

Increasing International Marriages in Korea: A Sociological Analysis

September 8, 2006

Yean-Ju Lee

yjlee@hawaii.edu

Department of Sociology
University of Hawaii
2424 Maile Way
Honolulu, HI 96822, USA

Paper to be presented at the 3rd World Congress of Korean Studies in Jeju, Korea, October 28-30, 2006.

Abstract

International marriage has increased drastically in Korea in recent years, and by 2005, 13.6 percent of total marriages involved a foreign spouse. The purpose of this study is to explore the social context of this rapid increase. Social changes broadly characterized as globalization seem to be responsible for the trend, and this study explores the detailed social processes behind such a trend.

First, this study examines the characteristics of Koreans who marry internationally and their reasons for international marriage. Then it explores several determining factors of foreign spouses' marriage migration, including the roles of marriage brokers. It also examines foreign spouses' social positions in Korea after the migration. Three indicators of social position will include citizenship, marital disruption, and employment. The two major groups of foreign spouses in Korea are Chinese who are ethnic Korean and Southeast Asians, but several other groups of foreign spouses distinguished by nationality, ethnicity, and religious affiliation exist. This study compares these groups to examine several distinctive pathways of international marriage.

Data are from marriage registration reports and from the Survey of Foreign Wives in 2005. The latter is the most comprehensive survey conducted so far in Korea at the national level regarding immigrant wives. This study will also refer to the existing literature on international labor and marriage migrations.

International marriage and multi-ethnic families are becoming important current topics in the media and in national politics in Korea. Heins Ward, who is black and was the most valuable player of the year in 2005 in the National Football League in the United States, was the top news for the ten days he visited Korea with his Korean mother in April 2006. The media frenzy touched various issues never publicly discussed before, mostly regarding discrimination against mixed racial/ethnic children in Korea. Owing to this loud discourse, the government promised legislation recognizing the citizenship of children of cohabiting international couples.¹

International marriages through the 1980s were largely restricted to Korean women marrying foreign husbands and most of them lived in a foreign country. Many of these marriages took place in the context of the Korean War and the continuing American military presence in Korea (Park 1982; Song 1974; Yuh 2002). Only from the 1990s, have immigrant foreign spouses become a visible population in Korea and, together with the even larger population of immigrant laborers, they challenge the long-held image of a homogeneous Korean society. With the emergence of these immigrant populations, various agents, including human rights advocacy groups, local government offices, and scholars, have studied their social circumstances. They highlight various hardships that immigrant spouses face, including commercialization and blindness of broker-arranged marriages, conflicts with in-laws and domestic violence in the family, and limited access to social services (Kim 1998; KWDC 2003; Lee 2005; Yi 2003; Yoon 2004; Yoon and Yim 2004). However, most of these studies are exploratory and use small-scale purposeful samples.

This study attempts to provide a more comprehensive view using national data from marriage registration statistics and an in-depth survey of immigrant wives. The next section discusses recent trends and demographic characteristics of international marriages in Korea. Then follows a reflection on social circumstances that facilitate international marriages, guided by the theories of international migration. The third section uses data from a national survey of 945 foreign wives (Seol et al. 2005) and examines their social positions in Korea. Then follows a conclusion.

1. Recent Trends and Demographics of International Marriages in Korea

In Korea international marriage increased threefold over the four-year period between 2001 and 2005. The percentage of total marriages that involve a foreign spouse was 4.6 percent in 2001 but 13.6 percent in 2005 (first panel Table 1). National data, such as marriage registration and population census statistics, show that international marriage is particularly relevant to two groups of men in Korea, never-married men in rural areas and previously married men of low socioeconomic status in urban areas, although most recent reports suggest that international marriage is becoming more frequent also among urban never-married men (Seoul Economy 2006).

Rural never-married men: With the rapid pace of industrialization from the 1960s, many rural young women migrated to urban areas for factory jobs. Gender-selective rural-urban migration has continued while the service sector expanded in the 1980s. Thus, in rural areas, gender imbalance of the population has worsened throughout the past few decades. For example, in rural villages (*myun* areas), for ages 20-24 the sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) was 126, 151, 188, and 162 in 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000, respectively. The analogous numbers for ages 25-29 were slightly lower but still above 100, reaching 131 in 2000 (KNSO 2005). Sex imbalance among the never-married population in rural areas is more severe (Figure

1-1). In 2000, for ages 25-29 and 30-34, sex ratios among the never-married population were more than 300 in rural villages (*myun*) and more than 200 in town areas (*eup*)². It is not surprising that about one in four (27 percent in 2004) marriages in rural areas involve foreign wives.

Marriage registration statistics show that more than 50 percent of foreign wives live in provincial areas (containing medium and small cities and rural towns and villages)³, whereas only about 40 percent of foreign husbands do so (second panel Table 1). Provincial residence is much more common among wives from Southeast Asia, at about 70 percent. Among foreign husbands, there is no important difference by nationality.

Male excess among rural young adults may worsen as the cohorts born in the 1980s and 1990s reach marriageable ages. The steady fertility decline passing the replacement level by the mid-1980s in Korea was paralleled with a diffusion of sex-selective abortion. Sex ratio at birth went beyond 110 in the mid-1980s and reached a peak, 116.5, in 1990. Since then it has steadily fallen but remained at 110 by 2002; in 2004 it reached 108. This trend translates into the age profiles of sex ratios by 2000 and 2005 shown in Figure 1-2. In 2005 male excess was the greatest for ages 10-19 and the next highest for ages 0-9, foretelling still worsening sex imbalance in the coming years. One forecast says that the sex ratio among the national population of prime ages of marriage will reach 123 in 2010. Thus, female shortage may be observed even in some urban areas.

Divorced men and women: Less well known than increasing foreign wives in rural areas is the trend in remarriages of divorced men which comprise an increasing proportion of international marriages. Divorce rates increased rapidly during the past decade or so in Korea. The crude divorce rate (number of divorces per 1000 population) was only 1.1 in 1990, but it reached 3.5 by 2003. Then with the introduction of a waiting-period requirement, it fell to 2.9 in 2004 and 2.6 in 2005, but the level is still double the level of a decade ago (Figure 1-3). Some experts conjecture that women may watch the situation because in 2008 more gender-egalitarian family laws will be enacted (Donga.com 2005a). In the new law, the rules of property division, custodial arrangements, and other legal procedures will drastically change, favoring women. For example, a custodial mother will be able to change her children's last name either to hers or to a new husband's, which is unthinkable under the current family laws based on patriarchal principles (KLACFR 2005).

Ages at divorce are concentrated in the 30s among men (46% in 2004) and more evenly distributed in the 20s and 30s among women, which are close to prime ages of marriage for both sexes. Thus, remarriage comprises an increasing proportion of all marriages. In 1990 about one in ten marriages involved remarriage of either spouse or both, but in 2004 and 2005 a quarter of all marriages involved remarriage of either spouse or both (Figure 1-4, KNSO 2005).

Marriage registration data show that remarriage comprises a much larger proportion in international marriages than in the national total. Among Korean men in international marriages, 32 percent remarried in 2001, but the percentage increased to 45 in 2004 (third panel left side Table 1). Among Korean women in international marriages, the percentage of remarriage rose from 38 to 52 percent over the same period (third panel right side Table 1). Most remarrying Koreans had been divorced, and only about one in ten had been widowed (third panel Table 1).

In Korea, the probability of divorce is negatively associated with men's economic standing (Lee 2006; Lee 1997). Even the limited wealth or income of divorced men may mean greater purchasing power in lower-income countries from which most foreign wives are coming. Thus, according to exchange perspectives, divorced men may be able to find mates with more

desired qualities (e.g., younger age, higher education, or better appearance) in foreign countries than in Korea. The other side of the reality is that, contrary to our common conception about international marriage as a means of access to better economic opportunity, half of immigrant wives live in households with below poverty-level incomes (Seol et al. 2005). A competing hypothesis regarding the high rate of international remarriage is related to the weak institutionalization of remarriage. Remarriages often do not involve a full range of typical family functions—for example, childbearing and socialization may not be expected in remarriages, although remarriage has its own complications such as stepfamily relationships (Cherlin 2002)—and hence spousal roles may be defined more flexibly than in first marriages. Therefore, foreign spouses may fit more easily in the second marriages than in the first marriages of Korean spouses.

2. Social Environments of International Marriages

The demand for foreign spouses created by the rapid demographic changes in Korea alone cannot explain the rapid increases in migration. Another important component is the availability of foreign spouses willing to marry Koreans. Whether it be marriage or labor migration, from the migrants' point of view, international migration is primarily driven by opportunities for economic gains, and an increasing number of women are joining the stream of international migration globally (Park HS 2005; Piper 2002). In the Survey of Foreign Wives conducted in Korea in 2005, a majority of 945 foreign wives reported that one of their primary motives for marrying abroad was economic (Seol et al. 2005).

However, this general cost and benefit framework cannot be applied to all foreign spouses in the same manner. For ethnic Koreans living in the regions of northern China and former Soviet Union republics, Korea is where their ancestors came from. Thus, they migrate to Korea mainly for economic opportunities, but also their status as a minority in the countries of residence and their ethnic ties to Korea are intensifying the migration stream (Moon 2000). For ethnic non-Koreans, some underlying social changes, which may be broadly summarized as cultural globalization, may be a factor. The influences of mass media, commercial trade, and other material and cultural exchanges reduce psychological distances among countries. This trend may stimulate imagination about the destination society, which plays a role in international migration, and also makes it easier to put into action (Park HS 2005; Piper and Roces 2003; Teo 2003).

Despite these environmental shifts, a more direct factor explaining the rapid expansion of international marriages is the institutionalization of marriage brokers (Han and Seol 2006). International marriage brokerage is a lucrative business that requires little initial investment, and dozens of brokerage firms have started in Korea recently. Government regulations overseeing the sector have fallen behind the pace of its growth, however, and their activities are virtually uncontrolled. These firms specialize in certain countries or certain regions within a country, and generally there is a chain of brokers from the grassroots level to higher levels linking the two countries. Media often provide vivid descriptions of the process. Brokers take Korean men to a prearranged site where potential brides gather, and altogether it takes only a week or so to pick the bride and have a simple wedding ceremony. Then men come back to Korea alone and apply for a foreign spouse visa (e.g., Chosun.com 2006). Brokerage ads are seen everywhere in Korea, in street placards, brochures, and newspapers. How to properly regulate this seemingly inhuman

practice while meeting the needs of both men and women is a challenge to the governments on both sides (Han and Seol 2006).

Another factor supporting international marriage is explicit and implicit state policies in Korea. Obviously, demographic conditions demanding foreign workers and spouses are an underlying force influencing the policies. In order to maintain the resident population, some local governments in rural areas actually sponsor international marriages, through sister-town relationships or through the help of brokerage firms, as is the case in Japan (Donga.com 2005b; Satake 2004). Forces influencing the central government to build more immigrant-friendly policies include various civil and religious organizations advocating human rights of immigrants and their children (Lee 2003).

Lastly, the literature suggests that harsh labor immigration laws may promote international marriages as an alternative route of immigration. It is observed that statistics of international marriages often parallel harsh immigration policies (Piper and Roces 2003). But with indirect evidence alone, it is hard to distinguish between those motives.

3. Foreign Spouses by their Nationality

The composition of foreign spouses and its trend are somewhat different by gender. Among foreign wives, Chinese comprise the vast majority, but Southeast Asians are increasing very rapidly (Table 2). Among foreign husbands, Chinese are increasing dramatically from mere 4 percent in 2001 to 42 percent in 2005, to become the largest group. Japanese used to be the largest group but now ranks the second (Table 2). As discussed in the earlier section, a lot larger percentage of foreign wives marry to men in rural areas, than do foreign husbands (54 versus 41 percent in 2005). Among foreign wives, Southeast Asians are much more likely to marry to rural areas than are Chinese (second panel in Table 2).

Related, Chinese are substantially more likely to marry previously married Koreans, compared to other groups, such as Southeast Asian women or European men (third panel Table 2). For 53 percent of Chinese wives and 79 percent of Chinese husbands, Korean spouses were previously married. Chinese comprise the vast majority of foreign spouses; thus the Chinese largely account for the high rate of remarriages of Korean spouses in international marriages.

The general hypotheses explaining a high rate of remarriage in international marriages discussed earlier, however, does not explicate why Chinese are particularly more likely to marry previously married Korean spouses. The high likelihood of Chinese being involved in remarriage of Korean spouses may be partly because they themselves were previously married. The secondary data of marriage registration statistics do not provide information about the marriage type of foreign spouses, but data from the Survey of Foreign Wives confirm this, as will be examined in the next section.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the international marriage market is differentiated by nationality, which implies that social positions of foreign spouses may vary by nationality. The next section will explore that implication focusing on immigrant wives and discuss the uniqueness of Chinese spouses as compared with Southeast Asian and other foreign wives. Historical and social background of Chinese spouses who are ethnic Korean will also be introduced.

4. Social Positions of Foreign Wives by Nationality and Ethnicity

Marriage registration data show that marriage patterns of foreign spouses vary by nationality. This section explores whether such variation in marriage patterns implies different social positions among foreign wives, as measured by Korean citizenship, divorce or separation status, and employment. Citizenship in a nation state is the ultimate indicator of full membership in the society (Park HS 2005; Piper and Roces 2003). Foreign wives' labor-market activity is another important indicator of participation in the society, whether or not it was motivated by the economic needs of the family. Also, economic contributions to the family mean more power and autonomy within the family.

Implications of marital breakup are more complex, potentially reflecting both adverse life circumstances and foreign wives' self-control over their lives. Alternatively, it may indirectly indicate bogus marriages. If international marriage was a means to obtain the right to stay in Korea for employment or for other purposes, then divorce or separation may be a likely outcome once the intended goal is realized, whether it be just entrance to the country, permanent residency, or citizenship. High rates of divorce or separation in certain groups may indicate that marriage is used as a path to Korean residency. In the Japanese case, the divorce rate of international couples is no higher than that of the general population (Satake 2004). The literature presumes such a function of international marriages (e.g., Piper and Roces 2003), but empirical research has not explored the issue. One data qualification of this study is that divorcees who left Korea are not included in the sample, which can cause a bias in the analysis. In sum, it can be said that these three indicators measure political, economic, and social independence among foreign wives.

The main research question in this section is how nationality, ethnicity, and religious group membership affect foreign wives' social positions. One major characteristic that differentiates Chinese from other nationalities of marriage migrants is that a majority of Chinese migrants is ethnic Korean. Obviously, ethnic Koreans occupy a unique position among all immigrants because of their social and cultural proximity to native Koreans, including Korean language proficiency. Furthermore, new legislation (i.e., Koreans Abroad Law 2004 revision) gave them legal privileges akin to those of native Koreans. Southeast Asians comprise another distinct group.

Thus, for the analysis, the sample of foreign wives is classified into five groups. First two groups are ethnic Koreans, from China and from all other countries, where the latter includes Uzbekistan and other former Soviet Union republics as well as Southeast Asian and other nations. Ethnic non-Koreans comprise another three groups, Southeast Asians, members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (*tongilgyo*), and all other non-Koreans. Filipinos comprise more than half of the Southeast Asians, and Vietnamese and Thais comprise the rest. In recent years, Vietnamese brides have constituted absolutely the largest group, but the sample of this study reflects cumulative outcomes of marriage migration for the past few decades. Family Federation is a religious sect advocating interracial marriages and was responsible for a large share of international marriages in Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. In the analysis they are treated as a group regardless of nationality or ethnicity because their marriages and marital lives are governed by their religious doctrine. A majority of Family Federation wives are from Japan, and about a quarter are from Southeast Asia. Other ethnic non-Koreans are from various countries, including China, former Soviet Union republics, Japan, and Mongolia.

Survey: Sponsored by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, a team of researchers conducted the Survey of Foreign Wives in 2005 (see Seol et al. 2005). This is the most comprehensive survey ever conducted on immigrant wives at the national level. Based on the

immigrant data in the Ministry of Justice, sampling quotas were determined by nationality and rural-urban residence. Then the sampling frames were obtained from the local government offices of the selected administrative areas. First contact was made through telephone and, if agreed, questionnaires were provided. Besides the selected cases from the sampling frame, additional approaches were also used to secure a large sample size. In small rural localities, all immigrant-wife residents were interviewed. In some urban areas, respondents were also recruited from people who visited the local immigration office to renew their registrations. With these diverse approaches used to select the sample, this is not exactly a probability sampling, but in terms of several characteristics, including nationality, rural/urban residence, age, and length of stay in Korea, the sample turns out to be almost representative of the population (Seol et al. 2005). As the main purposes of this study are multivariate analysis and comparison among ethnic and nationality groups, sample representativeness is of less concern.

Sample Characteristics: Table 3 presents the characteristics of the 945 sample respondents along those variables to be used in multivariate analysis. The five groups by ethnicity, nationality, and religion (i.e., Korean Chinese, other Koreans, Southeast Asians, Family Federation members, and other non-Koreans) comprise 36, 7, 22, 19, and 16 percent, respectively. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 68, and a majority was between 25 and 44 (not shown). Three out of four first entered Korea for the purpose of marriage, as opposed to employment, visiting relatives or friends, or other reasons. The percentage that first entered Korea for marriage is highest among Korean Chinese (86 percent) and the lowest among other non-Koreans (61 percent). About one half of the respondents came to Korea in the past five years. Ethnic Koreans from countries other than China are the most recent immigrants, while Family Federation members have resided in Korea the longest and also have been married the longest (not shown).

The five groups show substantial differences in the ability to speak the Korean language. Among Korean Chinese, 78 percent report they speak Korean fluently, whereas only 10 percent of Southeast Asians report they do so (Table 3). Despite their long residence in Korea, Family Federation members are among the poorest in Korean proficiency, suggesting their isolation from Korean society. Interestingly, ethnic Koreans from areas other than China and other non-Koreans show similarly poor command of Korean, although better than Southeast Asians and Family Federation members.

As expected, Korean Chinese wives and their husbands are most likely to have been married before, but other non-Koreans also show a relatively high likelihood (Table 3), suggesting that it may not be Korean ethnicity, but Chinese nationality that may be associated with the high prevalence of remarriage. Related, age at marriage is the oldest among Korean Chinese. The circumstances of the marriages will be further discussed later in relation to the determinants of divorce or separation.

Analysis: For each indicator of social position, two columns of results are presented in Table 4. Model 1 shows observed percentages of the indicator for the five groups. Model 2 shows predicted percentages calculated from the multivariate logit analysis results. These predicted percentages represent the estimated percentages of the indicator event when all the other characteristics in the model are set constant. Asterisks show that the percentage is significantly different from the percentage of the reference category that is marked with parentheses. It is worthy to note that differences among the other categories except the reference category are not tested. The binomial logit is used to analyze citizenship and employment status, and the multinomial logit is used to analyze marital status with the currently married or

cohabiting status as a comparison category and the widowhood status and the divorce/separation status as two alternative outcomes. We present the results only for divorce/separation outcome.

Citizenship: Model 1 shows the observed citizenship rate, i.e., the percentage of respondents who received Korean citizenship, of the five groups of foreign wives. Among the Korean Chinese (the reference category), the citizenship rate is the highest at 47 percent, and the percentage differences between the Korean Chinese and all four other groups are statistically significant. The citizenship rate of Southeast Asians is 38 percent, higher than the rates for other Korean, Family Federation, and other non-Korean groups, which show 21, 17, and 16 percent, respectively. The average citizenship rate among the total sample is 32 percent.

Results from the multivariate analysis are shown in Model 2. After taking into account reason to first enter Korea, years since entering Korea, and Korean language proficiency, the predicted percentages of citizenship are not statistically different between Korean Chinese and Southeast Asians. These results in Models 1 and 2, together with the descriptive statistics in Table 1, suggest that the citizenship rate is lower among Southeast Asians than among Korean Chinese mainly because of poorer command of the Korean language among Southeast Asians. The other three groups show still lower percentages than do Korean Chinese after taking into account other factors. Predicted percentage of citizenship is the lowest among members of the Federation of Family, consistent with their religious doctrine that does not recognize the citizenship of individual nation states.

The results in Model 2 also show that citizenship rate is higher among foreign wives who first entered Korea for the purpose of marriage than among wives who first entered Korea for other reasons. This seems to suggest that those who entered Korea for marriage have stronger intentions to be a full member of Korea and live in Korea permanently. As citizenship acquisition requires knowledge about history and social context of Korea as well as some level of Korean language proficiency, citizenship rate is higher among those who have stayed in Korea for longer duration and for those who better command the Korean language than among wives with shorter duration and poorer Korean proficiency, respectively.

Divorce or Separation: Model 1 shows the observed percentages of foreign wives who divorced or separated from their Korean husbands among four groups. Family Federation members are excluded from the analysis because their divorce rate is, not surprisingly, zero following their religious doctrine. Among Korean Chinese wives, the divorce/separation rate is the highest at 13 percent, but the percentage difference is statistically significant only with Southeast Asians, among whom only 2 percent divorced or separated. The divorce/separation rates of other Koreans and other non-Koreans groups are 8 and 10 percent, respectively, and not statistically significantly different from the Korean Chinese. Given the sample characteristics, no exactly comparable figure is available for the general population in Korea, but the rate of 8 to 13 percent appears to be somewhat higher than the national average⁴. It is noteworthy that if divorced foreign wives had gone back to their home countries, they could not be included in the statistics, in which case the presented numbers would underestimate the actual events.

Model 2 controls for several characteristics, including reason to first enter Korea, years since entering Korea, Korean language proficiency, either spouse ever being married before, and age at this marriage. After taking these characteristics into account, the predicted divorce rate is still significantly lower among Southeast Asians than among Korean Chinese or the other groups. These findings may suggest either that Southeast Asians have the strongest family-centered values or that Southeast Asians are least likely to marry for other ultimate purposes, such as easier entry into Korea and/or stable stay for employment.

The findings in Model 2 also demonstrate that the divorce/separation rate is higher among those who first entered Korea for marriage than among those who entered Korea for other reasons. Brokers often mediate the former group's marriages, and such marriages may have more unexpected outcomes and thus show a higher divorce rate compared to unions formed in Korea. Again the result may also reflect bogus marriages. Length of stay or Korean language proficiency does not affect divorce rates. This finding seems to reject the idea that marital breakup may imply control over life on the part of foreign wives. If either spouse had been married before, the divorce rate is substantially higher than among couples of first marriages. A higher divorce rate for remarriages is common in the divorce literature. Wives who marry at age 25 or older show a higher divorce rate than those who marry at younger ages.

The literature discusses the possibility that marriage is used for easier entry into Korea or for stable stay, but citizenship status is negatively associated with divorce/separation (result not shown). If marriage were a means for something, it is not for citizenship. Since permanent residency had required longer duration of stay in Korea than had citizenship, the visa status of divorcees without citizenship may be temporary, only with certain exceptions⁵.

Employment: The observed employment rates among the five groups of foreign wives are presented in Model 1. On average, 29 percent of foreign wives are employed. This is lower than the average labor force participation rate (50 percent) of all women in Korea, but the difference does not seem to be particularly high given the sample characteristics that these foreign wives are married, in childbearing ages, and have language and other cultural barriers. Again, the employment rate is the highest among Korean Chinese at 40 percent, and the percentage differences between Korean Chinese and other groups are statistically significant except for other non-Koreans, who mark 31 percent. Thus, whether ethnic Koreans or not, wives from China tend to show a high employment rate.

After other characteristics are controlled in Model 2, only Family Federation members show a significantly lower employment rate than Korean Chinese, 13 versus 30 percent, respectively. Employment rates of other Koreans and Southeast Asians are no longer lower than that of Korean Chinese. Similarly to the event for citizenship, Southeast Asians show a lower observed employment rate than Korean Chinese because of their poorer command of the Korean language, lower divorce rate, and younger ages. Other Koreans are in a situation similar to that of Southeast Asians with respect to employment status.

Reason for first entering Korea and years since entering Korea do not affect employment rates. Korean proficiency, however, leads to employment. Divorced or separated women show a higher employment rate than currently married women. Women of younger ages, less than 35, show a lower employment rate than older women, probably because of child bearing and rearing roles. Citizenship status has no direct effect on employment, suggesting that citizenship is not a prerequisite or facilitator of labor market activity.

Summary Characteristics of the Six Groups: Findings from the multivariate analysis show that Korean Chinese are the most autonomous among the five groups compared. They show the highest rates of Korean citizenship, divorce/separation, and employment. Their high divorce rate is largely explained by the high rate of either spouse having married before and high age at marriage, but the rate is still among the high even after controlling for these characteristics. The question of why there are so many divorcees among those Korean Chinese who marry Koreans needs to be explored in future research. It may be that divorce rates increase in China unrelated to Korean influences and that social taboo pushes those divorcees to remarry internationally (The New York Times 2005). Another possibility is that at least some Korean

Chinese may have divorced to remarry Koreans, which means that some of those international marriages are bogus marriages. A survey has not been conducted on foreign husbands, but marriage registration statistics show that 8 of 10 Chinese men marry previously married Korean women, suggesting that they also could have been previously married. Also the composition Chinese husbands comprise increased 10 times just over the four-year period, from 4 percent in 2001 to 42 percent in 2005. These drastic changes with regard to Chinese may reflect some artificial trend, i.e., bogus marriages, but with these aggregate data alone it is hard to estimate how pervasive the practice is (Han and Seol 2006).

The Korean government enacted in 1999 the Law Regarding the Immigration and Legal Status of Koreans Abroad, which gives Koreans abroad (“*dongpo*”) the same rights granted to citizens in the areas of employment, financial and real estate transactions, and participation in national health insurance while they stay in Korea long term. However, only with the revision in 2004, was the law made applicable to ethnic Koreans living in China and republics of the former Soviet Union (Ministry of Justice 2005). With such privileges, the demand for bogus marriage will diminish. Most Koreans living in these countries are offspring of refugees who ran away from harsh lives during Japanese colonialism, which covered the first half of the twentieth century up until the end of WWII. Currently they are ethnic minorities in those countries, and strengthening nationalism in some of the new republics pushes Koreans to relocate again (Kim 2005). With such historical and political circumstances, these ethnic Koreans seem to be highly mobile, especially if it is returning home. The migration stream of Korean Chinese may continue, but with the new legislation it may be through Koreans Abroad visas rather than via unwanted foreign-spouse visas.

If Korean Chinese are the most autonomous, Southeast Asians are the most adaptive to the host society. Their observed rates of Korean citizenship and employment are lower than those of Korean Chinese, but once years since entering Korea and Korean proficiency are taken into account the rates are not different any more. Also, divorce or separation rate is considerably lower than any other nationalities or ethnicities except for Family Federation members. It appears that Southeast Asian wives are determined to be full members of their married-in families and of Korean society.

Rather surprisingly, ethnic Koreans from areas other than China turn out to be the most maladaptive. Their Korean citizenship and employment rates are low, whether or not years since entering Korea and Korean proficiency are controlled. At the same time, the divorce rate is as high as among Korean Chinese. Being the most recent immigrants and coming from various countries, these wives may not have adequate social support networks. Even though they are ethnically Korean, they do not command the Korean language particularly well either. Public and private support seems in need.

Other non-Koreans, i.e., ethnic non-Koreans who are non-Southeast Asian and non-Family Federation, may be characterized as the most struggling. They are similar to Korean Chinese in their autonomy as well as in the possibility of committing bogus marriage, with high rates of divorce or separation and high rate of employment. As mentioned earlier, actually more than a third of them are from China. But their Korean citizenship rate is low, suggesting that they are not yet fully independent. Lastly, Family Federation members seem to be only internally oriented and very much secluded from the host society. They show the lowest rates in all three indicators. Simply put, they are physically located in the land of Korea but have not much to do with it socially.

5. Summary and Conclusion

International marriage has increased drastically in Korea. The percentage of total marriages that involve a foreign spouse increased threefold from 4.6 to 13.6 in the four-year period between 2001 and 2005. This study explored the demographic characteristics of the marriage market in Korea to explain the increase and examined the social positions of immigrant wives.

International marriages increased for both genders of Koreans, but men are 2 to 3 times more likely to marry a foreign woman than are women to marry a foreign man. As the theory of international labor migration supposes that labor shortages of the host country are concentrated in certain segments of the labor market, the demand for foreign spouses seems to be more intense among rural young men and divorced urban men.

Marriage registration data show that segmentation of the marriage market parallels differentiation among foreign spouses by their nationalities. Chinese women as well as Chinese men tend to marry divorced Koreans, whereas Southeast Asian women tend to marry rural men. The analysis of survey data shows that this segmentation by nationality largely reflects women's characteristics. Many Chinese women themselves had been previously married and relatively old at the time of migration, and as a result they tend to marry divorced men. A majority of Southeast Asian women, on the other hand, are never married and hence marry never-married men in rural areas.

Analysis of the National Survey of Foreign Wives shows that the differentiation in the marriage market has important implications for immigrant women's social positions. Immigrant wives occupy distinctive social positions by their nationality and ethnicity. Korean Chinese are the most autonomous, but their high likelihood of experience of previous marriage leads to a high rate of divorce or separation. Circumstances around their marriages call for further research. Southeast Asians are the most adaptive to the host society. With extended stay in Korea and improved Korean proficiency, they will be as independent as the Korean Chinese legally and economically while their marriages remain intact. Other ethnic Koreans, besides Chinese, are the most maladaptive and require public and private support. Other ethnic non-Koreans also need social support with regard to their low citizenship rate and high divorce/separation rate. Family Federation members are secluded from Korean society.

As economic and cultural globalization processes continue, migration streams related to international marriage are expected to keep growing in the coming years. Rather ironically, in the very time of globalization, this study demonstrates, membership of the origin nation state as well as ethnic origin still play a key role in the process of marriage migrants' relocation in the host society.

Endnotes

1. Korean citizenship follows the principle of *ius sanguinis*, granting citizenship to offspring of citizens (Park HS 2005).
2. The male never-married population of ages 20-24 is almost the same as that of ages 25-29 in both town and rural areas in Figure 1-1. This is because military service is compulsory for these early 20s men in Korea and they are not counted in this statistic.
3. The secondary data of marriage registration statistics provide information by provinces but not by rural-urban residence. In Korea there are 7 large independent cities and 8 provinces that include medium and small cities as well as rural towns and villages. This statistic presented in Table 1 is based on the population of all 8 provinces. Thus this statistic is only for reference for comparison purpose and does not reflect actual rural residence. According to the 2000 Census, about half of the population lives in these 8 provinces, but only 20 percent of the total population lives in rural areas (8 percent in *eup* [town] and 12 percent in *myun* [village] areas). Registration data show that rural marriages account for about 7 percent of the total marriages in Korea in 2004 (KNSO 2005).
4. The observed or estimated divorce/separation rate by the 15th year of marriage is no more than 5 percent among the marriage cohorts of the 1980s and 1990s in Korea. However, the divorce rate is relatively high during 15-20 years of marital duration, so the cumulative divorce/separation rate by 30 years of marriage may go beyond 10 percent (Lee 2006).
6. Permanent residency required 5 years of residence where as citizenship required 2 years until the 2004 revision of the immigration laws, under which both require 2 years of residence. Divorcees with dependent children and parents may be granted the same legal visa status as the currently married (Immigration Bureau 2005). Currently a large number of undocumented Korean Chinese live in Korea but how many of them first entered as foreign spouses is not known. In early 2006, the Ministry of Justice put out an announcement encouraging their voluntary return to China with a promise that they would be eligible for a visa in the 'Koreans Abroad' category one year after their return (Ministry of Justice 2006).

References

- Cherlin, A.J. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chosun.com. 2006. Vietnamese brides. <<http://www.chosun.com/national/news>> (in Korean) Accessed: 21 April 2006.
- Donga.com. 2005a. Shall we wait until the Hoju system is abolished? <<http://www.donga.com/fbin/news>> (in Korean) Accessed: 25 October 2005.
- Donga.com. 2005b. Vietnamese women are the best for rural never-married men. <<http://www.donga.com/fbin/news>> (in Korean) Accessed: 23 August 2005.
- Han, GS. and DH. Seol. 2006. *Matchmaking Agencies in Korea and their Regulation Policies*. Research Report to the Ministry of Health and Welfare. (in Korean).
- Immigration Bureau. 2005. <<http://www.immigration.go.kr>> (in Korean) Accessed: October 2005.
- Kim, AR. 1998. *Marriage Process and Adaptation among Korean Chinese Women Residing in Chungnam Area*. Chungnam Provincial Office (in Korean).
- Kim, JY. 2005. In My Tears: Sad Wanderers in the Continent, A Report of Koreans in Southeastern Russia. Kwangju: Haneol Media. (in Korean)
- Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations (KLACFR). 2005. <<http://www.lawhome.or.kr>> Accessed: October 2005.
- Korea National Statistical Office (KNSO). 2005. Population Registration Statistics, <<http://www.kosis.go.kr>> (in Korean) Accessed: October 2005-April 2006.
- Kwangju Women's Development Center (KWDC). 2003. *A Survey of Foreign Wives*. (in Korean).
- Lee, HK. 2005. Marriage immigration and problems and coping among international marriage families. *Korean Journal of Population Studies* 28(1): 73-106 (in Korean).
- Lee, HK. 2003. Gender, migration and civil activism in South Korea. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12(1-2): 127-153.
- Lee, HS. 1997. Demographic and socioeconomic determinants of divorce. *Family and Culture* 2: 17-43. (in Korean).
- Lee, YJ. 2006. Risk factors in the rapidly rising incidence of divorce in Korea. *Asian Population Studies* (forthcoming).

Massey, D., G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino, and J.E. Taylor. 1993. Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 20(4):699-752.

Ministry of Justice. 2005. <http://www.moj.go.kr/HP/MOJ/moj_05> Accessed: September 2005.

Ministry of Justice. 2006. <<http://www.moj.go.kr/>> Accessed: 18 April 2006.

Moon, K. 2000. Strangers in the midst of globalization: migrant workers and Korean nationalism. Pp.147-169 in S.S. Kim (ed.), *Korea's Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

New York Times. 2005. Women in China embrace divorce as stigma eases. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/04/international/asia/04divorce.html>> Accessed: 3 October 2005.

Park, HS. 2005. *Nationality, Citizenship and Administration of Foreign Residents*. Research Report to the Ministry of Justice. (in Korean).

Park, JS. 1982. Communication problems between spouses in Korean-American international marriage. *Sungjeon University Research Journal* 12: 99-136 (in Korean)

Piper, N. 2002. Global labour markets and national responses: legal regimes governing female migrant workers in Japan. Pp.188-208 in D.S. Gills and N. Piper (eds.), *Women and Work in Globalising Asia*. London and New York: Routledge.

Piper, N. and M. Roces. 2003. Introduction: marriage and migration in an age of globalization. Pp. 1-22 in N. Piper and M. Roces (eds.) *Wife or Worker? Asian Women and Migration*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Satake, M. 2004. Filipina-Japanese intermarriages: a pathway to new gender and cross-cultural relations. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 13(4): 445-473

Seol, DH, YT. Kim, HM. Kim, HS. Yoon, HK. Lee, KT. Yim, KS. Chung, Y. Ju, and GS. Han. 2005. *Foreign Wives' Life in Korea: Focusing on the Policy of Welfare and Health*. Research report to the Ministry of Health and Welfare (in Korean).

Seoul Economy. 2006. <<http://economy.hankooki.com>> Accessed: 24 March 2006.

Song, SJ. 1974. *Marital Conflicts in International Marriage: A study of Korean Wives of the American Military Forces*. MA Thesis, Department of Social Services, Ewha Womans University (in Korean).

Teo, S.Y. 2003. Dreaming inside a walled city: Imagination, gender and the roots of immigration. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12(4): 411-438.

Yi, KY. 2003. Marriage and family life among immigrant women. In *Alliance of Support Groups for Immigrant Laborers* (ed.). For Equality and Solidarity beyond the Borders, Race, and Skin Color (in Korean).

Yoon, HS. 2004. Spousal conflicts and adaptation in international couples.” Pp 321-349 In H. Choi, SK Kim, KS Chung, and MK Yoo (eds), *Minorities in Korea: Current Status and Future Prospect* (in Korean) .

Yoon, JS. and YK. Yim. 2004. “International Marriages as Gendered Immigration and Violence against Women: Marriages between Filipino Women and Korean Men.” Presented at the biannual meeting of the Korean Association of Women’s Studies, Fall 2004 (in Korean)

Yuh, JY. 2002. *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, New York: New York University Press

Table 1. Recent trends in International Marriages, 2001-2005 (Percentages)^a

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Composition of marriages that involve foreign spouses											
Foreign wife	3.1	3.6	6.3	8.2	9.8						
Foreign husband	1.6	1.6	2.1	3.2	3.8						
Total ^b	4.6	5.2	8.4	11.4	13.6						
Percentages of foreign spouses who live in rural areas ^c											
	Korean husband-foreign wife					Korean wife-foreign husband					
	Korean husband					Korean wife					
All nationalities	52	54	52	52	54	All nationalities	34	39	39	43	41
Distribution of marital order of Korean spouses											
	Korean husband					Korean wife					
First marriage	67	66	58	54	55	1st marriage	60	63	56	46	43
Second or higher marriage	32	33	41	45	43	2nd marriage	38	36	41	52	54
Previously widowed	3	4	4	4	4	widowed	3	3	4	6	6
Previously divorced	29	29	37	41	39	divorced	35	33	37	46	48
Missing	1	1	1	1	2	Missing	2	1	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	Total	100	100	100	100	100

a) Data source: marriage registration statistics (KOSIS 2005)

b) The total numbers of international marriages are 15,234, 15,193, 25,658, 35,447 and 43,121 in those 5 years, respectively.

c) Aggregate data are available only by provinces. The statistics include all residents in provinces containing any rural villages, as compared to residents in the seven large independent cities.

Table 2. Recent trends in Foreign Spouses' Nationality, 2001-2005 (Percentages)^a

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	Korean husband-foreign wife					Korean wife-foreign husband					
Distribution of nationality of foreign spouses											
	Foreign wife					Foreign husband					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
China	70	64	70	72	66	Japan	58	49	41	34	31
Japan	10	9	7	5	4	China	4	6	19	37	42
Southeast Asian ^e	8	15	14	15	23	US	22	25	19	14	12
Mongolia	1	2	2	2	2	European ^d	8	9	8	6	5
All other	11	10	7	6	5	All other	9	13	14	10	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	Total	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages of foreign spouses who live in rural areas^c by selected nationality

	Foreign wife					Foreign husband					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
China	52	52	49	49	49	Japan	31	34	35	40	37
Philippines	68	70	72	61	69	China	34	42	40	44	42
Vietnam	48	64	65	67	71	US	41	42	39	43	39
Thailand	71	72	64	67	70	European	35	37	34	44	36
All nationalities	52	54	52	52	54	All nationalities	34	39	39	43	41

Percentages of foreign spouses who married a previously married Korean spouse by selected nationality

	Foreign wife					Foreign husband					
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
China	38	41	48	53	53	Japan	50	52	48	49	47
Philippines	20	20	22	29	29	China	22	38	68	77	79
Vietnam	26	27	29	28	26	US	22	20	23	22	21
Thailand	16	19	21	24	24	European	13	11	9	11	9
All nationalities	32	35	40	45	43	All nationalities	38	36	41	52	54

a) Data source: marriage registration statistics (KOSIS 2005)

d) Europeans include people from Germany, France, Canada, and Australia.

e) Southeast Asians include people from Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Sample of Immigrant Wives by Origin Nationality, Ethnicity, and Family Federation Religion (Percentages)^a

	Ethnic Korean		Ethnic non-Korean			Total Sample
	Korean Chinese	Other Korean	Southeast Asian	Family Federation	Other	
Reasons to enter Korea						
Marriage	86	71	75	72	61	76
Other	14	29	25	28	39	24
Years since entering Korea						
0-4	60	72	56	11	60	51
5-9	31	21	38	49	33	36
10 or more	9	7	6	40	7	14
Speaking Korean						
Fluently	78	32	10	14	30	40
Some	10	43	46	46	35	31
Poor	12	25	44	39	35	29
Either spouse previously married						
Yes	45	25	24	8	40	31
wife ever married	11	10	4	1	11	7
husband ever married	10	7	15	4	12	10
both ever married	24	8	5	3	17	14
No	55	75	76	92	60	69
Age at marriage						
15-24	22	43	32	9	27	24
25-34	46	50	51	76	56	55
35 or older	32	7	17	14	17	21
Sample size	335	68	208	181	153	945
(Sample distribution)	36	7	22	19	16	100

a) Data source: Survey of Foreign Wives, 2005

Table 4. Indicators of Social Position of Immigrant Wives (Percentages Based on Logit Analysis)^{abc}

Group	Citizenship		Divorced/separated		Employed	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
(Korean Chinese)	47	47	13	7	40	30
Other Korean	21**	24**	8	8	19**	21
Southeast Asian	38*	40	2**	2*	26**	33
Family Federation	17**	8**	---	---	13**	13**
Others	16**	16**	10	9	31	32
Reason to enter Korea						
(Other)		17		3		25
Marriage		32**		6*		31
Years since entering Korea						
(0-4)		12		5		25
5-9		50**		5		29
10 or more		56**		11		24
Speaking Korean						
Fluently		33**		5		37**
Some		31**		6		25*
(Poor)		19		5		16
Either spouse previously married						
(No)				3		---
Yes				14**		---
Age at marriage						
(15-24)				2		---
25-34				7*		---
35 or older				7*		---
Current marital status						
(In union)						24
Divorced or separated						59**
Widowed or unknown						31
Age						
(18-24)						15
25-34						22
35 or older						35**
Citizenship status						
(No)						26
Yes						28
<hr/>						
Overall predicted percentage	32	28	7	6	29	26

a) Data source: Survey of Foreign Wives, 2005

b) These numbers are predicted percentages calculated from the results of the logit analyses.

c) Asterisks show that the percentages are significantly different from those of the reference categories marked with parentheses. * p < .05 ** p < .01

