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Negotiating Gender and Kinship within Multicultural Families in Non-Highly Urbanised Areas of South Korea

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Abstract: This study examines the lives of marriage migrants, primarily coming from the Philippines to non-highly urbanised areas (i.e., "rural" areas) of South Korea. It looks at how these women negotiate gender norms and expectations in these multicultural families within the context of state-led multiculturalism. Semi-structured interviews with 20 Filipino marriage migrants were conducted from August to September 2023 in selected areas of Chungcheongnam-do (South Chungcheong Province) and Jeollabuk-do (North Jeolla Province). Based on the data gathered, it was found that these women have navigated gendered cultural expectations in the Korean household, thus reproducing gendered norms within the traditional Korean family and playing a significant role in keeping the family intact. However, there are also instances where these gendered expectations were subverted within these families. This study would like to interrogate whether these women are able to re-imagine a different kind of "womanhood" away from traditional family norms, thus challenging existing models of how marriage migrants are expected to perform in the context of what I call "performative multiculturalism" in ethnonationalist states such as South Korea and Japan.

Keywords: marriage migrants; gender; multicultural families; South Korea

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1. Introduction

In the late 1980s, as South Korea was experiencing its unprecedented economic growth, there was concern over the plight of bachelor rural men in their 30s to 50s who committed suicide since they were unable to marry and carry out their Confucian duty to continue the family line (M. Kim 2018). This issue, coupled with low birth rates in the country and an ageing society, as well as an "imbalanced marriage market", (A. Kim 2018, p. 1) had an impact on single men in rural areas. Rural areas in South Korea have experienced a shrinking number of women choosing to stay in the area, as there has been an increase in the number of women moving to urban areas in the country. The number of women entering tertiary education as well as the labour market has increased, thus contributing to the cultural and economic transformations in Korean society. Younger women are "well aware that their career and self-realization will be compromised once they get married" (D. S. Kim 2010, p. 131). Thus, these women choose to move to urban areas and choose to delay marriage (or even not get married) to prioritise their careers.

To address the marriage problem in these rural areas, various organisations and institutions such as NGOs and local governments brought these men on "matchmaking trips" to China to marry Korean Chinese (*joseonjok*) women (M. Kim 2018, p. 2). Korean Chinese women were not the only ones considered as marriage partners for these rural Korean men; Southeast Asian women in poorer parts of the region were also matched with these men. In the 1990s, the Unification Church[1] (henceforth referred to as the UC) began matchmaking rural bachelors with Filipino women (not necessarily members of the church). Moreover, in the 2000s, there was a large influx of marriage migrants from Vietnam. M. Kim (2018) states that in 1990, international marriages only accounted for 1.2 percent of all marriages in South Korea; in 2005, however, 13.5 percent of marriages in the country

involved a foreign-born spouse, with a majority (86.9 percent) of these between Korean men and foreign-born wives.

This phenomenon brought about a significant transformation in South Korea's society, particularly in rural areas. In 2006, the Korean government introduced the concept of a "multicultural society", stating that the country was transitioning into a "multicultural, multi-ethnic society" (H. M. Kim 2011). Korean multicultural policies, however, revolved around "multicultural families"—families composed of these marriage migrants from East and Southeast Asia and their Korean husbands—marginalising a large part of the foreign population, particularly foreign labour migrants. These marriage migrants were considered to be "potential Korean citizens" as they are able to reproduce the next generation of Koreans (H. M. Kim 2011). With this, the government and civil society began to provide resources and programmes for these marriage migrants in order to assist them as they adjust to and assimilate themselves into Korean society.

Indeed, marriage migrants in South Korea have changed the socio-cultural landscape of its rural areas and semi-rural areas. Faced with a rapidly ageing population, the migration of young people to urban areas, and the lack of suitable domestic marriage partners for men, non-Korean Asian brides have been sought out as ideal marriage partners for rural men "left behind" in the marriage market. In Japan, for example, this phenomenon was seen beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s. While women from Korea and China comprised most of the marriage migrants in Japan, there was an increase in Filipino and Thai wives starting from the 1990s. Filipinos comprise the largest number of foreign wives from Southeast Asia in Japan, with Thai women a distant second (Chung et al. 2016). From the 2000s, Chinese and Filipino wives overtook Korean women and currently rank first and second in number as wives of Japanese men (Vital Statistics of Japan for Marriage, *Jinkou Doutai Chousa Jinkou Doutai Toukei, Konin* 2023). In 2015, there was a total of 147,382 marriage migrants of which 125,073 were women (Statistics Korea 2023). In the same year, Southeast Asian migrants account for around 35 percent of marriage migrants in South Korea, with many of these women coming from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cambodia (Park 2019).

Currently, these foreign brides in rural areas of Japan have integrated into Japanese society and are approaching later life, as many of them are in the 50-to-60-year-old age bracket. Meanwhile, in South Korea, Vietnamese women overtook Filipino women in marrying South Korean men from 2001 to 2005 (Chung et al. 2016; Chi 2018). This phenomenon has introduced changes within the family structure and norms, creating so-called "multicultural families" that speak of increasing cultural diversity in these areas. A multicultural family, as defined by the Multicultural Families Support Act, is (1) a family that includes one married immigrant and one who has acquired Korean nationality pursuant to Article 2 (acquisition by birth), Article 3 (acquisition by acknowledgement), or Article 4 (acquisition through naturalisation) of the Nationality Act and (2) a family where one has acquired Korean nationality pursuant to Articles 3 and 4 of the Nationality Act and one has acquired nationality pursuant to Articles 2 to 4 of the Nationality Act (Multicultural Families Support Act n.d., Korea Legislation Research Institute website). While multicultural policies exist to address the increasing influx of marriage migrants, several challenges still persist mainly due to cultural and linguistic challenges within these families and shortcomings in these policies. Thus, social problems such as domestic violence and increasing divorce rates, as well as education-related problems experienced by children in these families, have become pressing concerns in recent years.

Based on a larger study looking at Korean multicultural families' perceptions on diversity and experiences of social well-being, this paper focuses on marriage migrants, specifically Filipino women, in non-highly urbanised areas of South Korea. I use the term "non-highly urbanised", rather than rural, to denote the continuing changes that rural (and semi-rural) regions have undergone in the past several years. While the areas I visited may be considered "rural" relative to Seoul, as many parts of the towns and cities are still largely agricultural, the increasing number of shopping centres and economic development (such as the presence of KTX high-speed train stations) could indicate that these areas are

also going through some form of "urbanisation" as well. This study primarily focuses on non-highly urbanised areas, as most studies on migration tend to focus on urban areas and metropolitan centres. Moreover, it cannot be denied that rural areas are also being transformed by the presence of migrants, particularly marriage migrants (M. Kim 2018; Faier 2009).

In this paper, I look at how these Filipino women negotiate gender norms and expectations within these multicultural families (*damunhwa kajok*). I also interrogate whether these women are able to re-imagine a different kind of "womanhood" away from traditional family norms, thus challenging existing models of how marriage migrants are expected to perform.

2. Methodology and Data

Data for this paper are drawn from semi-structured interviews with 20 Filipino marriage migrants conducted from 1 August to 20 September 2023 in selected areas of Chungcheongnam-do (South Chungcheong Province) and Jeollabuk-do (North Jeolla Province). Semi-structured interviews enabled me to probe further beyond the responses they gave to my queries (Lune and Berg 2017, p. 69). The informants were chosen through purposive and selective sampling. Criteria for the selection of the informants were the following: (1) women who entered South Korea as marriage migrants and (2) women who are based in rural or non-highly urbanised areas in South Korea. As this was an exploratory study, I contacted a Filipino lay missionary introduced to me by a religious nun I was acquainted with. The lay missionary, based in Jeonju, then introduced me to the Filipino community there. She also introduced me to Catholic priests who are engaged in migrant pastoral care, and one of them gladly helped me with this study by introducing me to Filipino marriage migrants in Cheonan, Hongseong, Yesan, and Gongju in the Chungcheongnam-do region.

During fieldwork in South Korea, I also visited the aforementioned communities and attended Catholic masses and prayer meetings, as well as events such as a multicultural festival in Hongseong. During these instances, I had informal conversations with some marriage migrants by "hanging out" with them. The interviews were conducted mainly in Tagalog. I conducted most of the interviews in church community halls after each mass. Along with interviews with the marriage migrants, I also conducted interviews with key informants from the Philippine Embassy in Seoul, as well as a Filipino lay missionary and some Filipino priests. Thus, I would like to indicate here that the women interviewed are limited to Catholics since I met these women in Catholic churches and communities. Table 1 gives an overview of the informants.

Table 1. Profile of informants.

Name (Pseudonym)	Residence	Age/ Age Group	Arrival in Korea	Means of Meeting Husband	Visa Status	Current Employment
Grace Hwang	Hongseong	40	2007	Introduced by friend in PH[2]	Naturalised	Company/ factory[3]
Amy Yoon	Hongseong	41	2004	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Bea Song	Hongseong	50s	2003	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Rina Jung	Jeonju	36	2014	Introduced by family in PH	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Dana Seo	Jeonju	60s	2000	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory

Table 1. *Cont.*

Name (Pseudonym)	Residence	Age/ Age Group	Arrival in Korea	Means of Meeting Husband	Visa Status	Current Employment
Eliza Kang	Jeonju	60s	1996	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Joanne Im	Jeonju	39	2005	Introduced by friend in PH	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Carissa Noh	Jeonju	50s	2003	Met through work in PH	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Nancy Ahn	Jeonju	54	1997	Husband was her student in PH	Naturalised	English teacher
Myla Lee	Jeonju	54	1998	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Liza Cho	Cheonan	60s	1995	Unification Church	Naturalised	Retired
Patricia Kim	Cheonan	58	1991; 1997	Met though work in Korea	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Debbie Son	Cheonan	60s	2001	Unification Church	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Anna Shin	Yesan	47	2006	Introduced by officemate in PH	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Gina Ye	Gongju	38	2013	Introduced by family in Korea	Spouse visa	Housewife
Rebecca Park	Gongju	30	2017	Met through work in PH	Naturalised	Housewife
Melissa Bae	Gongju	48	2000	Unification Church	Naturalised	Entrepreneur
Nora Kong	Gongju	27	2019	Met through work in PH	Spouse visa	Housewife
Alice Han	Gongju	53	1996	Met through work in Korea	Naturalised	Company/ factory
Louise Na	Gongju	41	2007	Marriage agency	Spouse visa	Company/ factory

To guarantee each informant's privacy and rights, as well as the confidentiality of the narratives and other data collected, each informant was asked to sign a consent form before each interview. This also ensured ethical research practices. Each informant was given a pseudonym to hide their identity. Questions were centred on problems and concerns of marriage migrants and their families; adaptation to changing family dynamics and gender roles; social support services available to marriage migrants, their children, and other family members; children's education; and migrants' and families' social well-being, among other things. The interviews were transcribed and manually coded on Microsoft Word using the highlighter function.

Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes seen in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). For this study, thematic analysis was mainly in-

ductive. Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between theoretical or deductive (top–down) analysis, which is driven by the research question, and inductive analysis (bottom–up), which is data-driven (Braun and Clarke 2006; Maguire and Delahunt 2017). Both initial and focused coding was conducted (Lune and Berg 2017, p. 201). Coding is the process of sorting out data and organising them into various categories. Initial coding begins by inspecting interview transcripts and field notes "line by line" and asking general open-ended questions about these. Here, I noted various codes that could categorise each line/sentence of the interview transcript. Focused coding, meanwhile, is less "open-ended" and "more conceptual" (Lune and Berg 2017, p. 201). Focused coding was conducted based on the initial codes generated, which were selected to tie them together and generate more focused categories.

Before embarking on my fieldwork in August to September 2023, I visited the Commission for Filipinos Overseas (CFO) office in Manila in February 2023 to conduct preliminary key interviews with the director and staff of the CFO about the recent state of Filipino migrants (mostly women) leaving the country for marriage to foreign nationals. I also attended a cultural orientation seminar given to Filipino marriage migrants to observe how these kinds of orientations are conducted as well as received by the participants.

3. Multiculturalism in South Korea

In East Asia, such as in countries like Japan and South Korea, unlike in the West, multiculturalist policies have not or are not yet seen to have failed or be at the point of failure; rather, multiculturalism is regarded as a tool to address increasing diversity in what is perceived to be "homogeneous" countries. Multicultural policies are mostly about the management of "difference"; mainly assisting the "Other" in order to be able to adapt and be able to live comfortably in these so-called "homogeneous" societies. South Korea, like Japan, is increasingly becoming a migration country due to its plummeting birth rates and ageing population. As an "ethnonationalist" state (Lim 2021), South Korea's state-led multiculturalism is different from Japan, as most of its policies are geared towards addressing low birth rates and the reproduction of the next generation. This kind of multiculturalism is considered to be a "patriarchal family-oriented welfare model" (H. M. Kim 2011), where women (migrant women, in particular) are imagined as labour power replacing reproductive labour that frames them as forming and reproducing the Korean family. It should be noted here that multiculturalism in so-called "homogeneous" Asian countries like Japan and South Korea is different from Western perspectives and is more assimilationist (A. Kim 2018).

While there are national government efforts in supporting multiculturalism in South Korea, most of these are geared towards multicultural families. Local and national government efforts also provide assistance to migrants through the presence of multicultural centres, language assistance (learning and translation), etc. However, multiculturalism in South Korea is criticised as being very much superficial or, to borrow Japan Studies scholar Morris-Suzuki's words, "cosmetic" (Morris-Suzuki 2013, p. 169). Migrants themselves feel that their families and people in the community do not try to understand their cultures better. Currently, embracing and celebrating multiculturalism in the form of festivals and cultural events that aim to showcase migrant cultures abound, but the question of "are these enough?" remains.

Marriage Migrants in the Korean Family

As mentioned earlier, marriage migrants and their roles in forming multicultural families (*damunhwa kajok*) are at the core of South Korea's multicultural policies. Migrant women play an important role in the South Korean government's project of reproducing Korean families to boost population growth. With this, they had to be informed about cultural and societal norms and "trained" to be Korean wives before and after arriving in South Korea. These women undergo language learning, lectures on Korean society and culture, workshops on how to become the wife of a Korean, etc. These women had to be

"domesticated" within the Korean patriarchal family, where marriage migrants are seen to play an active role in the performance of "Koreanness" (H. M. Kim 2011). This form of "maternal citizenship" (M. Kim 2018) has given these marriage migrants access to social rights and Korean citizenship.

4. Filipino Marriage Migrants in South Korea

According to estimates from the Philippine Embassy in South Korea, there are around 12,000 marriage migrants living in South Korea. Most of these are women and are naturalised Koreans. This was because those who came in the late 1990s to the early 2000s had easy access to Korean nationality. From 2010, however, applying for Korean nationality became more challenging due to additional requirements such as language proficiency, among other things. From 2009 to 2019, South Korea is the fourth top destination country for marriage migrants from the Philippines, accounting for 5.91 percent of total registered marriages (Filipino Marriage Migrants in the 20th Century 2019), with most of them being women.

Most of the earlier Filipino marriage migrants met their Korean husbands through the Unification Church. However, not all of these women were or are members of the UC. This was also conveyed to me by eight of my informants who met their Korean husbands through the UC. Female marriage migrants who come from lower-income countries and marry men from higher-income countries have been considered as entering into a "global hypergamy". This type of marriage migration "is global in the sense that it involves men and women from different regions of the world. It can be considered hypergamous . . . as women marrying up into a higher socioeconomic group—if we conceive of 'up' as referring to a hierarchy or a chain of geographical locations" (Constable 2005, p. 10). Constable criticises this idea and this stereotype of women from lower-income countries marrying men from higher-income countries, as there are several reasons other than economic why women choose marriage. However, marriage migration, in most cases, has been considered as an opportunity to have a better life in the partner's host country rather than remaining in the homeland. Amy Yoon (from Hongseong), now in her 40s, came to Korea in 2004 when she was in her early 20s. The eldest of eight children, Amy saw marriage to a foreigner as an opportunity for a better life. She met her first husband through the UC. Bea Song, also from Hongseong, who is currently in her 50s, told me how she met her Korean husband in Hong Kong through the UC. Originally working as a medical technologist in the Philippines, she moved to Korea in 2003 upon marrying her husband.

Due to social pressures to marry in their late 20s to their 30s, women in this age group were expected to get married and have a family. While there is a recent trend of delaying marriage in most countries worldwide, this was not yet a phenomenon in the early 1990s. Several of my informants mentioned this social pressure to marry (most often imposed on them by the family) as one of the reasons that led them to join the UC's matchmaking activities as a viable option for them to find a marriage partner. This was the case for Debbie Son from Cheonan (currently in her 60s) who was 36 when she met her husband, who was 40 at that time, through the UC. Debbie told me that she joined the UC for the sole purpose of getting married. She also mentioned that she was attracted to the UC's aim of having a "happy family". She then underwent training at a UC centre in the Philippines and moved to Korea in 2001.

Meanwhile, Liza Cho also from Cheonan, also in her 60s, was advised by a former professor of hers to look for a husband through the UC. This professor was a member of the religious group, but Liza herself was not. She then met her Korean husband, an architect two years her senior, through the UC's matchmaking services. She arrived in Korea in 1995. Melissa Bae (from Gongju), now in her late 40s, shared that she was not keen on finding a husband but joined the UC "just for fun". She was matched with her farmer husband in 1999, and she moved to Korea in 2000. She was 25 then.

However, not all of the women who met their husbands through the UC had happy marriages. Some of these women did not expect that the men they were paired with

were suffering from a disability (physical or mental), were much older than them, or were abusive. Such was the case shared to me by Debbie where she became a victim of abuse from her husband, thus prompting her to seek refuge at a shelter for abused women. Liza also spoke of how her husband was an alcoholic and suffered from liver disease. Not being able to have children due to her husband's infertility, they adopted one. Liza however divorced her Korean husband after eight years of marriage and is now married to a Pakistani she met in Cheonan.

There are also marriage migrants who met their Korean husbands through other means such as introductions by family and friends (who themselves married Korean men), at their workplaces, and at educational institutions. Here, kinship and social networks play a role in finding a Korean spouse. It is also pointed out that women have brought over other women—their friends, sisters, and other relatives—to meet and marry their future spouses (Tseng 2010). These networks can also be seen as contributing to the promotion of hypergamy, where marrying a partner from a more developed country is considered as a way to obtain better opportunities through migration. One should note the significance of the Filipino wives' social class status in their homeland.

Grace Hwang, from Hongseong, who is in her early 40s and has been living in Korea for 16 years (she came to Korea in 2007), was introduced to her Korean husband by a Filipino friend who married a Korean. Grace met her husband in the Philippines. Despite having a university education from one of the southern provinces in the country, she considered marriage to a Korean as an opportunity for upward mobility. She used to work as an English teacher in Hongseong for 13 years but now works at a company (factory). Grace decided to give up teaching because of stress, despite her husband's objection.

Nevertheless, there were Korean–Filipino couples who met at their workplaces or places of study, such as Korean men meeting their future spouses in the Philippines when they were assigned there for work or when they were there for studies. There are also instances of "informal" matchmaking activities where Korean men would go to the Philippines on a "tour" to look for wives. Some of my informants met their Korean spouses this way, wherein their future husbands "chose" them at a "party" intended to match single Korean men with single Filipino women in a particular town. One of my informants told me that she herself is involved in this kind of activity where she holds tours for Korean men to meet Filipino women. She then invites interested women from her hometown to meet these men.

Nancy Ahn (54), from Jeonju, is one of these women who met her Korean husband in the Philippines. Unbeknownst to her, one of her students whom she was teaching English to would be her future spouse. She shared that this particular student of hers returned to the Philippines to look for her, and after several months of courtship, the pair decided to marry. Nancy then moved to South Korea in 1997. She currently works as an English teacher. Carissa Noh, who is in her 50s and also from Jeonju, told me that she met her husband in the Philippines through her business connections. She arrived in South Korea in 2003. Rebecca Park (30) from Gongju met her husband in her hometown of Cebu, in the central Philippines, where she was working as a school teacher. Her future husband was then 45, and she was 24. She moved to South Korea in 2017.

Recently, these marriage migrants have turned to online dating and dating applications (dating apps) to find their future spouses. This information was relayed to me by the staff of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas when I visited their office in Manila in February 2023. This was especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns and quarantines decreased face-to-face interaction as well as curtailed mobility. Another reason for choosing a Korean partner is increasing interest in Korean popular culture. It cannot be denied that the Korean wave or *hallyu* created an ideal and positive image of South Korea as a land of prosperity and opportunity where women from less-developed regions in Asia have aspired to go to (C. S. Kim 2011; Lacaba 2018).

While much of the literature on marriage migration considers economic aspects as the primary driver for these intermarriages, one should not undermine the importance of

looking at migrant agency in the decision to marry and migrate to the partner's country, as reasons for intermarriages vary. M. Kim (2018) argues that the role of emotions (not only of economic need) should also be taken into consideration when understanding marriage migration.

5. Negotiating Gender and Culture within the Multicultural Family

Upon marriage to their Korean husbands and settlement in South Korea's non-highly urbanised areas, these women spoke of the cultural and linguistic struggles that they faced as they tried to negotiate gendered and cultural logics within their own marriages and families, as well as their husbands' families. The most common cultural adjustments that these women shared were Korean food culture (particularly kimchi) and the language. Despite being required to study the Korean language before arriving in South Korea, these women spoke of the linguistic challenges that they faced upon their arrival. Some of the women continued their language learning in government-run multicultural (*damunhwa*) centres, while others improved on their proficiency through daily communication with their husbands and in-laws.

One of the women, Alice, spoke of the lifestyle adjustments she had to undergo since she had to move to a rural area and the difficulties she initially experienced with living in her husband's hometown. She spoke of the "squat toilets" (or the traditional toilets) that she had to use then. Originally from the Philippine capital, Manila, which is also one of the Philippine's busiest cities, adjusting to a rural area in a country totally different from hers was a big challenge. Unfamiliar food as well as the ubiquitous kimchi (which, according to most of my informants, they found "strong-smelling" at first) proved to be a challenge to her palate. Adjusting to the cold climate proved to be difficult for many of these women who are from a tropical region, such as the Philippines. Grace shared that she first arrived in South Korea in the middle of winter and thus had a difficult time adjusting to the very cold temperatures.

Most of the women I spoke to talked about their relationships with their in-laws, their mothers-in-law, in particular. Meanwhile, in my interview with the director of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) in February 2023, she mentioned that difficult issues regarding mother-in-law relationships were greater among marriage migrants in South Korea compared to those in Japan. This indicates that the relationship with the in-laws is significant in understanding these women's lives as marriage migrants in South Korea.

They also shared about having to learn cultural traditions such as the *jesa*, a traditional ritual practiced to honour the ancestors, where it was the wife (i.e., the marriage migrant) who was expected to carry out the responsibility of preparing the food for this ceremony. Food preparation also falls on the shoulders of women on other holidays such as the *chuseok* or the Korean Thanksgiving Day. These women spoke of the heavy burden imposed on the women of the household in performing these cultural traditions, especially the wives of the firstborn son. Rebecca told me that while the practice of the *jesa* might now be dependent on whether the husband belongs to an older or younger generation, it still becomes a source of conflict as foreign wives are also expected to help in preparation, cooking, and cleaning.

It should be noted here that these women undergo a two-day workshop (due to the pandemic, it was reduced to a four-hour one) for marriage migrants given by the CFO in the Philippines in order to familiarise themselves with Korean culture and traditions. While the state provides these workshops and seminars to help marriage migrants adjust to life in Korea, as well as the existence of policies on marriage migration, Encinas-Franco argues that these policies that are supposed to protect them tend to relegate them to traditional female roles as wives and mothers (Encinas-Franco 2024).

5.1. Gender, Family, and Religion

The significance of gender, family, and religious ideals and how these three factors intertwine in understanding the phenomenon of marriage migration should not be overlooked. It should be noted that the UC's aim or ideal of promoting "happy families" had

attracted some women to join and/or to look for a marriage partner through this religious organisation. These women held the ideal of having a happy family as one that coincided with their Catholic background. Having children is not only connected to their sense of motherhood but also "enhances" their sense of womanhood (Lacaba 2018). Moreover, according to Lacaba, for these marriage migrants, having a family gives them a sense of control and shared responsibility over how they would want to build a family and a home with their Korean husbands (Lacaba 2018, p. 80). However, for not a few of these women, their "expectation" of what a happy marriage and ideal family is was a far cry from the "reality" they experienced (or are experiencing).

5.2. Maintaining Family Harmony

Furthermore, these women had to negotiate gendered expectations and norms within the family in order to maintain family harmony and keep the marriage intact. For instance, the performance of "subservience" and "submissiveness" towards their husband and in-laws to avoid conflict in the family and to have a "successful" marriage is one strategy.[4] As divorce is frowned upon by many Filipinos, these women tried their best to maintain harmony in their marriages to avoid the possibility of divorce. It should also be pointed out here that most of my informants experienced culture shock due to the gender norms in a Korean–Filipino marriage, as their expectations of marriage were shaped by a more "egalitarian" set-up characteristic of most Filipino marriages—which is based more on the notion of "partnership"—in contrast to marriages influenced by Confucian culture. While most of them underwent seminars and workshops for marriage migrants given by the CFO before departing the Philippines, reality did not meet their expectations.

There are, however, Filipino wives who do not and did not compromise on expected gender norms in the family and demand that their husbands share in the housework. Alice shared that when she asked her husband to help her with housework, her in-laws used to get angry at her, causing conflicts within the family. However, when the couple moved houses, Alice told me that it was much easier for her and her husband to have an "equal" relationship.

There are also some who, despite knowing that they will be in conflict with their in-laws and husbands, demand that they be treated equally and with respect. Liza, for instance, shared how she always reminded her husband that she was a police officer back in the Philippines and that she could always report any abuse to the authorities. In this case, Liza uses her cultural and social capital, emphasising her previous occupation and connections in the Philippines, as a way to navigate relationships with her husband and in-laws.

Melissa shared how she used to deal with all of her husband's family members (including her mother-in-law and her husband's siblings, particularly her sister-in-law) when they were living with the family. She said that she would fight back whenever her in-laws demanded her to do something unreasonable or burdensome (like too much housework). She refused to be subservient and asserted her place in the family. "*Parang katulong ka na walang sahod* (you are like an unpaid maid/household helper)". For Melissa, "fighting back" was a way for her to emphasise her role as a wife, a family member, and a citizen tasked with reproducing the next generation of Koreans and not as an unpaid worker. Here, it can be argued that these women confront and/or subvert expectations as to how marriage migrants are expected to perform. While they acknowledge that their main role as marriage migrants is to produce the next generation of Korean citizens amid plummeting birth rates, they also bring into the multicultural family a "re-imagined womanhood", which works to empower them as marriage migrants.

5.3. Marriage Migrants Are Daughters Too

It should also be noted that these Filipino wives also work to earn for their natal family's upkeep and their (Korean) children's education (including *hagwon*[5] fees). Most of my informants are part of dual-earner families. Moreover, while prioritising their families

in Korea, these women also consider it their responsibility to support their families back in their homeland, as their filial obligation as a daughter to their parents. It was said that daughters, specifically, are expected to take care of their parents as their "*utang na loob* (debt of gratitude)" (Cruz and Laguna 2009).

This goes to show that marriage migrants are depended upon not only by the South Korean state to reproduce its next generation of citizens but are also depended on by their households and communities back in their origin countries. Sassen (2000) uses the notion of the "feminization of survival" to refer to the fact that communities and households are reliant on women for their survival. Sassen also notes that the governments of sending states also depend on these women's earnings in the form of remittances being sent back home.

6. Raising Children in Multicultural Families

While being aware of their roles as wives raising "Korean" children, these women have managed to utilise their roles as mothers to also impart aspects of their own culture to their children. This reflects their agency as well as their sense of control over their families to raise not only the next generation of Korean citizens but also children who are aware of their mixed parentage. This is accomplished through teaching (informally) their children their own languages, such as English and Tagalog (along with a regional language or dialect). Some mothers also cook Filipino food to familiarise their children with some aspects of the Filipino culture. Amy, for instance, shared that while she raised her children to be Koreans, she was also able to introduce them to Filipino food by occasionally cooking some Filipino dishes.

Some of the wives told me that their husbands were supportive of them imparting their own culture to their children. It should be remembered that some of the women interviewed met their husbands in the Philippines through work or through introductions by friends. The husbands' exposure to and familiarity with Philippine society and culture made the mothers' socialisation of their children into Philippine culture welcomed by their husbands. During my fieldwork, I was also able to visit a marriage migrant's house with my two other informants. The former was preparing for a barbecue event at Hongseong, and she and her Korean husband were grilling some vegetables when we arrived. I was told that her husband is very much supportive of the Filipino community's activities and also took on a leadership role among the Filipino–Korean multicultural families in the area.

Some of these mothers also make it a point to schedule a trip to the Philippines with their families in order for their children to get to know their relatives on their maternal side, whereas others ask their parents to come to Korea to help them in raising their children. The presence of the maternal grandparents in these multicultural families also plays a role in the transmission of cultural norms and practices. Transnational grandparenting (Nedelcu and Wyss 2020), where grandparents move to another country (in most cases, temporarily) to undertake care responsibilities (towards their grandchildren) on behalf of their children, encapsulates this type of childcare that migrant women employ. Rebecca shared that she makes it a point that the family visits her hometown in the Philippines. Her parents visit her as well and stay for a few months to help her in taking care of her children. In fact, when I attended the Gongju Migrant Community's 1st Anniversary celebration on 6 August 2023, I noticed that the mother of one of the marriage migrants in the community was helping to serve food for the attendees. Rebecca told me that her children are close to their maternal grandparents, and whenever they visit them in the Philippines, the children speak to their grandparents in the local language. She also mentioned that her husband actually wants their children to be able to speak not only Korean (and English) but also her native language.

Moreover, as these women are mostly Catholics and attend Catholic masses every Sunday, it should be noted that these women play a role in imparting their faith to their children. Not a few of these women bring their children to Sunday masses; some of the children even serve as altar servers during mass. Religious socialisation occurs among migrant and multicultural families, and it was observed that migrant mothers play a crucial

role in passing on their faith and religious practices to their children (Röder et al. 2014; Shen et al. 2020). Catholic religiosity has also become part of Philippine culture in that Filipino migrants are inclined to attend Catholic masses not only for the purpose of spiritual nourishment but also for building social networks, creating a sense of belonging, as well as for "reproducing their Filipinoness" (Tigno 2008) overseas.

Meanwhile, discrimination and bullying are still crucial issues being faced by the children of these multicultural families. Those with Southeast Asian mothers are found more likely to be bullied (Bae et al. 2019). Grace told me that the children of multicultural families like hers used to be victims of bullying and discrimination (particularly in her town of Hongseong), but recently, things have changed, and children from multicultural families are becoming more accepted in society. Grace and Bea shared that their children used to be ridiculed at school due to their appearance and slightly darker skin tone. Their classmates used to taunt them and called them "Africa"—denoting that they are from Africa due to their darker skin colour. However, both women told their children that while they might have darker skin tones due to their mothers' genes, they are also able to speak English because their mothers speak it (and even teach, in the case of Grace and Nancy) as well. The possession of cultural capital, i.e., English proficiency and a college-level education, has become a tool for these marriage migrants and their multicultural children to confront existing stereotypes of marriage migrants as poor and less-educated.

On the economic front, most of my informants have mentioned the importance of dual-earner families as necessary to support their children's education and *hagwon* fees. This points to the economic and financial role of migrant wives in these multicultural families. While a number of my informants shared that they needed to work as their husbands are too ill to work, the economic role that marriage migrants have in the family and the community cannot be denied. These women do not only reproduce the next generation but are also needed for the survival of the household and the community (Sassen 2000).

7. Conclusions

This paper examined the decisions and intentions of 20 Filipino marriage migrants in South Korea who arrived in the country at varying periods, from the late 1990s to the 2010s. While most of my informants met their Korean spouses through the Unification Church's matchmaking activities, others met their husbands at work, through study, or through introductions by family and friends. While many of the women shared that marriage to a Korean meant more economic opportunities for them as well as the chance to lead a better life, several women mentioned emotions such as love and affection as playing a role in their decision to marry their Korean husbands and move to South Korea.

It was found that these women have navigated gendered cultural expectations in the Korean household, thus reproducing gendered norms within the traditional Korean family, thereby playing a significant role in keeping the family intact. However, there are also instances of subverting these gendered expectations that led to conflict within these multicultural families. Some women have managed to utilise their roles as mothers to introduce aspects of their own culture (food, language) to a certain extent.

These women may be said to have been able to re-imagine a different kind of "womanhood" away from traditional family norms, thus challenging or even confronting existing models of how marriage migrants are expected to perform. Their economic roles within the household and the community help to re-imagine a different form of womanhood away from their expected roles as reproducers of the next generation of Korean citizens.

This study has its limitations since the field sites were only concentrated to a few areas in Jeollabuk-do and Chungcheongnam-do, leaving out other non-highly urbanised areas in South Korea where Filipino marriage migrants reside. As mentioned in the methodology, the women I interviewed belong to Catholic church communities, and thus my data were skewed towards those who are Catholic (and practicing Catholics), thus leaving out those who do not practice the religion. As this particular study focuses on marriage migrants, their husbands were not interviewed.

In future research, I intend to conduct interviews with marriage migrants (and their husbands) in other non-highly urbanised areas of South Korea as well as examine their roles not only within the context of multicultural families but also within their communities (i.e., social integration, socio-civic participation). While marriage may be a means to achieve economic stability for many of these marriage migrants who come from the Global South, the agency of these women should be considered, and the role of emotions (also from the perspectives of their Korean husbands) should be explored further in future work.

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Notes

1 The Unification Church is a religious organisation founded in 1954 by Moon Sun Myung in South Korea. Its teachings derive from Christianity. Also known as the "Moonies", the church is known for conducting mass weddings among its members. The UC is now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. For this article, though, I use Unification Church or UC, as my informants still call the church by this name.

2 PH stands for the Philippines.

3 My informants referred to their work in factories as working at a "*hoesa*" or working for a "*hoesa*". *Hoesa* means company in Korean.

4 This same information was also relayed to me by a Filipino missionary I spoke with during my fieldwork.

5 A *hagwon* is a privately-owned educational institution that works like a "cram school" where students go to after their regular school hours in order to further study in a particular subject.

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