problems of foreign brides, such as their status and citizenship, economic situation, access to social security and 'fake-marriages' issues; and 3) recent changes in governmental policies towards them. Special focus will be on what factors influenced the recent governmental action and how the ideology that "A married daughter is no

longer a daughter (出嫁外人)” is still reflected in recent policies even in today’s more progressive society.

Patterns and Trends of Marriage Migration to South Korea

1) Historical backgrounds

There is a prehistoric myth that during the period BC42 to BC532, the King’s first wife of ‘Kumkwan Kaya’ came from India. Nonetheless, international marriages were rare throughout Korean history. Most international marriages were associated with the invasion of Korea by other countries, such as China and later Japan. Korean women rather than men tended to be the victims of these invasions. Therefore, there has been a serious prejudice against international marriage in Korea, mainly towards women because the social stigma of "virginity" is more important for women than for men. Women who were abused were referred to having ‘dirty bodies’, this image symbolized the failure of national defense. During the Chung Dynasty in China, Korean women were captured as spoils of war. When some of these women returned home, they were looked down on as shamed outcasts, and had to move to live in a segregated area, now known as ‘Itaewon’. However, their succeeding generations were able to survive and adjust in Korean society because they resembled their fellow Koreans.

Although the exact figures are unknown, a significant number of Korean women became mistresses to Japanese men during the Colonial period from 1910 to 1945. Since 1945, there have been an increasing number of international marriages due to the presence of the US military. As a result derogatory terms such as "Yanggonju" which means “a vulgar and shameful social object”, and "GI Brides" were used to refer to Korean women who engaged in sexual labor or marry American soldiers (Kim, 1998).

Therefore, international marriages in general and especially those involving Korean women have been condemned as betrayals of nationalism. As a result, biracial children have difficulties against social prejudice and discrimination.

2) Marriage migration to Korea: after the 1990s

Although there were some international marriages between Korean men and Japanese women during the 1980s, the numbers were small and it was organized by the Unification Church. The trends of the post-1990 international marriages in Korea are shown in Figures 1 to 3.

Figures 1, 2, 3 are here.

Figure 1 shows the number of foreigners, divided by sex, who married Koreans between 1990 and 2005. Until the beginning of 1990, international marriage was related mostly to Korean women, while Korean men were involved in merely 600 cases. However, the Korean men's rate of international marriage started to increase in 1992, when Korea reestablished official relations with China. From 1995, the number of men participating in international marriages surpassed that of women. The cumulated data of internationally married Korean men was 160,000, from 1990 to 2005; of these, 107,000 had Chinese nationality, 17,000 Japanese, and 6,000 Filipino (Table 1).

Since 1992, the biggest group of female foreigners who married Korean men is Chinese (mostly Korean-Chinese) women (Figure 2). In 1996, international marriages involving Korean-Chinese women gradually began to decrease as 'fake marriages' became a social issue. The reason is the complexity of the process of marriage

between Koreans and Chinese (1996–2003), the aftermath of the economic crisis of the IMF (1997–1998), and the amendment of the Korean Nationality Act (1997).

Like other migrations in Korea, the marriage migration was also led by Korean-Chinese, but their women in latter cases. The first case of this occurred in December 1990, when an old bachelor farmer in Kyunggido married a Korean-Chinese women. This marriage was arranged by a former assemblyman and professor in order to unite Korea and its diaspora in China (Chosun Ilbo, 12/16/1990). After this case, some local governments, assemblies and related agricultural associations arranged marriage meetings between their local farmers and Korean Chinese women (Lee, 2005a: 80–81).

In the early 1990s, the Korean government had two different orientations toward migration influx: 1) open-door policy for Korean-Chinese women as ‘cross-border’ brides and 2) close-door policy for unskilled-migrant workers in general and Korean-Chinese in particular. As many Korean-Chinese, who visited their relatives back in Korea since the late 1980s, became undocumented workers, the government began to find ways to reduce their influx, by setting a minimum age limit on those intending to visit their relatives from 1992¹ and by not issuing tourist visas to Korean-Chinese in 1993 (Lee, 2002, 179–183; Lee, 2005b, 351). As some Korean-Chinese returned home with their earnings, the rest of the people in their villages were eager to go to Korea. This phenomenon is called ‘Korea Wind’.

Although the Korean government is anxious to limit the return of the Korean-Chinese, its promotion of international marriages between Korean farmers and Korean-Chinese has resulted in widening the doors for both young and older Korean-Chinese

¹ There had been no age limit for Korean-Chinese to visit their relatives back in South Korea until 1992, when the Korean government set a minimum age limit of 60 years old, then decreased it to 55 in 1994 and 45 in 2002 (Lee, 2002, 179–183).

women to enter the country². This has meant that international marriages have become not only an easy and important channel for Korean–Chinese women, but also provides a route for others to return to Korea because Korean–Chinese wives can send two invitation letters to their parents to come to Korea. Exploitation of the ‘invitation of parents’ visas appeared as the sale of it (Lee, 2005b).

As the ‘Korea Wind’ became a typhoon during 1994 and 1996, and as the international marriage became the only easiest route to Korea, ‘disguised marriages’ became a social problem in 1996 (Kwon, 2005; 2005a, 81–82). Then the government concluded a memorandum with China in 1996 which required the international marriage process between Korea and China to be more complex than it was before.³ Therefore, Figures 1 and 2 show the decrease in international marriages during 1996–1999. However, it increased again from 1999 and more rapidly after 2003. The resurgence of international marriages from 1999 was due to the increase of marriage agencies and brokers from 1999. Until then the establishment of private marriage–agencies was

² With the establishment of official relations between Korea and China in 1992, international marriages between Korean men and Korean–Chinese women began to increase. Farmers and lower–class Korean men, whom Korean women are reluctant to marry, try to import foreign brides. Korean–Chinese women are preferred to other Asian women, because of a common ethnicity and the emphasis on the purity of bloodlines. Some local governments initially organized these international marriages. Later, private agencies and some Korean–Chinese who were already residing in Korea began to arrange such marriages (Lee, 2003, 143).

³ According to the memorandum of understanding that has operated since 1996 for the prevention of fake marriages, if Korean and Chinese were willing to marry, they had to pass various complicated procedures; the person concerned must unmarried then: Marriage authentication → Marriage registration in China → Marriage authentication of China → Marriage registration in Korea → Visa application for the Chinese spouse, etc. However, this international memorandum of understanding between Korea and China was abolished on the 1st of July, 2003, therefore enabling people to register one’s marriage at the institution related to census registration in both countries, and receive marriage visa from the counsel of the Korean Ambassador to China (The Hankyoreh, 20th, June, 2003). From the 1st of July, 2003, therefore, the procedure of marriage simplified.

regulated by the 'Family Rite Law', but it was abolished in 1998 and enacted from 1999. That is such agencies have become free businesses without any sanction since 1999. As a result, the number of such agencies increased and the size of international marriages did so as well. The rapid increase of international marriages from 2003 was due to the simplification of the marriage processes between Koreans and Chinese by the abolition of the memorandum in 2003 (Figure 2).

3) Characteristics of international married families

Presently, the number of multi-cultural families due to marriage immigration is increasing. International marriages numbered 43,121 in 2005, representing 13.6 percent of all marriages in Korea. Such marriages account for 35.9 percent of marriages in rural areas. According to Table 1, the number of foreign women married to Korean men between 1990 and 2005 is about 160,000. The leading group is Chinese women (110,000); most of them are ethnic Koreans or Korean-Chinese, which is followed by Japanese (17,000), Vietnamese (10,000) and Filipino (6,000) women. The number of foreign men married to Korean women between 1990 and 2005 is 80,000. Among them, the majority are Japanese (44%) and American (24%), so the number of Asian unskilled migrant husbands, who have the most socio-economic difficulties in Korea, is not that significant (Figure 3). For example, the number of Southeast Asian migrant husbands from Pakistan, Bangladesh, The Philippines and Nepal is less than 2,000. And among the 13,000 Chinese men, it is unknown how many are Korean-Chinese.

Table 1 is about here.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare asked some academics including myself to investigate the problems that migrant women in international marriages face in Korea (Seol, et al., 2005). Therefore, a countrywide survey was carried out in May and June 2005. As a result, 945 foreign wives participated in answering our questionnaire.

According to this data (Seol et al., 2005), immigration through marriage in Korea is mainly done in four ways. ① Recommendations made through acquaintances, ② direct meetings, ③ religious groups, and ④ intermediary agencies. ① was mostly for Korean-Chinese women, ② for Chinese and Mongolian, while ③ was mostly for Japanese, Filipinos, Thais, and ④ was for Vietnamese, Mongolian, and women from Russia.

In the early 1990s, international marriage with Korean men was primarily promoted to bachelors who were farmers, but after 1999, as marriage agencies increased, international marriage became an important alternative for Korean men who were willing to remarry. Men who divorced native women prefer having Chinese (Korean-Chinese) women as their second wives. That is, in the beginning of the 1990s, international marriage was mostly for bachelor farmers, who found it difficult to seek their partners domestically, but as time passed, more female foreigners were coming Korea mainly to marry urban men, most of the men are from the lower economic classes. Consequently, the places of residence for the families of married immigrants show a distribution of 25% in rural areas and 75% in urban areas in 2005 (Seol et al, 2005).

70% of urban couples had some form of nuclear family, whereas couples belonging to extended families was 14% in urban area. However, for people living in rural areas, 45% of the couples had a nuclear family, but another 45% had an extended family

(Table 2). This suggests that the foreign brides in the rural areas have to take care of their parent-in-laws as well as their children.

Table 2 is about here.

Meanwhile, almost 60% of female foreigners, who are married to Korean men, are employed in Korea. Considering the local women's labor force participation rates are 50.9% in 2005, 10% more foreign women than native women are participating in economical activities now. 52% of female foreigners are working in service industries, such as wait staff, cooks, and domestic workers. The remaining women work in factories (14%), and in professional management positions, such as a teaching, or small business ownership (13%). Most of the Korean-Chinese were working in places like restaurants; 63% of Koreans-Chinese in the cities, and 46% of them in rural areas. On the other hand, women from other foreign countries also worked in the service industry, 43% of them in the cities, and 27% in rural areas. Besides this, there were many incidences of these women working as factory workers (25%) in the cities, and as simple laborers (31%) in rural areas (Table 3).

88% of foreign female employees wish to work continuously, which reflects their aspiration for employment. 93% of the ones who were not currently working, hoped to work in the future, and the reason why they couldn't get employment was because of 'child rearing' (43%), or 'failure in finding the right job (21%)', or 'lack of fluency in the Korean language (10%)'.

Table 3 is about here.

Issue of the International Married Families

1) Citizenship and legal status

The increase of international marriages has challenged the definition of Korean nationhood and citizenship. Until 1998, before the revised Nationality Law enacted, the old law was patrilineal and gender-discriminated. On the one hand, the old Law permitted the nationalities of children to follow only a paternal line. It meant that children with a Korean mother and a foreign father could not acquire Korean nationality by birth. On the other hand, the old Law discriminated on gender: female foreigners who married Korean men could obtain Korean citizenship immediately after their marriage, while male foreigners who married Korean women had to wait two years, and meet certain eligibility requirements in order to apply for nationalization. The government revised the Korean National Act in November, 1997, which went into effect in June, 1998. Therefore, these two problems were solved. It is true that the revision of the Law has alleviated sexism, however, it's main purpose was to prevent fake marriages of female foreigners, especially Korean-Chinese.

After 1998, the remaining issue was the legal status of foreign spouses before they could obtain Korean nationality. First, foreign spouses obtained the Visiting and Joining Families (F-1) visas, but the F-1 visa holders could not apply for permission to work in Korea. This was a serious problem for foreign spouses, especially for foreign husbands, to maintain their economic situation. In May 2002, all foreign spouses could get residence (F-2) visas, which allowed them to work.

Although the 1998 Nationality Law and succeeding changes in the F visa problem improved the situation of the international married families of foreign (Asian) men and

Korean women, this group has suffered most from social prejudice and discrimination. As I mentioned before, there has been serious prejudice against international marriage in general and particularly against Korean women's involvement.

As the number of male migrant workers has increased, some have married Korean women. According to Table 1, there are Chinese (13,000), Pakistani (700) and Bangladeshi (700) husbands for Korean women. Since most migrant worker husbands were undocumented workers, their precarious legal and working status caused serious problems for these families. According to Table 1 in 2005 the number of international married families of Southeast Asian unskilled husbands was about 2,000, but the actual number would be higher because most families lived together without registering their marriages, because many migrant worker husbands were undocumented. Some civic groups estimated it to be between 5,000 and 10,000 in 2002 (HRSWM, 2001). However, this group has got the least attention from the national authorities.

Regarding foreign wives, the remaining issue was the legal status of divorced cases. Since 1998, there were cases in which some female foreigner who wanted to divorce within two years of marriage had to leave their child and return to their mother country. Since December, 2003, these divorced foreign wives are allowed to apply for naturalization in the following cases: If a husband died, or is missing, if one lives apart or is divorced due to husband's imputation, or if one has to take care of children. However, in the case of divorce and legal separation, one has to prove the reason for their husband's imputation firsthand, which will be mitigated further from 2007.

2) The economic difficulties and exclusion from the social security system

According to our data (Seol, et al. 2005), it was discovered that 53% of the

families of migrant women fell under the official poverty line. In fact, 44% of the families survived with a family income below 50% of the minimum cost of living. This displays the fact that most foreign female spouses cannot maintain the basic subsistence level because of the lack of an adequate social welfare system in Korean society. For example, 15.5% of foreign female spouses have experienced starvation due to these economical reasons.

The basic social security policy, which is the final social net in Korean society, is dysfunctional because it eliminates families of foreign female spouses. The reasons why the basic social security policy is almost useless to families of migrant women are because foreigners are excluded from the social security program⁴ and because half of them are not aware of the existence of the policy itself.

In addition, 1/3 of all foreign female spouses are not in the medical security system, many of them were not even aware of whether or not they were medical insurance subscribers. Most of them presumed that foreigners were not eligible for medical insurance, reflecting how insufficient public awareness campaigns on this issue have been. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Health tried to improve this economic hardship, exclusion of social welfare and health care programs from late 2005. Furthermore the related policy was announced on April 26 2006 by the government.

3) The 'fake-marriage' issue

Although the 'fake marriage' has been a social problem since 1996, it is difficult

⁴ International married families are excluded from the social security program in two ways then: first, foreigners were not recipients of the social security program; and second, international married families tended to exclude from the program because a foreign spouse's earnings were counted in a numerator but she (or he) was not counted in a denominator when the local authorities calculated the relative earnings per person in that household.

to estimate the magnitude due to its blurred criteria. The “fake marriage” means that a foreigner uses international marriage as a route to migrate and/or to a mean to change his (her) status in the destination country. However, in reality, people’s minds and actions are changeable. According to my interviews with Korean-Chinese women, some Korean-Chinese women came to Korea in order to make a happy family but had to run away out of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and/or domestic violence later. At the same time, there were other Korean-Chinese, whose former intention was a “fake marriage”, but they stayed because their husbands were sincere, generous, but not rich. Therefore, this phenomenon problematises the dichotomy between the “real marriage” and “fake marriage”.

According to the Ministry of Justice (2001), out of 20,172 people with foreign spouses, there were 111 cases of divorce, which only makes up 0.6% of the total percentage. However, when including the number of people who ran away from their abusive spouses, almost 10% of foreign spouses did not live with the Korean men to whom they married. In addition, most of the people who ran away (total numbers were 1,763) were Chinese (1,206) and Filipinos (106). That is, 16.2% of Chinese spouses and 3.8% of Filipino spouses have experienced family dissolution.

The ‘fake marriage’ phenomenon is related to ‘Korean-Chinese’ women due to their easy access to employment in Korea (Lee, 2005a). Unlike other foreign brides, Korean-Chinese women could find jobs in the service industry since the early 1990s, due to their ability to speak Korean language and similar appearance.

The spotlight of ‘fake marriage’ of the Korean-Chinese women in newspapers led Korean people to have a stereotype toward them, which led their Korean husbands to be suspicious and not to allow their outside employment. Then this led their Korean-

Chinese wives to decide to run away.⁵

Policies on International Married Families

Although there has been a serious need for governmental assistance for international married families and their children, the Korean government only revised Nationality Law in 1997. After the millennium, several ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, the Social Welfare and Health, and the Ministry of Gender Equality, have tried to find ways to improve their situation. Finally, the Korean Government announced plans for the comprehensive policy for the social integration of foreign wives and their families on April 26, 2006. The ‘Grand Plan’ was produced in the national meeting with President Roh Moo-hyun and 14 branches of governmental administrations. As a result, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MGEF) became the leading department for coordinating policies for international married families and their children. It was a very welcomed announcement. In this section, I want to deal with the factors that led to a rapid change in government policy in 2006.

1) Background

A number of problems have been highlighted by international marriage both locally and internationally. For example, human-trafficking by international marriage agencies and the situation of foreign wives in Korea have become a social problem. Abroad, for example, a Korean man seeking a potential foreign bride was arrested on the suspicion of being a trafficking broker in Cambodia (Joongang newspaper, 2/15/2005). In January 2005, the Philippine Embassy in Korea issued an urgent warning to Filipino women “to

⁵ Similar cases can be found in Freeman (2005).

be extra wary, or avoid, applying for arranged marriages to Koreans” (Korea Times, 7/5/2005). Vietnamese women’s association criticized a Korean newspaper’s report on April 21 2006, titled ‘Vietnamese women wish to come to Korea, land of dreams’, including a photograph of a group of Korean men interviewing Vietnamese women as prospective wives. The women were standing in line with number tags (Joongang newspaper, 4/27/2006; 4/29/2006).⁶ In Korea, several women’s associations, female migrant support NGOs and the foreign wives’ self-help organizations have criticized the process and advertisement of international marriage agencies, such as ‘bride guarantee’, which means that the agency will replace the bride if she runs away. A ‘law to regulate marriage agencies’ was submitted to the National Assembly in February 1 2005, Since then and prior to that several government administrations have tried to improve the situation for foreign brides in Korea. However, all these administrations have always worked independently until the ‘Grand Plan.’

First, the Ministry of Justice permitted denizenship from April 2002 and began to change foreign spouse’s status from the F-1 to the F-2 visa, allowing employment application for them from May 2002. Then it also mitigated the situation of foreign divorced brides, lessening the documentation to prove that their Korean husband was responsible for their divorce.

Second, since November 2002 the Ministry of Gender Equality has provided an interpretation service for migrant women who need professional counseling and shelter for sex trafficking, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. The service is available in English, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. The service is provided through a women’s hotline. The Ministry of Gender Equality began to organize a service for foreign wives

⁶ The Korean newspaper sent a letter of apology to the Vietnamese Women’s Alliance on May 11 2006 (Joongang newspaper, 5/14/2006).

in 2005, after Amore-pacific Corporation donated 200 million Korean Won (about 200 thousand US dollars) in order to assist foreign wives.⁷ The Ministry of Gender Equality took over child care and family services from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health in June 2004. In June 2005, the Ministry of Gender Equality changed its name to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, to expand its services further.

Third, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health asked several scholars to investigate the situation of foreign wives in Korea in 2005. Based on the findings of the investigation report by Seol et al. (2005), it plans to include poor foreign wives and their families into the social security program from January 1 2007.

2) The 'Grand Plan' of April 26 2006

According to the 'Grand Plan' of April 26 2006, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family became the leading and major coordinating department, and other ministries including the Ministry of Justice, Labor, Social Welfare and Health and local and central government departments had to participate in the 'Grand Plan' (Table 4).

The vision of the 'Grand Plan' is "a social integration of foreign wives and an attainment of a multicultural society." The major policies are seven: 1) Regulation of international marriage agencies and protection of foreign wives before entry to Korea; 2) Support for victims of domestic violence; 3) Support and orientation for newly arrived foreign wives; 4) Support for Children of international marriages in schools; 5) Providing social welfare to foreign wives; 6) Raising social awareness of multicultural issues; and 7) Making a comprehensive project (Table 4).

Regarding the first policy, the government plans to introduce a new law regulating

⁷ US1\$=1,028 Korean Won in June, 2005.

marriage agencies or brokers in 2007 to enhance the transparency of their practices and prevent human rights abuses. The new law will require international marriage agencies or brokers to offer foreign brides legitimate information of potential husbands before they meet.

Regarding the second policy, the new law will enable foreign wives to be protected from becoming undocumented immigrants. Currently, foreign women married to Koreans are eligible for Korean nationality only after two years in wedlock. However, non-Korean spouses fall victim to become undocumented immigrants when their Korean spouses divorce or withdraw identification guarantees. Also, divorced foreign wives who claim that their Korean husbands are responsible for their marriage break-ups will be allowed to stay in Korea until the court determines the responsible party. In addition, the new law will find measures to protect foreign wives from domestic violence by providing more hotlines and shelters.

Regarding the third policy, the new law will provide various Korean language and cultural programs. Furthermore, it will operate Korean language and cultural education programs through educational channels such as EBS (Educational Broadcasting System). It will also operate 'host family programs' and 'mentoring programs' in their neighborhoods.

Regarding the fourth policy, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development plans to revise and correct contents implying racial discrimination in textbooks. It plans to make special programs for biracial children, including dual language programs. Furthermore, it will try to prevent racism.

Regarding the fifth policy, from January 1 2007 foreign women who are married to poor Korean men and have young children will become recipients of basic state aid,

including social welfare and medical care, even before they obtain Korean citizenship.⁸

Regarding the sixth policy, the government will try to raise social awareness and move towards becoming a successful multicultural society. Since 'mixed blood' or 'biracial' implies racial discrimination, the government will replace them more politically correct terminology. Moreover, they are considering to implement a law banning prejudice against children from international marriages and immigrants.

Regarding the seventh policy, the government asks several administrations, such as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources to investigate the situations of international married families and their children. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family will increase their current 21 centers (in August 2006) for supporting international married families to 51 until the late 2006 in order to offer the above services. It will also build networks among various administrations and between the central and local governments.

3) Factors influence on the governmental change

Although some NGOs supporting female migrants feel that the 'Grand Plan' as a sudden change (Han, 2006: 3), it is an outcome of several internal and external factors. The main external factors are the racial struggles in France and a visit of Hines Ward, a Korean-American football star. First, the government wants to prevent a 'racial uprising' similar to the racial riot in France in November 2005. Since Korea has had migrant workers for almost 20 years, the number of migrants has now become significant.⁹ Second, after the news that a Korean-American football star, Hines Ward,

⁸ Currently, 52.9 percent of multi-cultural families live below the poverty line, but only 13.7 percent of families receive basic aid.

⁹ Out of 800,000 foreigners residing in Korea more than 3 months, there were 150,000

who was born in Seoul to a Korean mother and African-American father, has become the world's hero by leading his team to victory in the Super Bowl and becoming the MVP in February 2006 has brought the 'race' issue to the fore. This raised public awareness about children of international marriages.¹⁰ A 'law to support multi-cultural children and their families' was submitted to the National Assembly in April 6, 2006. In addition, the government wants to prevent any diplomatic struggle due to human rights violation of foreign wives.

The internal factors are rooted in the strong civil social movements by migrant support NGOs and foreign wives associations (Lee, 2003). However, I want to highlight the perspective and characteristics of the current government itself and the recent demographic restructuring in Korea. First, the current president Roh Moo-hyun and many members of his cabinet were the leading civil activists in pro-human rights movements. Although the president and his cabinet have been criticized for their economic policies, they have improved human rights issues in Korea.¹¹ Second, as the low fertility rate in Korea has become a serious social problem and as it is interpreted as a 'women's rebellion' in Korea, the Ministry of Gender Equality is required to perform more responsibilities.¹² When it took over child care and family services from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health, it also took their huge budget of 600 billion Korean Won (about 590 thousand US dollars) for its child care program and 25 billion

ethnic Koreans (majority are Korean-Chinese), 170,000 documented workers and 180,000 undocumented workers in 2005.

¹⁰ Hines Ward announced a plan to establish a foundation for multi-cultural children in South Korea on May 29 2006. The foundation will be named 'Hines Ward Helping Hands Korea' and will be independently operated by Pearl S. International, a non-profit organization assisting multi-cultural children (Korea Times, 5/29/2006).

¹¹ For example, the immigration policy changed from the notorious 'Industrial Trainee Program' to 'Work Permit Program' in August 2004, although the former will be abandoned from the 1st of January 2007.

¹² The total fertility rate was 1.16 in 2004 and 1.08 in 2005.

Korean Won (about 24 thousand US dollars) for its family program in 2005. Therefore, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family can use some of the family program budget to operate several projects to assist foreign wives and their families.

Therefore, the 'Grand Plan' represents two important shifts. The first shift is from a policy for 'immigration' to a 'population' policy. The second shift is from a policy for 'women' to a 'family' policy. First shift is welcome and positive in the sense that it represents a shift from the policy focusing on 'them' to one that focuses on 'us'. However, the second shift calls for more careful attention because the over emphasis on 'family' may highlight their roles as 'wives' and 'daughter-in-laws' instead of their more important role as 'independent human beings'.

In addition, the 'Grand Plan' tends to exclude other international married families such as foreign husbands with Korean wives. Of course, one reason for this exclusion may be due to their small numbers, i.e., for the international families with Southeast Asian migrant husbands, which was shown in Table 1. A more significant reason may be attributed to the patrilineal ideology that "a married daughter is no longer a daughter (出嫁外人)" both in a progressive government and Korean society in general.

Conclusion

Marriage migration to Korea since the early 1990s shares characteristics of the so-called 'mail order bride' phenomenon in other countries (Lee, 2004; Nakamatsu, 2003; Piper, 1997; Truong, 1995; Yu, 2001). For example, it is mostly Korean men who seek wives from less developed countries, and a significant number of the couples are arranged by commercialized marriage agencies or brokers. The majority of the men are not economically affluent. Nowadays this phenomenon does not only apply to men in

rural areas but includes urban men.

Although marriage migration had begun in Korea since the early 1990s, the Korean government did not have any policy on international marriage, because marriage was regarded as a private and personal matter. As international marriages have challenged the 'homogeneous' and 'patriarchal' Korean society, it is vital for government to take action. The first action was the revision of the Korean Nationality Law in 1997. Although it abolished patrilineal and gender discriminated factors in the previous national law, its underlying purpose was to prevent 'fake international marriages'. After some trials of several administrations to support the social adjustment of foreign wives in Korea, the government announced the 'Grand Plan' in April 2006.

The 'Grand Plan' is important because it represents two major shifts in policy orientation: 1) from the policy focusing on 'them' to one that focuses on 'us'; and 2) from a policy for 'women' to a 'family' policy. The first shift is welcome and positive because it is comprehensive to cover the whole processes of adaptation of international married families and their children, including policies from a pre-stage of their entrance to later stages of their residence in Korea. However, the 'Grand Plan' does not include the 'cross-cultural' families of foreign men and Korean women into the category of "us". Such exclusion may be attributed to the traditional ideology that "a married daughter is no longer a daughter (出嫁外人)".

The second shift can be interpreted as a strategy to step over the threshold of a 'patriarchal' society to a more 'gender equality' society. It is true that Korean people can accept the 'Grand Plan' for the sake of 'family' than for 'feminism'. However, the over emphasis on 'family' may become a barrier to the gender balanced family life and the empowerment of foreign wives.

In summary, marriage migration to South Korea has challenged the 'homogeneous' and 'patriarchal' Korean society. By experiencing social and political trial and error during the 1990s, the Korean society is attempting to evolve towards becoming a successful multicultural society. The 'Grand Plan' in April 26 2006 can be the stepping stone towards this.

References

- Freeman, Caren, 2005. "Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosonjok Brides in South Korea" pp. 80~100 In *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*. Edited by Nicole Constable, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Han, Gook Yum, 2006. "International Married Families: A Direction of the Governmental Policy" Paper presented in NGOs meeting at the Seoul Women's Plaza, on June 12, 2006 (In Korean).
- HRSWM (The Human Rights Solidarity for Women and Migration), 2001. *Migrant Women and Inter-ethnic Marriage*. Workshop Report (In Korean).
- Kim, Hyun Sook, 1998. "Yanggongju as an Allegory of the Nation: The Representation of Working-Class Women in Popular and Radical Texts." pp. 175-202 In *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*. Edited by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi. New York and London: Routledge.
- KNSO (Korea National Statistical Office), 1999-2005. *Annual Report on the Marriages and Divorces Statistics*.
- _____, 2006. Inside re-tabulation by asking the author in August 17, 2006.
- Kwon, Tae Whan, 2005. *A Change in Korean-Chinese Communities in China: post 1990s*, Seoul: Seoul National University Press (In Korean).
- Lee, Gwang Gyu, 2002. *Korean-Chinese in A Rapid Change*, Seoul: Back San Seo Dang (In Korean).
- Lee, Hye-Kyung, 2003. "Gender, Migration and Civil Activism in South Korea," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 12(1-2):127-153.
- _____, 2004. "Migration and International Marriage in South Korea" Paper

- presented at the 99th Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August 14-17, 2004.
- _____, 2005a. "Marriage Migration to South Korea: Issues, Problems and Responses" *Korean Journal of Population Studies*, 28(1):73-106 (In Korean).
- _____, 2005b. "Changing Trends in Paid Domestic Work in South Korea" pp. 341-363 In *Asian Women and Transnational Domestic Workers*, Edited by Shirlena Huang, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Noor Abdul Rahman, London, New York, etc.: Marshall Cavendish Academic.
- Ministry of Justice, Korea, 2001. "Residential Situation of Foreign Spouses of Korean Natioanls" 2001.2 (In Korean).
- _____, 2005a. *Annual Report on Emigration and Immigration*.
- _____, 2005b. Inside Report (In Korean).
- Nakamatsu, Tomoko, 2003. "International Marriage through Introduction Agencies: Social and Legal Realities of "Asian" Wives of Japanese Men" pp. 181-201 In *Wife of Workers?* Edited by Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Piper, Nicola (1997) "International Marriage in Japan: 'race' and 'gender' perspectives" *Gender, Place and Culture*, 4(3):321-338.
- Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion, 2005. "Policies for the Social Integration of Foreign Wives and their Families" Report for the 74th National Meeting on April 26, 2006 (www.pcsi.go.kr)(In Korean).
- Seol, Dong Hoon, Yun Tae Kim, Hyun Mee Kim, Hong Sik Yoon, Hye-kyung Lee, Kyung Taek Yim, Ki Seon Chung, Youngsu Ju, Geon-Soo Han, 2005. "A research on the actual condition of the migrant women through international marriage, and the plan for supporting policy of health and welfare" Seoul: The Ministry of Health and Welfare (In Korean).
- Truong, Thanh-Dam. 1995. "Gender, International Migration and Social Reproduction: Implications for Theory, Policy, Research and Networking" Paper presented at the international seminar on "International Female Migration and Japan: Networking, Settlement and Human Rights" December 12-14 1995, at the International Peace Research Institute, Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo.
- Yu, Kojima (2001) "In the Business of Cultural Reproduction: Theoretical Implications of the Mail-Order Bride Phenomenon" *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(2):199-210.