

**Cultural Differences in Korean-Russian Mixed Marriages: Past and Present<sup>1</sup>**

In today's world of globalization one can observe the convergence of different cultures. The development of communication and transportation technologies, international cultural exchanges allowed happening millions of direct contacts between people from different cultures. Globalization has an impact on cross-cultural contacts in various fields - in business, politics, international relations, migration, tourism, student and academic exchanges, as well as family and marital relations.

Under the term *mixed marriage* sociologists usually understand a marriage in which the partners belong to different ethnic or religious groups. In this paper by the term *mixed Korean-Russian marriage* we mean those marriages which are concluded between the Russians (mostly Russian women) and Koreans who were born and living in South Korea.

The transformation of family relations in modern societies is the focus of research interest of many sociologists. Thus, the British scientist Anthony Giddens believes that changes in personal life (in sexual relationships, marriage and family) are the most important social changes taking place in the modern world. Giddens identifies the following specific processes in the sphere of family relations of the last time.

- Traditional family is disappearing as an economic union, which was based on the inequality of its members - men, women and children.
- In modern families the attitude towards children is changing – people more value personality and spiritual quality of a child. It happens because the number of children in contemporary families has decreased. In this case the decision to have a child in today's society affected by the psychological characteristics and emotions of people.
- There is a transformation of sexual relations, today their purpose and the result is not only the birth of children, but rather receiving emotional and physical pleasure (Giddens 2004: 58).

That is why Giddens calls the institutions of marriage and family as "institutions-shells": they are still have the same names as before, but their nature in modern society has changed significantly. Today, the couple is in the center of family life, love and sexual attraction are a basis of marital relations, founded primarily on emotional communication or intimacy.

In terms of social and cultural transformations the opened borders have expanded social space for interaction between different people and for a new individual freedom of choice in life strategies,

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies of the Republic of Korea in year 2011-2012 (AKS-2010-CAA-2101)

including the field of marriage. Within this background, there occurred an increase in marriages with foreign partners, in which interpersonal relationships between men and women from different countries go beyond the usual territorial limits and receives intercultural nature.

The difference in territorial and state integrity, to which belong marriage partners, is making their marriage a complex phenomenon. The lifestyle of two individuals in such cases consists of two cultures: Korean and Russian. This situation is characterized by two main aspects. First, in terms of legal rules, a mixed marriage involves additional complexity connected to nationality and residence permit. Compliance with legal guidelines limits the possibilities of the spouses. One of them should leave the country of his/her citizenship. Second, social and personal characteristics of a newly married person associate with the country of origin and become evident in many aspects of his/her life within marriage. These characteristics also impact on the process of adapting to new social and cultural environment.

In the current conditions in both countries (in South Korea and in Russia) the previously existing restrictions for international marriage do not exist. In Korea the peculiar role of the coordinator before marriage was performed by pandering institutions, which took over the selection of partners and providing almost one hundred percent of marriages in a society. So far in Korea, there are special dating agencies, where young people seek to find a marriage partner. In these practices also relatives and friends participate, wishing to find a mate for someone who wants to marry. "Sogeting" is an informal event organized not by parents or older relatives, but by friends. Such a meeting is held usually in a café or restaurant. The third person introduces the young people to each other and leaves them along. If a man wants to continue dating, he should offer a girl to meet again. If his new friend agrees, then this is followed by several more meetings and then the situation is developing in much the same way as when a meeting organized by the parents (Lankov: electronic resource).

Currently, with all its social and cultural uniqueness South Korea is a modern upgraded society, which has one of the most dynamic economies in the world since the beginning of the 1990s. Development of South Korean society follows the same social foundations that govern other post-industrial societies. For example, modernization of the traditional Korean family is caused not only by the Western influence, but rather by the objective universal processes: urbanization, the growth of requirements for an individual employee training, changes in the nature of male and female labor, and many other factors that create conditions in which the traditional family simply can not longer exist. Economic development in South Korea, as well as in other countries, will inevitably lead to the growth of individualism and the weakening of non-economic control over the person of the society, to emancipation of women, to a greater dynamism in the labor market, to a gradual transition of a number of functions from family or neighboring communities to the state authorities (Korean Anthropology: Contemporary Korean Culture in Flux: 2010).

During Soviet times in Russia marriages mainly were conducted between people living in one state - the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR everyone received opportunity to find a partner outside the country and marry a foreigner. In Russian society nowadays there is no public, government, legal or moral obstacles for that. In intercultural marriage spouses are personally responsible for their choices and for their future life. However, in today's Russia, along with the modernist transformation, it is possible to note a parallel archaisation of marriage institution. After the collapse of the Soviet Union various marriage agencies stepped up their activities in the field of dating. They offer all sorts of psychological and astrological "recipes for happiness". Pragmatism and calculation often come back in place of romantic aspirations for freedom in choosing a partner based first of all on the emotional pull.

Multiple approaches to the study of family and marriage relationships were developed in modern sociology. In our view, a constructivist approach associated with the concepts of microeconomics, and economic sociology, which in turn is based on the category of "economic man» (homo economicus), has the great potential for the interpretation of Korean-Russian mixed marriages. In this tradition, the formation of mating pairs is interpreted as the result of deliberate rational choice of partners in order to maximize the utility function defined abstractly. In this perspective ethnic groups are included in the extensive list of parameters that determine the choice of marriage partner.

Let us quote some of the most characteristic ideas from the work of G. Becker, who for many years studied the problem of modeling "marriage markets". "An efficient marriage market usually leads to the choice of a partner, in which high-quality males form pairs with high-quality women, and low-quality males with low-quality women, although the choice of a partner of the opposite quality often plays an important role. It is assumed that every man and woman only care about their own well-being, and not about the welfare of society. In pursuing their selfish interests, they are unknowingly sent the "invisible hand" of competition in the marriage market and maximize the total volume of goods produced by them "(Becker 1994: 15).

"Market" concept of selecting a mate based on two assumptions. The first is that all the participants of the "marriage market" (brides and grooms) are strictly ordered on a scale of "quality", which takes into account all of their basic characteristics (age, income, education, religion and ethnicity). Second - that marriage is measured by the effectiveness of their manufactured "product" (the higher the performance, the better the marriage).

The elementary theory of the "marriage market" under the productivity of marriage is usually understands the total family income, which is in case of a successful marriage should be much higher than the income of each spouse individually before the marriage. However, the authors of the concept are aware, that is how successful the marriage is determined not only by its economic performance, so it is assumed that as a "product" produced by the family, can be considered psychological and sexual satisfaction, the quality

of children, etc. The efficacy of marriage may be assessed in two groups of "products" - which has market value and which not having any.

In the 1990's. Russia faced a strong economic and social crisis. Many women dreamed of marrying a foreigner and leaving Russia. South Korea appeared many Russians as the country with good economic and social conditions. But not only bad economic situation in Russia has affected the marriage strategy of choosing a spouse abroad. If one look at the Russian history of the twentieth century, it appears that events such as First World and the Civil War, the famine of 1921 and 1932-1933, Mass repressions, forced resettlement of entire peoples, the Great Patriotic War in 1941-1945 affected the demographic situation in the country and impact on the quantitative predominance of women over men. While in today's Russia the demographic imbalance between the sexes is in the past, in the society the stable stereotype of lack of men was formed. This stereotype was gradually developed into the stereotype of a lack of "qualitative men" who can provide the family with dignity and raise children (the phenomenon of single-parent families, fatherless).

As for the Koreans, their marriages with foreigners can also be explained from the perspective of market-based approach. First, in the Korean culture, according to tradition sons are favored. Son is considered to be a kind of successors, and he imposes duties of care for parents when they are old. Daughters usually leave the parental home after marriage and support family ties mainly with the family of their husband. Second, in the late 1980-1990's in South Korea demographic imbalance has emerged, that is an imbalance in the ratio of newborn boys and girls. The emergence of inexpensive and reliable ways to determine a sex of the child in the early stages of pregnancy allowed to get rid of girls and to give birth only to boys, especially the first-born.

The peak imbalance among newborn boys and girls reached in 1993, when 100 girls born, had more than 115 boys. In an effort to prevent such unwanted development of the demographic situation, the Korean authorities were quick to take legal action. In accordance with the approved in the 1994 decision of the Ministry of Health, the elucidation of sex of the embryo in Korea, is strictly prohibited. Additionally, the Korean media began to pursue an active propaganda campaign to convince parents that the girls in contemporary society, as adults, will be able to successfully perform the functions of parental support in old age. All this had its effect. The demographic situation in the whole country is gradually coming to normal. For example, in 2001 to 100 newborn girls have already had 109 boys. Although in some regions rather large disparity persists. The highest imbalance in favor of boys was registered in 2001 in Ulsan - 100 girls out there accounted for nearly 116 boys. In Seoul, the sex ratio among newborns was more than 107 boys to 100 girls (Guenkov: electronic resource). Thus, in remote rural areas of South Korea, there was a shortage of brides. With the modernization of the country and the penetration of Western ideology of emancipation Korean female prefer to be better educated and financially independent. In the same time, Korean men who live in rural places can not leave the house and forced to farm, because they are

responsible for inherited legacy. Taking into consideration these factors, Korean men sometimes are forced to marry foreign women.<sup>2</sup>

According to Korean statistics, in 2006 in South Korea were registered 90,489 marriages with foreigners. Of these, the lion's share accounts for marriages with partners from the North-East Asia (China, Taiwan, Japan and Mongolia) - 65,139 marriages, as well as partner of Southeast Asia - 17,805 marriages. 1179 marriages were concluded with the natives of Central Asia. Among Western countries the leading position belongs to the United States - 1794 marriages.<sup>3</sup> The share of marriages with Russians is 835, among them 523 cases introduced by marriages of Russian women to Korean men, and only 73 – by marriages of Russian men to Korean women, (KOSIS - Korean Statistical Information Service).

The purpose of the presented study is to explore cultural differences in the Korean-Russian mixed marriages in the following areas of relationships:

- in the process of courtship, mate selection, the wedding ceremony;
- in the relations of kinship, namely the relationship between spouses, the spouses and children, between spouses and parents, between spouses and relatives;
- in the emotional ties and common interests, a joint leisure activities;
- the distribution of duties between the spouses, the difference in the food, table setting, equipping the home, the distribution of finances;
- in the rituals, ceremonies, traditions, respect for the holidays;
- in the religious sphere.<sup>4</sup>

To collect the empirical data the researchers used semi-structured interview method, which allows obtaining the necessary information and makes the most detailed examination of the object of research by aligned clusters.

The study involved 10 Russian women at the age of 19-31 years old, married to citizens of the Republic of Korea. All of them met their future husbands while studying at university - in Russia or in Korea. During the interview it became clear that at the initial stage of dating chat took place either in Russian, in cases where a man fairly well mastered the Russian language or in English. Currently, all Russian informants are more or less proficient in Korean language, have a higher education of the Russian sample and get the second higher education in South Korea. The study was conducted in Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the Russians participants of the research were married to Koreans from Seoul - South Korea's capital, but our sample does not negate mentioned trend in general.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the other countries, great majority of marriages conducted between Americans and Koreans belong to American men and Korean women.

<sup>4</sup> This study was conducted in 2010-2011 by the graduate of the Faculty of Sociology, St. Petersburg State University Tatiyana Choi under supervision of Dr. R.Tangalycheva.

The great interest of Russian women was caused by debate about the Korean wedding ceremony, which is very different from Russian. As it is well known, modern Korea preserves its cultural traditions. So, compulsory part of the wedding ceremony is a traditional part of it, during which the bride, groom and parents should be dressed in traditional Korean costumes "hanboks". A. Lankov in his notes, describes part of a traditional Korean wedding. After the official part the guests go to dinner, which can be carried out in the banquet hall or the restaurant. However, the young couple doesn't participate at the banquet. Once it starts they go to a special room where they welcome parents and relatives from husband's side, specially assembled there. For this ceremony the bride and groom off their western outfits and dress up in traditional Korean dress. A table with refreshments set in this room. A mandatory element of the ceremony is the fruit of jojoba oil.<sup>5</sup> The bride and groom at a time, in order of seniority, are suitable to each family member and, having made a ritual bow before them. It starts with a greeting the groom's parents, for whom are supposed to give the two prostrate bows, and a belt bow (Lankov: electronic resource).

During the interview it became clear that our informants also took part in a traditional Korean wedding ceremony. In some families, the wedding was celebrated twice - in Korea and in Russia. Respondents noted that in Korea everything was strictly regulated, running on schedule. In Russia people celebrated a wedding in much less formal way – with a lot of fun, dancing and contests. One of the study participants described their wedding as follows: *"In Korea it was a Korean standard wedding: 20 minutes for ceremony, eating and that was all. In Russia we have it with jokes, dances, games"* (Interview transcript 1: 2). Another respondent said: *"Well, nice, ordinary Korean wedding. Nothing funny, but very beautiful... There were nothing in common with Russia wedding where people are having fun from all their hearts "* (Interview transcript 6: 14).

Speaking about the features of the Korean family, it should be noted that at the present time, there is a transition from a traditional patriarchal extended family to the modern nuclear. Nevertheless Confucianism doesn't have a status of the official ideology in Korea these days, it is still the strong foundation of Korean culture. Confucian tradition attached great importance to the family, placing it first in the list of groups to which the individual belongs. In this respect, family today continues to play an important role in the system of individual and social values.

Korean society is considered to be hierarchically differentiated. This applies to the Korean family as well. In accordance with Confucian ideas, there is a clear division between senior and junior, men and women. A clear contrast between "external" and "internal" (home) spheres in such families has led to unexpected consequences. In today's commodity economy household management has become primarily the management of family expenses. Korean urban households in these conditions became the field of

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<sup>5</sup> The fruit of jojoba oil symbolizes the male principle, and expresses the wish to have more sons.

women's financial responsibilities. In the vast majority of families and office workers a husband gives his wife his entire salary (Lankov: electronic resource).

As Korean-Russian mixed marriages can not be an exact copy of a purely Korean patterns, let us turn to their specific characteristics. In the course of the study revealed that Korean-Russian marriages do not trace clearly hierarchical style of typical Korean family life. As for the distribution of family responsibilities, we can say that there are families in which clearly defined the role of wife and husband, and where such distribution is not determined. However, most respondents indicated a lack of segregation of duties. In such marriages young household jointly solve problems. In some families husband is involved in the process of cooking and cleaning. But to grocery store a woman is usually sent. In Korea, large purchases do not cause special difficulties for women, because families often have two cars. In addition, Korean stores have special service opportunity: everyone can get all purchased commodities delivered to the home address. If a family has several children and a wife is performing the housewife duties, husband and wife clearly divide their responsibilities - a husband is the "breadwinner", and a wife does all the household responsibilities. One Russian woman, who participated in the research, even said that in her family control of the household is completely in her hands.

Korean-Russian families generally prefer to have Korean food at homes. First, nevertheless Korean husbands of our respondents traveled to Russia and all of them familiar with Russian cuisine, they still prefer the traditional Korean food. Second, as noted by Russian informants, the process of cooking of Korean dishes takes less time, than Russia ones. For example, for cooking Korean soup Russian women spend about 30 minutes, as for Russian soup – not less than an hour. In several families the Russian wives still did not learn how to cook Korean food. In these cases, a man either cooks himself or eats at places of public catering. The diet habits of mixed families are combining the features of Russian and Korean cuisine. One of the respondents said that her husband eats Russian soup "borsh" with rice, although Russians used to have it with bread, *"He puts rice to borsh and eats (smiles)"* (Interview transcript 6: 18).

Talking about the differences in the table setting, all the respondents drew attention to the fact that all the family members use chopsticks and on the table Koreans always have a few salads. One of these salads should be a traditional Korean "kimchi". *"In Russia it is no usual to prepare several different salads, it is needed only on holidays. Our eating traditions are much simpler: salad with cucumbers and tomatoes and that is all"* (Interview transcript 6: 19).

Arrangement of houses is also very different in Korea and Russia. First of all, Russian women paid attention the Korean floor heating in the apartments, so called "ondol". *"In Russia I never want to sit on the floor with my mother. And here it is tepid... There homes are not so comfortable, too many cabinets in every room.... And here's something you want to breathe. A lot of free space..."* (Interview transcript 6: 19).

In financial terms, in the Korean-Russian marriages, the husband is head of the family, and the most important decisions are made by him. On the question of the interviewer: "How do you deal with financial issues in your family, who makes the money and who is responsible for expenses?" - One of the informants said: *"My husband earns and gives me some part ... Yet from his side, he pays all utilities, it is as if everything is correct ... it gives me for my expenses and does not say me to pay for utilities. It's all ... he pays "* (Interview transcript 6: 15).

With regard to family leisure and holidays respondents indicated that, despite of lack of time Korean men spend their free time together with their family. While their vocation time they try to go to the sea or parks. *"Yes, we love to go to the sea. Usually we go there with some other family. We like to travel with tents. Our husbands like it, they take an active part in it"* (Interview transcript 6: 18). All Russian women said that their husbands were happy to spend their free time with their children. *"He never refuses to spend time with our children. He is very fond of children, and this is a very important trait for a man in my eyes. Another thing ... he can not allocate much time for them, but when it does, he is completely devotes himself to the children"* (Interview transcript 6: 19).

The upbringing the children, according to informants, does not raise many problems in Korean-Russian families. A child in this kind of family owns two languages - Korean and Russian. The parents give child two names, first Korean and second Russian, or choose any European name. It is important to enter the Korean metric system, which keeps only two syllables in its name, as the Korean names consist of two syllables. In one interview respondent said that her son was named a European name, but to get into the Korean metric had to cut the number of syllables in his name: *"We call him Daniel, and we will call him Danny, to fit into the Korean metric. Danny Yoon - that's three syllables. I agreed, but call him Daniel. He's on the passport Yoon Dani, but I call him Daniel"* (Interview transcript 6: 17). In another interview, respondent replied that the child has two names: Korean and Russian, *"in Korean - Lee Hong-Ming, in Russian - Victor"* (Interview transcript 3: 3). According to the Korean Statistical Information Service in 2008 there were 303 children who were born in mixed marriages, the Korean-Russian and live in South Korea (KOSIS - Korean Statistical Information Service).

In the relations between the spouses and relatives, between older and younger generations of Koreans, traditionalism is clearly traced. Life in South Korea in general is fraught with many obligations and responsibilities. In an interview a Russian woman noted an interesting detail: a name of married Korean women is taken out from the family genealogical tree, and is entered into a similar family tree of her husband. It clearly describes its position - she becomes a part of her husband's family, and must comply with all requirements of her new family. The same requirements applied to wives from Russia. Many of them stated that the husband's parents expect daughters-in-law follow all Korean traditions and customs. In an interview, respondent describes it like this: *"For example, if the mother (mother-in-law) is doing*

*something, you also should help. Regardless of whether you want to lie or something the like ... if you live in Korea, you must be a Korean woman. Forget who you were before at all... who were you before you came to Korea... And when we had a big quarrel, his dad has told me that I should throw out all, everything that once was and should behave as Korean woman"* (Interview, transcript 4: 15).

This behavior is determined by the peculiarities of Korean culture. Previously, the tradition demanded from the daughter-in-law the complete and unconditional obedience to her mother-in-law. Any disrespect and irreverence severely suppressed. Disrespect to parents-in-law in Korea is condemned by the public opinion as well. However, the development of modern economy and the modernization of Korean society have led to major changes in this area (Lankov: electronic resource). According to the observations of authors who participated in the study, many of the couples are living separately from their parents. At the same time, Koreans are still characterized by a very strong family ties. Close links exist in Korea, not only between parents and children, but generally between relatives.

As noted by respondents, the most difficult part of family life in the Korean-Russian mixed marriages is not even a difference in two different mentalities, but rather communication with Korean relatives, a mandatory visit them during the collective family holidays (Lunar New Year, the feast of harvest "Chuseok") when parents' home is crowded by relatives gathered together. Sometimes the relationship between husband and wife in mixed marriages may worsen if the family is actively intervene in the life of the newlyweds. For instance, in an interview, informant said: *"In principle we have a normal family, but I tell (parents of the spouse) do not touch me with food. Do not command so much.... I think if the family is created, and it is growing up, let it grow independently without parent's help every moment..."* (Interview transcript 5: 6). Another Russian woman noticed that her husband's parents may suddenly ask me to come, regardless of the schedule of daughter-in-law. *"His parents treat us very well... Well, a little sad that they are, for example ... without warning, without calling in advance ask me to come immediately and help, especially on holydays..."* (Interview transcript 6: 4).

The study showed that Russian women married to Koreans are clearly marked differences in holidays, family rituals and rites of the life cycle. Thus, it was unusual for them to aware the lack of familiar to Russians holidays - New Year, March 8, Birthday celebration. All trial participants noted with displeasure that their husbands simply forgot their wife's birthday, as well as, indeed, their own. The fact is that South Korea's birthdays are celebrated on the lunar calendar, according to which the birthday does not have a permanent, recurring from year to year, date. It must be accounted each year separately. New Year is also celebrated by the lunar calendar in February or March in the family, when all the relatives gather at husband's parents' house. It is important to note that in those families where the husband had lived for some time in Russia, the New Year is celebrated on December 31 and men congratulate women on March 8. Thus, some Korean-Russian families combine the traditions of Russian and Korean culture.

If we talk about the more recent holydays, formed as a result of global trends, respondents also highlighted the significant differences. For example, in Russia, St. Valentine's Day celebrated on February 14, when the young men and women present with gifts to one another, due to their feelings. In South Korea it goes in a different way. If the girls want to admit to sympathizing with the young man, they give them candy on February 14 (Valentine's Day). March 14 is celebrated so-called "White Day", when, on the contrary, young men give chocolates to girls and recognized them in love. April 14 marks the so-called "Black Day", when those who did not receive candy, go have noodles with brown sauce, which indicates that a person has not found his/her pair.

In Korean culture, great importance is attached to the traditional rituals and ceremonies - the birthday of the child when s/he turns a year, wedding and 60th anniversary of a person. When a child turns a year, the family organizes a magnificent festival. A child dressed in Korean traditional costume, the parents, too, dress up in hanboks. Typically, the celebration begins at noon. A lot of people come to the ceremony, among them mostly relatives and friends. There is a ritual: a child seated at a small table, which displays a variety of subjects, and s/he must choose one of the subjects, each of which carries a specific meaning. For example, if a child is pulled out money, it means s/he will live in prosperity. During the investigation it was found that in the Korean-Russian families also celebrated the first birthday of the child. In an interview a respondent described it like this: *"It was ordered a large hall for 50 people, not less... Amina (her small daughter) the first thing grabbed the rope, when the word is not sounded, well, she had a string, selecting, and laid back. She grabbed the second case the money, and there lay a green bill and a white bill (a check). She grabbed the check. I do not know what that means. But I think the first thing she grabbed was the robe, so she will live a long life"* (Interview transcript 6: 8).

During the interview it became clear that in the religious sphere in the Korean-Russian marriages specific differences do not arise. Informant's replies indicate there are families where both husband and wife do not profess any religion, and family, in which two religions "peacefully coexist". In one interview participant study confirmed that in her family's husband and son, Roman Catholic, and she is Orthodox, but the problems on the basis of religious affiliation do not arise. In another study a participant indicated that spouses hold different beliefs: she was the Orthodox, her husband - a Catholic, their son was baptized in the Orthodox Church. *"He (husband) is Catholic, but the baby we christened in the Orthodox Cathedral"* (Interview transcript 5: 6).

The ideological basis of Korean behavior and thinking has several sources: Buddhism, Confucianism and religious syncretism. Despite the fact that this situation has always led Europeans to the astonishment, it accustomed to an entirely different principles of organization of religious life. The conducted research has shown that it helps to avoid conflicts on religious grounds in Korean-Russian marriages.

Summing up the consideration of cultural differences in Korean-Russian mixed marriages, we can draw the following conclusion. Cultural differences in such marriages are rather strong, since they are determined by the specific scenarios of child socialization in different societies. In fairness it should be noted that in our study many of these differences were not revealed completely. It can be explained by the fact that we have studied the differences in the marriages of young Russians and Koreans who have lived together in a few years. They were in a kind of "honeymoon period" of their marriage. With age, as it often happens, a person becomes more conservative, and traditions of his/her native culture are beginning to be valued higher. At the same time the cultural contexts of ethnic relations, as well as of global trends are now changing so rapidly that the predictions do not have any sense: we live in a situation of increasing uncertainty. Clear is only one thing: if today mixed Korean-Russian marriages still represent something quite exotic, the trend is that very soon they will become commonplace and ordinary. Since this study is one the first Russian sociological study of cultural differences in Korean-Russian marriages, it is hoped that the identified theme will be further developed, and it will help us better understand the complexities of inter-ethnic relations.

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