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RURAL MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES IN SOUTH KOREA: A LOOK INTO FILIPINO WIVES' SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND FUTURE PLANS

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THE STUDY

- In 2015, it was said that 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)
- This research looks at rural multicultural families in South Korea, focusing on those with Filipino marriage migrants
 - Filipino women entered the country as foreign brides starting in the 1990s
 - 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 (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2019), with most of them women

THE STUDY

- This study primarily focuses on non-highly urbanized areas or so-called rural areas, as most studies on migration tend to look at urban areas and metropolitan centres
 - However, it cannot be denied that rural areas are also being transformed by the presence of migrants, particularly marriage migrants (M. Kim 2018; Faier 2009)
- This study also aims at comparing marriage migrants in Japan and Korea's rural areas from the perspective of multiculturalism, social well-being, citizenship, perceptions on aging, and gender

THE STUDY

- Some of the questions currently being explored in this study are:
 - How is gender (norms, roles) negotiated within these marriages?
 - How are Korean and Filipino culture and values negotiated within these families?
 - How do religious organizations, particularly missionaries working with migrants, proffer solutions and strategies for improving the social well-being of multicultural families?
 - How do these marriage migrants see themselves in the future (retirement, perceptions of home and aging)?
 - What is the role of the sending state in the maintenance and reproduction of performative multiculturalism in ethno-nationalist states such as Korea and Japan?

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

- 50-day fieldwork in South Korea from 1 August to 20 September, visiting areas in Chungcheongnam-do (Cheonan-si, Hongseong-si, Gongju-si, Yesan-gun) and Jeollabuk-do (Jeonju-si and Jeongeup-si)
- Interviews with key informants from the Philippine Embassy and priests and a lay missionary and the Commission for Filipinos Overseas (CFO)
- Semi-structured interviews (individual and group), informal conversations, participant observation (attendance in prayer meetings, Catholic masses, and events)
 - Convenience sampling
 - Target parishes in Chungcheongnam-do area (Daejeon diocese), Jeollabuk-do (Jeonju diocese)
 - As of 12 September: 1 group interview in Jeonju (6 members) and 1 individual, 3 interviews in Cheonan, 3 interviews in Hongseong, group interview in Gongju (6 members), 1 interview via Facebook Messenger (Yesan)

FILIPINO MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN KOREA

- According to estimates from the Philippine Embassy in Korea, there are around 12,000 marriage migrants living in Korea
 - Most of these women met their husbands through the Unification Church (some were members, the others were not)
 - The more recent marriage migrants met their husbands through introductions by friends and family members; others met them in the Philippines due to work or study (English)
- Most of the women are naturalized Koreans
 - The earlier migrants who came in the late 90s and early 2000s had easy access to Korean nationality
 - From 2010, applying for Korean nationality became more challenging due to language proficiency requirement, among other things
- South Korea is the Top 4 country of destination among Filipino spouses and fiancé/es from 2010 to 2020. About 12,000 Filipino marriage migrants en route to South Korea accounted for 5.72% of all Filipino marriage migrants in the said period. 97.76% are female (Commission on Filipinos Overseas)

ISSUES FACED BY MARRIAGE MIGRANTS

- Domestic abuse and violence
- Divorce and child custody
- Access to Korean nationality
 - Ethnonationalism and citizenship (Lim 2020)
 - Stringent requirements (as opposed to previous years)
- Discrimination
- Acculturation of marriage migrants
 - Cultural and language barriers
- Social integration
 - Are they really integrated?
 - Legally Koreans, but are they fully accepted as “Koreans”
- One’s place in the family
 - Relationship with mother-in-law
- Issues regarding aging
 - Loneliness, social isolation
 - End-of-life decisions

PROFILES OF INFORMANTS

Name (Pseudonym)	Residence	Age/Age Group	Arrival in Korea	Method of Meeting Husband	Visa Status	Current Employment
Grace Hwang	Hongseong	40	2007	Introduced by friend in PH	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Amy Yoon	Hongseong	41	2004	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Bea Song	Hongseong	50s	2003	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Rina Jung	Jeonju	36	2014	Introduced by family in PH	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Dana Seo	Jeonju	60s	2000	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Eliza Kang	Jeonju	60s	1996	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Joanne Im	Jeonju	39	2005	Introduced by friend in PH	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Carissa Noh	Jeonju	50s	2003	Met through work in PH	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Nancy Ahn	Jeonju	54	1997	Husband was her student in PH	Naturalized	English teacher
Myla Lee	Jeonju	54	1998	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Liza Cho	Cheonan	60s	1995	Unification Church	Naturalized	Retired
Patricia Kim	Cheonan	58	1991; 1997	Met through work in KOR	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Debbie Son	Cheonan	60s	2001	Unification Church	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Anna Shin	Yesan	47	2006	Introduced by officemate in PH	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Gina Ye	Gongju	38	2013	Introduced by family in KOR	Spouse Visa	Housewife
Rebecca Park	Gongju	30	2017	Met through work in PH	Naturalized	Housewife
Melissa Bae	Gongju	48	2000	Unification Church	Naturalized	Entrepreneur
Nora Kong	Gongju	27	2019	Met through work in PH	Spouse Visa	Housewife
Alice Han	Gongju	53	1996	Met through work in KOR	Naturalized	Company/Factory
Louise Na	Gongju	41	2007	Marriage Agency	Spouse Visa	Company/Factory
Emily Cha **	Incheon	64	1986; 1991	Met through work in PH	Naturalized	Entrepreneur

THE JOURNEY TO KOREA – THE ROLE OF THE UC

- As earlier mentioned, most of the earlier marriage migrants met their Korean husbands through the Unification Church; not all of these women are members of the UC
 - Marriage for social mobility (hypergamy)
 - Marriage to foreigners (especially those from more developed countries) as an opportunity to have a better life than remaining in the homeland
 - Marriage due to social pressures (women in their late 20s to 30s are expected to get married and have a family)
 - Lack (?) of marriage partners, could not find a partner, guarantee to finding a partner led many of these women to see the UC's matchmaking activities as a viable option for marriage

AMY YOON (HONGSEONG)

- Amy, 40s, came to Korea in 2004 in her early 20s
- The eldest of 8 children, Amy saw marriage to a foreigner as an opportunity for a better life
- She lived in Yongjin and Suwon before settling in Hongseong
- She met her 1st husband through the Unification Church
 - She talked about cultural and linguistic struggles as well as her relationship with her mother-in-law as some of the challenges she faced upon moving to South Korea
- She met her 2nd husband through her work (upon moving to Hongseong)
- Amy has a child each from both her husbands and while she raised her kids to be Koreans, she was also able to introduce them to Filipino¹³ food

DEBBIE SON (CHEONAN)

- Debbie is in her 60s, arrived in Korea in 2001
- Debbie is from Davao in the southern Philippines and moved to Manila to work at a department store; she has 5 siblings
- She was introduced to her Korean husband through the UC
 - She joined the UC for the sole purpose of getting married; she underwent training at a UC centre in the Philippines
 - She mentioned that she was attracted to the UC's aim of having a "happy family"
 - She was 36 when she married her husband who was 40 at that time
- Experienced abuse from her husband and sought refuge at a shelter

LIZA CHO (CHEONAN)

- Liza, 60s, arrived in Korea in 1995
- She used to be a police officer (investigator), with a rank of SPO1 (Senior Police Officer 1 (current equivalent: Police Master Sergeant)) in Metropolitan Manila and worked on abuse cases on women and children
- She was advised by her professor (a member of the UC) to look for a husband through the church since she was already 36; Liza then met her husband – an architect 2 years her senior – through the UC
- They adopted a child due to her husband's infertility (sick of liver disease due to alcoholism)
- She divorced her husband after 8 years of marriage and is now married to a Pakistani she met in Cheonan

MELISSA BAE (GONGJU)

- Melissa, in her late 40s, came to Korea in 2000 at the age of 25
- She 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; they have three children
- She spoke of several cultural adjustments upon arriving in Korea, including food, language, as well as cultural traditions such as the jesa
- She talked about problems living with her husband’s family, especially her relationship with her sister-in-law
 - She refused to be subservient and asserted her place in the family
- Melissa shared how she overcame her challenges and is proud to have succeeded financially, investing in some real estate in Gongju

THE JOURNEY TO KOREA - OTHER MEANS

- There are also marriage migrants who met their Korean husbands through means other than the UC's matchmaking activities. These are through introductions by family and friends (who themselves married Korean men), through work, and study
 - Kindship and social networks in finding a Korean spouse – role in the promotion of hypergamy (significance of Filipino wives' class status in the Philippines)
 - Korean men who were assigned in the Philippines for work or studied there met their Filipino spouses there
 - “Informal” matchmaking activities where Korean men would go to the Philippines on a “tour” to look for wives
 - Some women met their Korean spouses this way; a marriage migrant in Cheonan is also involved in this activity where she invites interested women from her hometown in the Philippines to meet Korean men

THE JOURNEY TO KOREA - OTHER MEANS

- Online dating, dating apps (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) also became a means for Filipino women to meet a Korean spouse
 - Other reasons for choosing a Korean partner: interest in Korean popular culture
- The role of emotions (not only of economic need) should also be taken into consideration (M. Kim 2018)

NANCY AHN (JEONJU)

- Nancy, 54, arrived in Korea in 1997
- She met her husband in the Philippines when she was teaching him English in Manila (private tutoring)
- She never expected to be in a relationship with him; he went back to the Philippines to look for her
- Her biggest challenges upon arriving in Korea were the cultural adjustments that needed to be done (food, interpersonal relationships, etc.)
 - While her husband knows English, she had to learn Korean for daily living
- She has two grown-up children who are working
- Nancy continues to teach English in Jeonju

GRACE HWANG (HONGSEONG)

- Grace is in her early 40s and has been living in Korea for 16 years
- Originally from Davao in the southern Philippines, she was introduced to her Korean husband by her Filipino friend (who also married a Korean). She met her husband in the Philippines.
 - She learned Korean on her own for 8 months before studying at *damunhwa* centres
- Grace has a university education but also considered marriage to a Korean as an opportunity for upward mobility
- She spent 3 years in Seoul (husband was a businessman) before moving to her husband's hometown, Hongseong
- She used to work as an English teacher in Hongseong for 13 years but now works at a company (factory); she decided to give up teaching because of stress, despite her husband's objection

ALICE HAN (GONGJU)

- Alice, 53, arrived in Korea in 1996, as a foreign trainee at a Korean company
 - Before leaving for Korea, she had to learn basic Korean language
- She met her husband at the factory where she was working at; her future husband was her supervisor at that time
 - At first her parents and grandparents were against her decision to marry a Korean, due to stereotypes about Korean men
- She spoke of some cultural challenges, and difficulty living in a rural area (she is originally from Manila)
 - Food (especially kimchi), language, toilets
 - Relationship with in-laws

NEGOTIATING GENDER

- Marriage migrants as “performers of Koreanness” (H. M. Kim 2011)
 - Migrant women and the Korean government’s project of reproducing Korean families to boost population growth
- Many of the women had to negotiate gendered expectations and norms within the family in order to maintain family harmony and keep the marriage intact
 - Performance of “subservience” and “submissiveness” to the husband and in-laws to avoid conflict and to have a “successful” marriage
 - Many of the women experienced culture shock due to the gender norms in a Korean-Filipino marriage, as their expectations on marriage were shaped by a more “egalitarian” set-up as characteristic of most Filipino marriages (“partnership”)

NEGOTIATING GENDER

- There are however, Filipino wives who do not compromise on expected gender norms in the family and demand that their husbands share in the housework
 - Alice Han (Gongju) shared that when she asked her husband to help her with housework, her in-laws used to get mad at her; when the couple moved houses, it was much easier for Alice and her husband to have an “equal” relationship
- There are 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 Cho (Cheonan), 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

NEGOTIATING GENDER

- Melissa Bae (Gongju), shared how she used to deal with all of her husband's family members (including her mother-in-law and her husband's siblings) 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). "*Parang katulong ka na walang sahod* (You are like an unpaid maid/household helper)"

SOCIAL WELL-BEING

- Social well-being has been considered by the World Health Organization to be connected to the health of individuals. From an economic perspective, social well-being pertains to a country's GDP or gross domestic product. Psychologists, meanwhile, tend to focus on the subjective and individual factors of social well-being.
- From a social scientific and a sociological point of view, social well-being points to socio-cultural factors such as community participation, sense of belongingness to one's community, social capital, and social cohesion (Cicognani, 2022; Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 2000).
- It can also be assumed that social well-being and subjective well-being influence each other (Kanai, 2015).

SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND GENDER

- Gender differences due to structural factors (access to education, economics, politics, social resources, opportunities, and power structures between men and women), sociocultural factors (differences in social expectations and norms between men and women), and biological factors.
- Findings also reveal a larger gap in social well-being between men and women in poorer countries and countries with unequal gender rights (Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2013).
- Socio-cultural challenges faced by Filipino immigrant women also impact social well-being.
 - Common obstacles include language barriers, psychological distress, illegal residency, unacceptability in Japanese society, low economic status₂₆ and inadequate medical care (Parreñas, 2010; Cheng & Choo, 2015).

RURAL MIGRANTS AND FACTORS FOR SOCIAL WELL-BEING

- The experience of migration is gendered and intertwined with one's own cultural and social capital.
 - Workmates, church friends
- Language and communication, one's status of residence, spirituality and religion, and the presence or absence of family are also deemed significant.
- Social welfare
 - Pension and health care, health insurance
- Korean nationality
 - Social integration?

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

- Presence of migrant desks in Catholic dioceses in Korea, as well as the deployment of foreign priests to administer to the migrants' pastoral, spiritual, emotional, and social needs
- Role of the Church in migrants' social well-being: social well-being is about support networks and faith (Paillard-Borg & Hallberg, 2018), and the Catholic Church can be considered as a place where this support network and faith can be realised
 - These support networks created by churches are important for migrants' social well-being, as it not only gives them a community to go to, but also a sense of belonging (Zulueta 2023).
- Less support given to migrants in rural areas by the Philippine Embassy in Seoul due to the distance and bureaucratic red tape; thus the importance of missionaries who are able to immediately respond to migrants' problems

MULTICULTURALISM IN SOUTH KOREA

- While there are national government efforts in supporting multiculturalism in South Korea, most of these are towards multicultural families
- Multiculturalism in Korea (as in Japan) as still very much “cosmetic” (Morris-Suzuki 2002)
 - Migrants themselves feel that their families and people in the community do not try to understand their cultures better
 - “Multiculturalism” in the form of festivals, cultural events that aim to showcase migrant cultures – but are these enough?
 - Local and national government efforts to provide assistance to migrants through the presence of multicultural centres, language translation, etc.

MULTICULTURALISM IN SOUTH KOREA

- Multiculturalism and the promotion of population growth in a rapidly aging society
 - Marriage migrants and “reproductive citizenship” (Jang 2020)
 - “Patriarchal family-oriented welfare model” (H. M. Kim 2011), where women are imagined as labour power replacing reproductive labour that frames them as forming and reproducing the Korean family

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- While marriage may be a means to achieve economic stability for 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 perspective of the Korean husband) should be explored more.
- These women have navigated gendered cultural expectations in the Korean household, thus reproducing gendered norms within the traditional Korean family. However, some women have managed to utilize their roles as mothers to introduce aspects of their own culture (food, language) to a certain extent.
- The role of the sending state in the maintenance of an ethnonationalist multicultural ideology should be explored further
 - The Philippine Embassy in Korea though has expressed dissatisfaction with the Korean government's form of multiculturalism (and thus introduced workshops for multicultural families in 2023)

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- As most marriage migrants are naturalized Koreans, many of them decided to stay longer in Korea until retirement. This is due to the following reasons
 - Social and health services
 - Presence of family (children and grandchildren)
 - Work and pension
 - Better living conditions and safety concerns
- There are some who expressed their wish to retire in the Philippines and some who expressed their desire to be buried in their homeland
 - One said that her husband wants to spend his retirement years in the Philippines, but she herself just prefers to live a transnational existence moving between Korea and the Philippines