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The Waning of Ethnic Nationalism and Rising of Globalism: Changes in Transnational Marriages and Everyday Nationalism in South Korea

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Abstract

Ethnic nationalism has been the dominant discourse in Korea's nation-building since the liberation of Korea from the colonial rule of Japan nation in 1945, and it has been continuously reinforced in the era of the national division. In South Korea, however, there have been signs of the demise of such ethnic nationalism in the 21st century. Such phenomenon has been apparent in the rapid declining of the 'banal' nationalism in the daily life of South Koreans. One example is the changes in international marriages in South Korea in the 2010s, until when the South Korean government promoted marriages between South Korea's rural bachelors and ethnic Korean brides from China. In the 1990s South Korean government, community leaders, and the "old bachelors" themselves preferred ethnic Korean brides. In particular, ethnic Korean brides from China and Uzbekistan – poorer, former communist countries – were preferred in the assumption that they share the same tradition and culture with South Koreans. In addition, in popular imagination these women have the qualities of innocence and purity – the virtues that were lost among contemporary South Korean women. This explains the large influx of ethnic Korean brides from China and Uzbekistan until the late 2000s. This trend, nevertheless, did not last and soon ethnic Korean brides were avoided in international marriage market. Instead non-ethnic Korean transnational brides from Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Mongolia gained popularity over ethnic Korean brides. Another example is the disappearance of North Korea from the daily weather forecasts in South Korea sometime in the early 2000s. As Billig (1995) shows such a form of nationalism helps the formation of the national minds. How and why did such a change occur in a short time period between the 1990s and 2010s? This paper explores the causes of the qualitative changes in the nationalist discourse of South Korea in the last two decades.

Key Words

Ethnic nationalism, transnational marriages in Korea, media discourse of transnational marriages, old bachelors in Korea, ethnic Korean brides from China and Uzbekistan, ethnic preference in international marriage, weakness of ethnic nationalism

1. Introduction

Ethnic return migration has been a visible trend in international migration in the last two decades. A great number of Europeans in Latin America return migrated to their ancestral homelands in Europe recently due to Latin America's economic instability compared to the positive prospect in Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 also led to a large scale ethnic return migration in which a few million Russians returned to their homeland, Russia, from Central Asia and Caucasus regions. Ethnic Germans and other Europeans returned to their ancestral homelands in Europe from the former Soviet Union. Some two thousand Japanese Brazilians also have return migrated from Brazil to Japan in the 1990s. South Korea also has seen increasing number of ethnic return migrations, especially Korean Chinese returning from China, since the early 1990s. While much of these ethnic return migrations were caused by the economic disparity between the ancestral homelands and natal homelands, such ethnic return migration was also promoted by the liberal policies of advanced democracies in regard to citizenship rights, which made ethnic return migration easy.

This new trend in international migration gained scholarly attention and recently there emerged numerous studies on it. There have been a few good studies on ethnic return migration, which focus on the ethnic return migrants, dealing with the causes of such migrations, their adaptations to their ancestral homelands, and identity changes after ethnic return migrations. Relatively less attention has been paid, however, to receiving societies, particularly the reactions of receiving societies to the ethnic return migrations. Tsuda's work on Japanese Brazilians (2003) is one of the few works that consider both returnees and the receiving society. A similar trend has been true in the case of ethnic return migrations to South Korea. There have been

some works on the ethnic Korean return migrants from China to South Korea, or North Korean refugees to the South, but few of them deal with the expectations as well as reactions of South Korean society toward the return of ethnic Koreans from overseas.

Considering such a gap in the previous researches, this paper attempts to look at the expectations and perceptions of South Koreans toward ethnic Korean return migrants. In particular, it focuses on the relationship of South Korean society and ethnic Korean Chinese and Korean Uzbek brides, an important part of the ethnic Korean return migration in the last decade. Instead of solely looking at ethnic return migrants themselves, this paper reviews the host society's popular imagination – both historical and contemporary – of the ethnic return migrants in the expectation that we can gain new insights regarding contemporary ethnic return migrations. In so doing, this paper looks at the popular representation of ethnic Korean brides in films and TV dramas as well as literary works.

While ethnic Korean brides who return migrated to South Korea through transnational marriages form a relatively small part of the ethnic return migrations in South Korea, but these women returnees are important if we consider their impacts on South Korea both as the wives of South Korean males and as the mothers of so many children. In addition, often, they are the rare legal and permanent immigrants to South Korea, which has restricted entry visas tightly for foreigners.

In fact, the number of transnational marriages in South Korea increased dramatically in the two decades of the 1990s and 2000s. There were 5,118 in 2000, 7,815 in 2001, and 8,048 in 2002. [more statistical data here]

More than half of these transnational marriages in South Korea are between South Korean males and ethnic Korean brides from China and Uzbekistan. What were

behind the rapid increase and popularity of those ethnic Korean women in the 1990s and 2000s in South Korea? There is no doubt that economic factors are the most important one, but there is also South Koreans' positive imagination of ethnic Korean women of less developed countries such as China and Uzbekistan.

Their importance in South Korea is well reflected in their prominence in South Korean popular media as we will see. [1] Ethnic Korean women of China and Uzbekistan even have become a popular theme in South Korean media recently. For example, in the last few years, several films, TV dramas, and TV documentaries have featured ethnic Korean brides from China, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam as protagonists. For example, the film *Innocent Steps* (*Taensŏ ūi sunjŏng*, directed by Yŏng-hun Pak, 2005) deals with a love story of an ethnic Korean girl from China and a South Korean male. Another film, *Wedding Campaign* (*Naŭi kyŏrhon wŏnjŏnggi*, directed by Hwang Pyŏng-guk, 2005), is also about two South Korean men from rural area falling in love with ethnic Korean women from Uzbekistan. Actually, *Wedding Campaign* is based on a popular TV documentary series *Human Theatre* (*In'gan Kŭkchang*) which in 2002 featured a real story of South Korean bachelors going to Uzbekistan in search of ethnic Korean spouses under the title of *Old Bachelors' Trip to Uzbekistan* [*Noch'onggak Ujŭbek kada*]. In 2006 the KBS TV began its new daily drama series *A Pure-hearted Nineteen-year-old* [*Yŏrahop Sunjŏng*], which is a comic love story between an ethnic Korean girl from the Yŏnbyŏn Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China and a South Korean man. In 2007 another TV drama features a Korean-Vietnamese bride (who was born between a Korean soldier and Vietnamese woman during the Vietnamese War) -- *Bride from Hanoi* [*Hanoi Sinbu*].

Though these films, documentary and TV dramas are quite different from each other in their genres, settings and plots, surprisingly they share many similarities in

their discourses of ethnic Korean women from these countries. In particular, the ways how ethnic Korean women from the countries such as China, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam are depicted are similar. First of all, they all deal with romantic relationship between South Korean males and Korean diasporic females from less developed, former socialist countries. Secondly, the ethnic Korean female protagonists in these stories -- Ch'ae-rin from China (*Innocent Steps*), Lara from Uzbekistan (*Wedding Campaign*) [2] and Kukhwa in *A Pure-hearted Nineteen-year-old* -- have similar personal attributes. Initially she was marrying an old bachelor who is handicapped. Finally, in most of the love stories South Korean males are the people who are low in their social and economic status in their society.

While analysing these popular representations of ethnic Korean brides from allegedly poor countries, the paper will focus on the following questions: how ethnic Korean women of these countries are represented in the popular media? What discourse that the South Korean society developed on these young ethnic Korean females from the allegedly less developed, former socialist countries? What are the cultural, social and political implications of the representations of Korean diasporic women in regard to the needs and desires of contemporary Korean society? How this trend dramatically changed and ethnic Korean brides came to be replaced (or even avoided) in South Korea by the late 2000s? What are the implications of such a change in regard to South Korean attitude toward ethnic nationalism?

2. South Korean Imagination of Korean Diaspora: De-territorialized Nationalism

The history of overseas Koreans goes back to the mid-nineteenth century when Koreans began to migrate to Manchuria and the Russian Far East in the 1860s in search of cultivable lands. Later, Hawaii was added to the destinations of those Koreans who wanted to seek for new opportunities overseas. It was, however, after the colonisation of Korea by Japan when greater number of Koreans left their homeland to Manchuria, Russian Far East and Japan.

The Korean national history has recognized overseas Koreans for their involvements in the independence movements. Later, the Korean Americans, whose number rapidly grew through the 1970s and 1980s, became the main interests of Korean discussion about overseas Koreans. The two million and half ethnic Koreans of China and the Soviet Union were very much forgotten in the memories of South Koreans due to the Cold War hostilities between South Korea and these communist countries.

Since the late 1980s, however, there have been rising interests in overseas Koreans in South Korean media, government, and academia. After the mid-1980s South Korean media began to report about ethnic Koreans in China and the Soviet Union, and this change came with South Korea's growing economic and political engagements with these two communist neighbours. South Korean economy had shown rapid growth for more than three decades by then, and it reached the stage, where diversification of trading partners and development of new markets became crucial. For this reason, South Korean business leaders were keen to expand their business into the newly emerging markets of China and the Soviet Union, and they assumed that ethnic Koreans of these countries would be beneficial for their business

projects in these countries. Meanwhile, South Korean government also sought political support of China and the Soviet Union in regard to its policy toward North Korea. It was in this context that more and more South Korean journalists, politicians, academics, and business leaders started to emphasize the importance of the ethnic Koreans of these two countries. They emphasized that Korean diaspora are an essential part of the Korean nation, and they are very important asset for the nation's future. Such a view was well represented by a researcher at the Samsung Economy Institute in mid-1990s:

There live two million ethnic Koreans in China, eight hundred thousand in Japan, and one million and two hundred thousand in the U.S. The size of the overseas Korean population is nearly five million, including those who are not identified or registered [...]. The fact that overseas Koreans are concentrated in the four super powers that surround the Korean peninsula is a great advantage for our global policy. We, together with those overseas brothers, must form a "Pan-Korean Economic and Cultural Community," and let these overseas Koreans act as intermediaries between their host countries and us to develop bilateral relationships.... let them work to develop a [friendly] relationship between their host countries and South Korea (Ku 1995:177-178)

Such a notion that Korean diaspora would be beneficial for South Korea was not confined only among nationalist intellectuals. Chu-yǒng Chǒng, the late Chairman of the Hyundai Group, was one of them and he stressed the importance of ethnic Koreans of China and Russia for his company's natural resources development

project in Siberia. He contended this in terms of South Korea's competition with Japan:

Although Japan began developing the Siberian resources much earlier than we do [...] we can outdo the Japanese because there are many ethnic Koreans in the region. We can utilise Korean Chinese labour for our development projects in Siberia... Working with the people who share same culture and language with us is much easier than working with foreigners (Chōng 1997, pp.141-2).

In this trend The South Korean government began to incorporate hitherto not included Chinese Koreans (2 million) and the former Soviet Union Koreans (half million) to the category of the Overseas Koreans in the 1990s. The size of the Korean nation grew through the 1990s due to the statistical inclusion of "overseas Koreans" in the former Soviet Union and China. The government also changed the formal name of overseas Koreans from *haeoe kyopo* (ethnic Koreans overseas) to *chaeoe tongp'o* (Koreans living outside of Korea), emphasizing their close relations to the nation. In a sense the 1990s' "imagined community" of the Korean nation expanded to China and the former Soviet Union, which was aided by globalization and ever developing communication technologies. This was also a case of 'pan-Korean' or 'de-territorialized nationalism' as Appadurai (1996) and Clifford (1994) calls.

Such notion of 'de-territorialized nationalism' grew even further in the face of the 1997 financial crisis when South Koreans lost confidence in their society's ability to grow and looked for help from Korean diasporic communities. People openly insisted that overseas Koreans should help their motherland, as an official of the newly established Overseas Koreans Foundation urged:

Behind Israel's influence in global politics and economy are Jewish diasporas [...] The remarkable economic development of China would not have been possible without the support of the fifty million overseas Chinese. The rise of the Vietnamese economy after the War was possible only thanks to the annual remittance of the 1.5 billion dollars from the overseas Vietnamese. Though they had fled from their motherland as "boat people," they are now fulfilling their filial duty to their motherland. Now is the time when our country needs the patriotism both from the domestic and overseas Koreans. No country will willingly suffer the pains [of financial crisis] in place of us, and no country will pay our debt [to the IMF] for us. We should overcome this economic crisis and repay the debt only with our own resources and national wisdom. There cannot be any difference between domestic Koreans and overseas Koreans in the time of crisis since any crisis of our country will be the crisis of our nation (Kim 1998:3).

As some scholars pointed out, governments, in the face of increasing emigration, attempt to retain some control over its citizens overseas and ensure their continuing loyalty (Tsuda 2003: 256-7). This is the "de-territorialized nationalism" (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1994) which indicates that nationalist project goes beyond national boundaries and diasporic community to maintain nationalist sentiments outside of their ethnic motherland. As Basch, Glick Shiller and Szanton Balnc (1994:3) writes, "through the use of [national] symbols... political leaders in the country of origin are engaged in constructing an ideology that envisions migrants as loyal citizens of their ancestral nation-state." This is clear for South Korean government policy toward overseas Koreans with organizations such as the Overseas

Koreans Foundation (OKF). South Korean government stretches its arms to various overseas Korean communities to promote Korean culture, thus promoting Korean identity. It does so by supporting overseas Korean communities with Korean books, Korean language schools, and various cultural programs that are designed to promote Korean identity among Korean diaspora. Such de-territorialized nationalism was not carried out by the Korean state alone. In the case of South Korea it was not just the government, but also civic organizations, intellectuals, and businessmen who cultivate de-territorialized nationalism. South Korean business community have helped Korean Chinese to maintain their ethnic identity, and one of the many examples is Donga Publishing House's donation of 6,800 volumes of Korean dictionaries to Korean Chinese in 1990 (*Kyŏngnyang Daily*, May 2, 1990).

In a similar vein, many South Koreans underlined the possible role of Korean Chinese in the unification of the two Koreas. Emphasizing Korean Chinese experiences of communism in China and their familiarity with North Korea, nationalists in South Korea tend to regard Korean Chinese as 'missionaries of unification' (*cf.* Yi 1994). [3]

Most of local governments that support international marriages for their bachelors, assume that foreign brides will live together with the elderly parents of the rural bachelors who apply for such funds from local governments. According to the regulations for the support programs for the rural bachelors of the North Kyongsang Province, eligible bachelors would have enough size of cultivable lands and would support their elderly parents (Ijuyeoseong Jeongchaek Network 2007; Chong 2008: 44).

Table 1. *Number of Migrant Brides in Korea by Nationality and Year*

Nationality	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	6945	9684	10698	18750	25105	30719	29665	28580	28163	25142	26274	22265	20637
China	3566	6977	7023	13347	18489	20582	14566	14484	13203	11364	9623	7549	7036
Japan	819	701	690	844	809	883	1045	1206	1162	1140	1193	1124	1309
Philippines	1174	502	838	928	947	980	1117	1497	1857	1643	1906	2072	2216
Vietnam	77	134	474	1402	2461	5822	10128	6610	8282	7249	9623	7636	6586
Thailand	240	182	327	345	324	266	271	524	633	496	438	354	323
**Uzbekistan	43	66	183	328	247	332	314	351	492	365	317	324	365
Other	462	357	175	236	159	163	201	220	205	223	219	277	297

3. South Korean Imagination of Ethnic Korean Women of China and Uzbekistan

Purity of blood

Purity and innocence as Korean women

Tradition-keepers

Same nationality and same culture

From the underdeveloped former socialist countries and poverty (positive environment) = ideal spouses for old bachelors and male losers of South Korea

Koryŏ saram themselves also use the same discourse (of national purity) when they marry South Koreans

But, later the discourse of cold-blooded instrumentalists (refer to the article on Taiwan's perceptions of foreign brides) was also developed

As the number of transnational marriages between South Korean males and ethnic Korean females of China and other less developed countries increase, such marriages were depicted initially positively. However, by the late 1990s these marriages gained very negative representations in media. In particular, Chosŏnjok brides were

frequently seen as cold-blooded instrumentalists, who cheat innocent South Korean bachelors to achieve their materialistic goals. Such a negative representation is not unusual as most of South Korean people tend to judge those brides on the basis of which country they are from. Bridegrooms who marry to Korean Chinese or others tend to be regarded inferior or 'losers'. Hsia (2007) confirms that similar media representation is true in the case of Taiwan. In the case Taiwan foreign brides are rather negatively represented in Taiwanese media, which constructed the 'foreign brides phenomenon' as a social problem (Hsia 2007). The brides are portrayed either as passive victims or materialist gold-diggers, and prone to committing crimes, while the bridegrooms are portrayed as the 'socially undesirable,' including physically or mentally disabled, and morally inferior. Hsia Hsia-Chuan (2007: 62) argues that "Foreign brides' have been constructed either as passive victims bought by men as sexual commodities or materialist gold-digger disguised by their beauty. The rhetorical 'double-bind structure' serves to maintain the construction of 'foreign brides' as the 'inferior other' (Hsia 2007: 62).

Meanwhile, the popular films and dramas mentioned above all tend to depict ethnic Korean brides from China, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam as idealistic figures. The popular cultural representations of Korean Chinese in South Korea in the 2000s also show relatively positive perceptions of South Koreans toward Korean Chinese. For example, South Korean films and TV dramas feature Korean Chinese women in a very positive manner by depicting them usually pure and innocent. [9] There have been several photo exhibitions on Korean Chinese and they normally feature Korean Chinese from rural areas, who were still using traditional farming tools that long disappeared in South Korea. Therefore, these exhibitions inspired South Korean nostalgia for the old days, and their sympathy toward their co-ethnics in China. [10]

As such, South Koreans imagined Korean Chinese as ‘pure,’ traditional and even patriotic. Nonetheless, such a positive and sympathetic view is mixed with negative perspectives as large scale Korean Chinese return-migrate to South Korea by the mid-1990s.

These female protagonists are commonly depicted as good-natured, innocent, non-materialistic, honest, and courageous figures. In the case of the TV documentary *Nochonggak Ujūbek Kada* [Old Bachelors’ Trip to Uzbekistan] there appear several ethnic Korean women of Uzbekistan and no one is particularly depicted as an innocent or honest figure. Nonetheless, the male protagonists – South Korean bachelors – revealed their belief that ethnic Korean females of Uzbekistan are innocent and less materialistic in comparison with South Korean women, and this is the reason why they chose to look for possible wives from Uzbekistan. [11]

The facts that all these stories deal with similar romantic relationships between South Korean males and ethnic Korean females, and the female protagonists are depicted similarly -- innocent and honest – provokes our interests.

Compared to the rather negative representations of Korean American women in some media works, the images of these ethnic Korean women from China, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam are highly positive. The two South Korean males in the above mentioned TV documentary (Old Bachelors Trip to Uzbekistan) say that Uzbek Korean girls would be “strong” (*saenghwallyōk i kanghada*) because of the “hardships” they experienced in history (even though the real hardships that the Soviet Union had was during the forced relocation of 1937 and the following years). They also believe that Uzbek Koreans would be somewhat more “spiritual” and less “materialistic”, also because of their experiences of forced migration.

Same Ethnicity, same people

Their purity is not just in their personality but it is also related to their being “pure Korean”, i.e., purity in Korean blood. South Koreans also praised Korean Chinese for their having preserved much of old Korean traditions regardless of their having been surrounded with Chinese cultural influence. Such a view was common in the 1990s and it is well represented in an editorial of a popular newspaper:

Korean Chinese, though they are Chinese citizens, have preserved our language and traditions more than we have done in Korea. They also have kept the purity of their blood by marrying only among themselves. Considering that many other ethnic groups such as the Manchus have vanished in the *Han*-dominated China, it is almost a miracle that Korean Chinese have kept their own distinctive culture (*Hankyore Daily*, December 21, 1996).

The first politicians who arranged such marriages between South Korean bachelors and Korean Chinese brides in the early 1990s thought that such marriages would be good for the nation’s future especially for the revival of rural community in South Korea and also for the revitalisation of national unity). They thought that Korean Chinese villages in China were “just like the untainted rural villages of South Korea”. One politician stated in 1990 after his visit to an ethnic Korean village in Jilin Province: “[...] the village did not look like China at all to me. It was just like the innocent and humble rural village of our country [...] People there retain our language and customs. If brides of these villages marry to our bachelors, they would not feel difference and there would not be any cultural shock” (*Kungmin daily* Sept. 1, 1990). Meanwhile, the parents of the girls in Tashkent say:

“Korea is the homeland of our grandparents, and it’s our homeland as well. For us, Mr. Jang [the man who would become their son-in-law] is not a foreigner and we just feel glad to him (as he is a Korean as we are).” Another parent say: “I’m happy and glad that my daughter is going to our homeland.”

Meanwhile, their belief on the cultural sameness between Koreans and Korean Chinese showed ambivalence. The Korea Family Welfare Institute (KFWI), a government-sponsored match-making institute that acted as an organisation that promotes marriages between South Korea’s rural bachelors and Korean Chinese brides, in fact, arranged a pre-marital education programme for the Korean Chinese brides. In the programme Korean Chinese brides were taught about the Korean tradition and etiquettes before their wedding ceremony (*Donga Daily* February 26, 1992).

Purity as an ideal Korean woman

The films, *Innocent Steps* and *Wedding Campaign* and TV dramas *Yŏrahop Sunjŏng* and *Hanoi Bride* depict ethnic Korean females, from China, Uzbekistan and Vietnam respectively, as women of purity, honesty and courage. These four ethnic Korean female protagonists, far from being materialistic or opportunistic, all pursue decent life and true love. Kim Lara, Chang Ch’ae-rin, Yang Kukhwa and Li Ti Bu (a half-Korean Vietnamese girl) [12] -- they all represent ideal feminine values that are considered as traditional feminine virtues in Korea.

By the way, such a favourable representation of ethnic Korean women from China and the former Soviet Union is not new in South Korea. Actually, such a pure

and innocent image of Korean diasporic women from China and the former Soviet Union has been recurrent in South Korean public discourse. In the mid-1990s Doosan, one of the conglomerates of South Korea, used such image in its advertisement (Figure 1). Presented in this advertisement is a modest-looking girl who is an ethnic Korean living in the Yŏnbyŏn Korean Autonomous Prefecture in Jilin Province of northeast China.

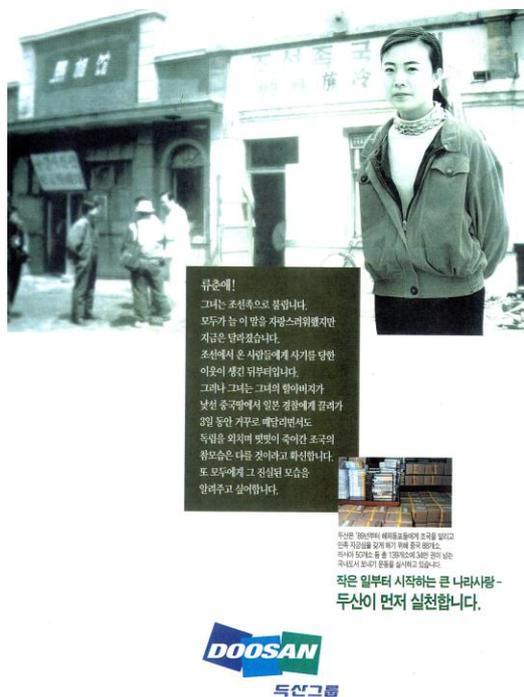


Figure 1. “Ryu Chun-ae! She is called a Chosŏnjok” (Doosan’s 1994 advertisement)

The caption in this advertisement recounts that: (1) this girl feels proud of herself as a Korean, although she lives in China; (2) However, recently such a pride was damaged due to the numerous fraud cases by South Koreans, who took money from Korean Chinese people who want to work in South Korea ; (3) nonetheless, she thinks of her grandfather who fought for Korean independence during the colonial period, eventually being arrested and tortured by Japanese police as a result; (4) such

was her grandfather's dream of his motherland and she thinks that the 'real' Korea would not be represented by such fraudulent people; (5) Doosan supports the Korean community in China by providing them with Korean books so that they can learn more about their "motherland" Korea.

However, the benefits that overseas Koreans provide to their homeland are not only economic or political. Cultural aspects of them are even more important in the same discourse. Now, those overseas Koreans in China and the former Soviet union were viewed as the bearers of Korean tradition which disappeared in the industrialized South Korea. South Koreans tend to view that Korean Chinese are 'pure' and 'innocent' while they themselves have lost such innocence living in the modern world. This dichotomy of tradition-bearing Korean Chinese and tradition-breaking South Koreans implies different roles for each group in the national community. According to Chatterjee (1993) the dichotomy of dividing "inside/woman" and "outside/man" -- man (outside): needs for changes, and westernization while woman (inside, needs for preserving tradition, as the essence of national culture) -- is common in colonial discourse. In this logic and discourse, it is implied that Korean Chinese are the keepers of the old Korean tradition while South Koreans are the innovators of technologies and developer of the national economy. Such a rhetoric is overlapped with the traditional gender discourse of Korea (and many other Asian countries), and it puts the marriages between Korean Chinese women and South Korean men an ideal unity.

Ethnic Korean Brides: innocence, honesty, and courage

As many have pointed out, international marriages are not simply unilaterally by economic factors. Instead of unilaterality from poor countries to rich countries, they are formed by various factors such as confluences of culture, border crossings, exchanges, and fluid terrain, rather than simple unidirectional flows of power and desire (Constable 2005: 7). Many women expect foreign husbands to have embraced more modern and open-minded ideas about gender roles than local men at home while many men turn to Asia for traditional wives (Constable 2005: 8). Korean men are not exception here and they imagine ethnic Korean women from China and Uzbekistan more traditional than the women at home.

[Ch'ae-rin]

Ch'ae-rin is a nineteen years old girl from Yŏnbyŏn (Yanbian in Chinese), the home of the two million Korean Chinese. Ch'aerin comes to South Korea in disguise of her sister who won the championship at the Yŏnbyŏn Korean Autonomous Region's Dance Contest. A South Korean dance company invited her sister to Seoul, but Chae-rin comes, disguising her sister, as her sister married recently and could not accept the offer. Yŏng-se, who once was a promising dancer, is sent by the dance studio to meet her at the port of Inchŏn. Yŏng-se has a bitter memory of the past: he had lost his girl friend (and dance partner) Se-yŏng to his rival Hyŏn-su, who has good background and money. Soon after Ch'ae-rin's arrival the dance studio discovers that she is not the talented dancer whom they wanted to bring from China. Though Ch'ae-rin wants to learn dance, she is abandoned by the studio. With no support and no place to stay, she finds a work at a night club. Yŏng-se feels

sympathetic to Ch'ae-rin and decided to teach her dancing as she is determined to learn it. Through the practice of dance they get closer to each other gradually and become a good team. It is then when Hyön-su takes Ch'ae-rin away from Yöng-se with tricks and violence. The gangsters hired by Hyön-su breaks Yöng-se's leg so that he would not be able to dance any more. Having lost Ch'ae-rin and become lame, Yöng-se gives himself up to despair. Ch'ae-rin, however, is different from Se-yöng -- Yöng-se's former girlfriend who had betrayed him for his rival Hyön-su. Ch'ae-rin leaves Hyön-su regardless of the prospect of fame and wealth. Ch'ae-rin returns to Yöng-se, knowing that he sincerely loves her.

The film shows the pure-heartedness of Ch'ae-rin who chooses genuine love over material success. Despite Yöng-se's being a loser in Korean society – with no money and being lame – Ch'ae-rin returns to Yöng-se. In so doing, the film contrasts Ch'ae-rin to Se-yöng, who represents contemporary South Korean women in terms of their seeking for materialistic opportunities over pure love. The film also makes its viewers, especially male viewers, feel nostalgic about the 'good old days' when people (especially women) were pure and innocent. In the film Ch'ae-rin says that she is from China where “fireflies fly all over.” This provokes a deep nostalgic feeling among contemporary South Koreans who remember their childhood with fireflies, which disappeared in urban areas. This imagined past is contrasted with the present where people, especially women, are highly materialistic and opportunistic. Here Ch'ae-rin is similar to Kukhwa, the female protagonist in the TV drama *Yölahop sunjöng* [A pure-hearted nineteen-year-old] even though this drama is a kind of Cinderella story.

[Kukhwa]

In the drama *Kukhwa* is a Korean Chinese girl who is an orphan. She initially comes to South Korea to marry an old and lame man with whom she exchanged letters and fell in love. However, when she arrived in Korea, her would-be husband has just died from an accident. She stays with his family and she meets many people including Yunhu. Yunhu is a typical elite man, who is smart, handsome and rich. Though they do not like each other in the beginning, the two eventually feel love to each other. Both Ch'ae-rin and Kukhwa look attractive to South Korean male viewers particularly because of their good-natured attributes which reminds them of the virtuous traditional Korean women. They are innocent, generous, and independent-minded. Ch'ae-rin and Kukhwa often say "*irössumda*" ("I'm fine") to anyone who shows his/her sympathy to them. This reveals their mental strength and independence. They are idealistic and pure in mind and body and they wait for true love.

[Kim Lara]

As stated above, *Wedding Campaign* (directed by Byong-guk Hwang, 2005) is based on the TV documentary *Nochonggak Ujubek Kada* (Old Bachelors' Trip to Uzbekistan, 2002). This documentary follows two South Korean bachelors' journey to Uzbekistan in their effort to find marriage partners. Such a trip and dating were arranged by match-making agencies, and in many cases local government helped the bachelors financially so that they can cover the costs. For marriage agencies it was a good business those days as there were substantial number of Korean bachelors who want to marriage ethnic Korean women of Uzbekistan and other former socialist countries. As in the *Nochonggak Ujubek Kada* in the film *Wedding Campaign* two South Korean males (Man-t'aek and his friend Hi-ch'öl) go to Uzbekistan to meet

possible marriage partners. Their guide in Uzbekistan is Kim Lara, and even though she pretends to be a Uzbek Korean, she is actually a defector from North Korea. Lara works for the match-making company and she dreams to make enough money to obtain a South Korean passport so that she can go to South Korea. Her plan depends on how successful she is in match-making her South Korean customers.

Though Lara tries very hard, her customer Man-t'aek, who is a farmer from rural Andong, North Kyōngsang Province of South Korea, fails in attracting girls in several dates. Man-t'aek is helplessly shy and, unlikely his friend Hi-chōl who attracts girls, he cannot look at his dates in the face. Lara's boss now plans to introduce Man-t'aek a bad girl whose primary purpose of marriage is not to form a family but to go to Korea to make money. However, Lara discovers what her boss plans for Man-t'aek, and she feels sympathetic to Man-t'aek, who is very shy but simple and honest. Therefore, Lara aborts Man-t'aek's date against her boss' plan though her boss' plan would bring her benefit. It was discovered soon and now Lara's plan to obtain a South Korean passport goes wrong. Eventually, the match-making agent gets attention from Uzbek authorities and all the South Korean bachelors are ordered to leave the country. By now Man-t'aek feels love to Lara, but he has to return to South Korea, leaving Lara behind. After returning from Uzbekistan, heart-broken Man-t'aek leads desolate life. After a year, South Korean intelligence agency calls him that a woman from Uzbekistan is looking for him. It was Lara who successfully defected to the German Embassy in Uzbekistan and made her way to South Korea to meet Man-t'aek.

Like Ch'ae-rin in *Innocent Steps*, Lara chooses love over materialistic success. Though pure and innocent, these women are far from weak. In reality, another commonality between Ch'ae-rin and Lara is courage and mental strength. Ch'ae-rin is strong enough to take the adventure of coming to South Korea in place of her older

sister. She also refuses the fame and wealth guaranteed by Hyŏn-su and seeks for her love Yŏng-se. Lara also acts against her own personal interests when she aborted her boss' plan to cheat Man-t'aek. Lara eventually follows Man-t'aek by crossing the walls of the German Embassy in Tashkent.

[North Korean Woman in the *South of the Border*]

Similar characters are observed among North Korean female characters in South Korean films. The 2006 film *South of the Border* [*Kukyŏngŭi Namchok*, directed by Ahn Pan-seok, 2006) and *Southern Man Northern Woman* [*Namnam Pug'nyo*, directed by Chong Cho-sin, 2003] also show similarly-characterized female protagonists. They are innocent, non-materialistic and courageous in the face of love. South Koreans also view their brethren in North Korea as pure (but primitive) people. Grinker (1998) observes that for South Koreans North Korean is highly valued for its purity "because it is seen as fixed in time, and yet it is denigrated as primitive for the same reason (Grinker 1998: 56)."

They are pure in the sense that they do not value money or success too much. Rather they value pure love. Ch'ae-rin wants to return to China regardless of her apparent success with Hyŏn-su (the successful dancer with lot of money and background). Lara does not allow the bad girl, whose primary intention is just go to South Korea to make money (possibly as a prostitute), to meet Man-t'aek and instead Lara herself takes him out to abort the meeting. These female protagonists have been kept "pure and clean" in distance from the hustle bustle of their homeland (South Korea) as if they were prepared for the good males of the country who became undesirable. Such "purity" is imagined also from foreign brides from poor countries

(as is the case of Min's mother when she thought of the Philippine bride for her son)
(Abelmann 2004: 111).

Strength

These female protagonists fall in love with the male protagonists, two South Koreans, regardless of the latter's being losers in South Korean society. It is the female protagonists, not males, who initiate love in the two films. Such strength in women has been valued in Korean tradition. In traditional Korea, women's virtue did not stop at purity, honesty and physical attractiveness. Virtuous women are expected to show great courage and strength for their family. In particular, she should be strong enough not to allow other males forcefully destroy her chastity. Such a tradition made women to carry small knives as a decoration. These films imply the nostalgia of South Korean males for Korean women with traditional values, who, seem to be lamentably rare in South Korea today.

Indeed, rural bachelors who want to marry Korean Chinese brides commonly expressed their impression of the Korean Chinese women as "pure" and "innocent" (*Donga Daily* September 8, 1991). In 1992 the *Hankuk Daily* also reports in its editorial while reporting about the marriages between South Korean rural bachelors and Korean Chinese brides: "[...] when we look at the Yŏnbyŏn brides, we feel that

they have retained the original purity of our ancestors. They smile shyly and are full of untainted purity and innocence” (*Hankuk Daily* Nov. 7, 1992).

Romantic stories of Korean males and overseas Korean females are not new in Korean films. However, such representations are in direct contradiction to the general depiction of Korean diasporic women of the West, especially Korean Americans, who have been depicted rather negatively in Korea’s public discourse, especially in regard to their ‘westernized’ attitudes. For example, in *Deep Blue Night* [*Kipko Purŭnbam*, directed by Bae Chang-ho, 1984] Jane, a Korean American woman, is portrayed as a materialistic person who married to an American man solely to obtain US citizenship and she later agrees to disguise a marriage for the male protagonist, who is an illegal migrant from Korea. Similarly, in the film *All That Falls Has a Wing* [*Ch’urakhanŭn Kosŭn Nalgaega Itta*, directed by Chang Kil-su, 1989] the female protagonist, Yunju, craves for America and leads a dissolute life in which she cares only materialistic and sensual pleasures.

South Korean bachelors also thought that Korean Chinese brides kept traditional Korean feminine virtues. Freeman observes: “many South Korean men I interviewed claimed they were initially drawn to China by the expectation that Chosonjok women retained so-called traditional Korean virtues of chastity, purity, and obedience to a greater degree than women living in fast-paced, capitalist South Korean society” (Freeman 2004: 95).

Here the women from China, Uzbekistan and Vietnam are contrast of South Korean women. In fact, these films and dramas are not about the women of these countries but the women of South Korea. Constable (2003: 68) points out that American men seeking marriage partners abroad portray western women in diametrically opposed images, either as ‘overly liberated placing their careers ahead of their marriage and

family’, or ‘materialistic, spoiled, lazy and unwilling to work in or outside the home’. Even in China Korean Chinese women are popularly considered “soft, virtuous, hard-working and patient” (Yi, Hae-eung’s 2005 MA thesis: p.37).

4. ‘Redemptive Love’ for the Nation

The Rural Bachelors’ Question

Humanitarian concerns, Agricultural devastation, Population decrease, Tradition keeping.

The *Hanguk Daily* editorial praised the new arrangement in its 1991 Feb. 4 editorial:

Due to the lack of brides there are so many bachelors in their thirties who long passed the marriage age and there are even bachelors who are over their forties. The negative effects of such situation are beyond description. Disappointed and discourages bachelors neglect farming and many of them even fall in debauched life style. Then we hear the news that rural bachelors are leaving for China to find ethnic Korean brides, which makes us feel happy as this would be a good solution for such a problem.

However, the Korean Chinese community in China suffers from shortage of women due to the large number of Korean Chinese women leaving for South Korea. More than 60,000 pregnable ethnic Korean women left the Korean Chinese community in the last ten years, and this resulted in rapid reduction in new born children in the community (Hwang 2005).

[Statistical data of the number of rural bachelors in South Korea].

In 1990s the estimated number of rural bachelors whose age is above average marital age exceeded 100,000 (*Kungmin Daily* February 5, 1990). Promises to help rural bachelors who have difficulties in marrying became essential public promises of politicians in local elections ever since the late 1980s. [Statistical data of rural bachelors].

The first government-endorsed marriages between South Korean bachelors and Korean Chinese brides started in February 1991 when the Ministry of Health and Welfare made a plan to arrange such marriages in March that year. Though this would be carried out by the Korean Family Welfare Institute, but the Ministry would provide financial and administrative support. The government plans to expand such marriages to the ethnic Koreans of the former Soviet Union (*Donga Daily* Feb. 17, 1991).

It is in this context that South Korean government endorsed the program of sending farmer bachelors on marriage tours to China and Uzbekistan with the anticipation that those marriages would not only restore family life in the countryside but also, as quoted throughout the mass media, contribute to the sacred national goal of restoring ethnic homogeneity to a divided people (Freeman 2004: 95).

International Marriages as an Ethnic Return Migration

The Korea Family Welfare Institute (Kajongpokchi Yonguhoe), with the support of the South Korean government (The Ministry of Health and Welfare), arranged meetings between South Korean rural bachelors and Korean Chinese brides

and seven couples married in June 1992. At the wedding ceremony, the Director of the KFWI stated: “we welcome the return of the descendants of our ancestors who had left their homeland in Korea in search for lands in Manchuria during the Japanese colonial period” (Kungmin Daily June 3, 1992). The Institute of Family Welfare has arranged more than 40 couples until 1993 March. The organisation led another 53 rural bachelors to China for Korean Chinese brides. (Hanguk Daily March 1, 1993).

Frequently, such weddings (between rural bachelors of South Korea and Korean Chinese brides) were attended by famous politicians. In February 1992 then First Lady, Kim Ok-suk, attended the wedding while the ceremony was led by the former Prime Minister (Soul Shinmun February 29, 1992).

Such arranged meetings and marriages expanded to Sakhalin. In 1992 one local governmental official from Umsong, North Chungchong Province, arranged such a meeting between rural bachelors of his province and brides of Sakhalin (Kungmin Daily February 11, 1992). Rural bachelors paid their own travel while the travel costs of the brides from Sakhalin were covered by the local government with the help of local donors.

Various TV and radio programs dealt with programs to help rural bachelors to find brides in urban areas or overseas. Thys include the KBS 2 TV Kajok Hwansanggok, MBC “Sarangui Styudio”, and SBS “Kyorhon Halkkayo?” in the 1990s.

Megazine “Kagyo” (Bridge) also promotes marriages between South Korean bachelors and Korean Chinese brides. The “Bridge” paid attention that South Korean bachelors should pay 2-3 million KRW to visit Yanbian for an arranged meeting with Korean Chinese brides (as well as they have to take about ten days’ holidays from their work), and it arranged letter exchanges between the prospective bachelors and

brides first and then let Korean Chinese brides to visit South Korea (Hanguk Daily Nov. 7, 1992).

Even private companies also arranged such marriages. In the case of the Samyang Foods (a conglomerate in food business) employed unmarried Korean girls from China for its “industrial Trainees” program and helped them to meet with rural bachelors. They would work the weekdays while on weekend they would be introduced to rural bachelors of the area. This was possible when Park Kyong-su, MP, DLP (Democratic Liberal Party), visited Yanbian to solve the rural bachelors’ problem of South Korea, and Park suggested this to the Samyang Foods (Hanguk Daily April 21, 1991).

Media in the early 1990s reported these marriages from very positive perspectives. Hanguk Daily reports (1992 December 31) that Korean Chinese brides were positively impressed by the wealth of South Korean rural villages: “...in addition, there was no difficulties in living as there were colour TV, refrigerator, gas range, which [the Korean Chinese brides] were not available in rural China...” The Kyunghyang Shinmun reports in 1996 that Korean Chinese brides are became “Korean”: “... for them China is, regardless of its being their natal homeland, it is other’s country, and Korea, regardless of its not being their natal homeland, now it has become her motherland where her parents-in-laws, husband, and children live.”

The Dognan Daily, while it welcomes such arranged marriages between South Korean bachelors and Korean Chinese brides (as it would solve two problems at once: rural revival and strengthen the unity between South Koreans and Korean Chinese), it also expresses its worries if Korean Chinese community might feel bad about South Korea that takes too many of their women (Donga Daily Feb. 18, 1991; Hwang 1997).

International marriages have been increasing in South Korea, and almost fifteen per cent of all marriages in South Korea are international in 2006. According to the Bureau of Statistics (South Korea), there were less than 100 international marriages reported to the government until 1992. After 1992, the year when South Korea and China formally established diplomatic relations, however, the number rapidly grew. In 1994 there were 2,043 international marriages were reported to the government, and in 1997 the number grew to 7,362. [Table] The number of international marriages visibly decreased after the 1997 financial crisis, but it regained strength soon again. According to the data from the Ministry of Justice, between 1990 and 2004 total 128,762 foreign women married South Korean males. Among them 47.4 per cent are ethnic Koreans from China. [4] International marriages between South Koreans and foreigners rose from 12,319 cases in 2000 to 35,447 cases in 2004 (Statics Bureau of Korea). By 2005 international marriages comprise almost 14 per cent of all marriages in South Korea and more than 70 percent of these international marriages are between South Korean bridegrooms and foreign brides. Among the foreign wives, Chinese comprise the vast majority (more than 70 per cent), and most of the Chinese brides are Korean Chinese. There are also increasing number of transnational marriages between South Korean males and ethnic Korean women from the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent Countries), especially from Uzbekistan, which is the home of more than 200,000 Soviet Koreans today.

Brides for Male Losers: Redemptive Love

Interestingly, in the above mentioned films and dramas, male protagonists – South Korean men such as Yǒng-se and Man-t'aek -- are losers in South Korean society. Yong-sae and Man-t'aek represent the uneasy situation of contemporary South Korean males and the society. These two males in the *Human Theatre* say that they tried to find spouse in South Korea, by utilizing the services of marriage counselling companies and so on. Yi states that he used to dream about the countries such as China and Russia, implying that in these former communist societies people are more friendly and less materialistic and more accepting people like him who are considered 'losers' in South Korea. This definitely suggests his disappointment with South Korean women. The narrator says that "Yi is a 'sunsuhan' (pure-hearted) man. He is the kind of person who would feel good by helping others in need." Kim, another man in the documentary, is a factory worker and he stammers a bit, which is a handicap in Korea. He is a caring person in the documentary. Kim's sister-in-law (Kim's younger brother's wife) states that her brother-in-law is a man who deserves love and care, but has not been able to find a wife. Both Kim and Yi say that they were disappointed at the South Korean women who "care only for the visible conditions of men – such as job, income, and man who talks nicely." Yi says that "I tend to speak straightforwardly, and who would like me?"

Both Man-t'aek in *Wedding Campaign* and Yǒng-se in *Innocent Steps* are 'good' men in Korean standard. They are hard-working and honest. Both of them are shy and rather passive in expressing their feelings of love to their female partners. As many rural males in South Korea today, Man-t'aek is unable to find a wife even though he is already in his late 30s. While being a bachelor is lonesome, Man-t'aek

feels particularly sorry to his mother who complains “a woman with no luck of husband does not have luck with her son.” Therefore, Man-t’æk’s problems come partly because of his inability to fulfil the Confucian ideal of lineage continuation.

They work hard and are honest. Nonetheless, regardless of their hard work and good personality they are losers in the society. They represent the frustrations of South Korean society and its stagnant economy. Poor, unsuccessful, and disrespected, they are far from happy people. However, they become happy after they are ‘rescued’ by the redemptive love of the female protagonists from China and Uzbekistan. The narration states that “these days honest and hard-working Korean males are popular among Uzbekistan Korean girls.” It also states that these males “heal their wounded heart” (after failing in marrying in Korea) in Uzbekistan.

Their presence is everywhere and often they are considered as a revitalization force of abandoned rural communities.[5] More than 60 per cent of these foreign brides live in countryside South Korea (Lee 2006).

However, transnational marriages are not only for rural bachelors. Increasing number of urban workers also marry to foreign brides. In the *Human Theatre*, both Yi Kwang-tae and XXX are urban workers. Both of them work at medium-sized factories in Seoul and Taejon. Statistical data show that foreign brides normally reside in rural area and the number of children born between South Korean and foreigners are same as follows: Kyeonggi (1480), Seoul (688), Chonnam (587), Chonpuk (517), Kyongbuk (468) and Kyongnam (457). In Chonnam have the biggest number of children below 12: 2,000 in 2006 (*Hangyore* 2006.2.15). In particular, poorer regions of North Cholla and South Cholla have bigger number of foreign wives.

In the documentary *Nochonggak Ujubek Kada* the narrator mentions that those males who came to Uzbekistan to find marriage partners are “good-nature and hard-

working” Koreans (NUK date, 2002). It also mentions that Kwang-tae, another South Korean male who fails in dating several times, is a “pure” (innocent) man, who always helps people in need. In fact, it is revealed that the South Korean males in the documentary have never been to theatre while their female partners in Uzbekistan are familiar with cultural activities such as opera and other forms of performing arts.

This reflects the realities of South Korean society where males of low class and rural areas are considered undesirable for marriage partners and thus those males have to find their spouses overseas. This is one reason why Korean men are having difficulties in finding spouses in Korea. As it is seen in the KBS TV documentary (2002) one of the male says that he came to Uzbekistan to marry an ethnic Korean woman because “they are not materialistic as South Korean women.”

The reason why such films appear in early 2000s is not an accident. South Korean society has felt somewhat stagnated already for more than a decade since its economy stopped the rapid growth, for which the country gained a global fame as a “miracle” nation. The nation seemed to have lost its vision after the turbulent 1980s when politics was alive. As the revolutionary left lost its energy and widely incorporated into liberalist market capitalism, everything looked vacant. Its economy was not only stagnant but it also lost its confidence after the late 1990s financial crisis.

Once North Korea was viewed as a new frontier which can stimulate South Korean economy, by offering cheap labour, resource and much needed road to continent. Nonetheless, it was proven that things would not move as South Koreans desire. In *Wedding Campaign* the female protagonist, Lara, is depicted as a North Korean defector in Uzbekistan. She needs South Korean passport – which shows South Koreans’ imagination that North Koreans also long for South Korea as their

final destination. The film never questions if they will have a good life in South Korea. In any way, Lara longs for South Korea and Man-taek needs a wife.

Nostalgia: The background itself stimulates nostalgic feelings from the viewers. The country side scenery of Andong, North Kyongsang Province in *Wedding Campaign* remind viewers of the idyllic life of rural village. The shabby urban sceneries of Uzbekistan (*Wedding Campaign*) and Yanbian (*Innocent Steps*) also bring similar effects in the minds of viewers in addition to the dialects and clothing of the protagonists.

In another TV drama (broadcasted in 2007 and also published as a novel in the same year) *Golden Bride* the half-Korean Vietnamese lady Ngyuen Jinju also heals her husband, who is from a poor family and also suffers from emotional disorder. Junu’s emotional disorder was caused by his former girlfriend, who betrayed him to marry a wealthy man. The love and efforts of Ngyuen heals her husband, Junu.

Table 1. The number of Korean Chinese entered into South Korea

Year	Male	Female	Total
2000	30,268	29,908	60,176
2001	32,022	35,657	67,679
2002	28,555	33,226	61,781
2003	29,305	31,291	60,579
2004	NA	NA	NA
2005	73,497	94,092	167,589
2006	110,489	126,365	236,854
2007			

Source: The Immigration Office of the Republic of Korea (www.immigration.go.kr)

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6. Ethnic Korean Brides and Experiences in Ethnic Homeland

Like their male counterparts, these ethnic Korean return migrants in South Korea experience status degradation, discrimination, and alienation. This makes them to reconsider their notion of ethnic homeland. Behind these transnational marriages of Korean Chinese women to South Korean men are economic aspirations. Chosŏnjok brides are motivated to leave their villages and marry to South Koreans out of a sense of independence, adventure, entrepreneurialism, and longing to lead a ‘modern’ life in a ‘developed’ country (Freeman 2004: 97). As seen in the cinemas and television dramas that deal with romantic love relations between South Korean males and ethnic Korean females of China and Uzbekistan, South Korean society shows its strong desires toward ethnic Korean women overseas in the dream or imagination that somehow these women would save the nation’s males losers. Mantak is a poor farmer and there is no woman who wants to marry him in South Korea. However, for

North Korean defectors or Uzbek Korean woman such as Lara, Mantaek's being South Korean citizen becomes an attraction.

As in other cases of international marriages, such marriages are between South Korean males who are low in social/economic status – manual workers and farmers – and for that reason who have difficulties in finding marriage partners domestically. From the perspective of these foreign brides, South Korea is a relatively wealthy country and they expect that by marrying South Koreans they can improve their economic status and can provide their family members with opportunities of migration. For others they come to South Korea to work as waitresses, kitchen aids at restaurants. Overall, more females migrate to South Korea than males. These foreign workers and imported brides form an important part of the ethnic return migration of Korea.

Later in Korea, Mr. Jang takes his wife to balling hall and teaches her how to play. He says: “We South Korean males should patiently teach them (because we are locals here and they are from foreign country).” The perspective of this documentary is very much South Korea-centred. Korean Uzbek brides learn Korean in South Korea while their husbands are at work.

Many young Korean women of these countries also desire to marry South Koreans. Some of them come to Korea only to make money through the scheme of international marriage to enter into South Korea legally.

South Korean males show a patriarchal attitude that their Korean Chinese spouses should accept the same national perspective as their husbands. Because of this, the Chosonjok wives experience identity crisis while experencing loss and disappointment (Choe 2005: 344). South Korean mothers know it very well that the fact that their sons marry to Korean Chinese women means that their sons are inferior

figures in South Korea. This sense of inferiority also makes them to disregard and discriminate their Korean Chinese daughters-in-law (Choe 2005: 246). Meanwhile the South Korean males who marry to Korean Chinese bride tends to think that China is inferior to South Korea in terms of economic development and political democracy, and thus their Korean Chinese wives are lucky that they could marry to South Korea. Therefore, they themselves are “saviours” who rescued their Korean Chinese wives from China’s harsh environment, and they tend not to pay attention to their wives’ unhappiness (Choe 2005: 344).

Korean Chinese wives also worry if their children might be discriminated at school if her identity (as a Korean Chinese) should be revealed (Choe 2005: 349).

Caren Freeman (2004) documents that some Korean Chinese women have hardly found their dreams of hypergamy satisfied in the South Korean countryside. Most of Korean Chinese complain that life in rural South Korea is very harsh for them. Freeman observes: “many believed they were no better off by marrying to South Korea – the work being too difficult, the standards of living too low, and the expectations of their husbands too high” (Freeman 2004: 91).

“Ultimately, the ambiguities and contradictions surrounding the notion of ethnic homogeneity not only call into question official discourses that celebrate these transnational marriages in metaphors of national reunification, but also provoke Chosŏnjok and South Koreans to reevaluate their own conceptions of national belongings.” (Freeman 2004: 97).

In the *Human Theatre*, both men suffer from the cultural differences between themselves and Korean Uzbek girls. The narration goes that “the cultural difference

was a shock to them.” The Korean males have never been to opera theatre while the Korean Uzbek girls have frequently enjoyed theatrical arts. The theatre-going course, which was a part of the dating programme arranged by the match-making agent, is the most difficult course for the Korean males as they have never been to theatre before. This is a class difference rather than cultural difference.



Table. Decline of ethnic Korean brides from China

7. Conclusion

Nearly half of the international marriages in South Korea today are between South Korean males and ethnic Korean females from China and the former Soviet Union. These women are an important part of ethnic return migrations to South Korea that has occurred in the last fifteen years. Media, particularly electronic media such as television and cinema, are important in developing and reinforcing national consciousness not only within the territories of nation-states but also beyond national

territories toward overseas nationals. There are numerous media depictions of overseas Koreans and in particular ethnic Korean women of China, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. Cinemas such as *Innocent Steps* and *Wedding Campaign* and television dramas such as *A Pure-hearted Nineteen-year-old* and *Hanoi Bride* depict ethnic Korean brides from China and other former communist countries as innocent, pure, and non-materialistic, which are the feminine values nationally desired in contemporary South Korea, but are considered lamentably rare among South Korean women today.

Far from being materialistic or opportunistic, the female protagonists in these stories eagerly love South Korean males, regardless of the fact that these males are not desirable, and actually are "losers" within the competitive society of South Korea. These films show the widely shared wish of South Koreans that their society can be revived by the "pure, innocent, and strong" ethnic Koreans from the former socialist and less developed countries such as China, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

South Koreans tend to view that Korean Chinese are 'pure' and 'innocent' while they have lost such traditional Korean values while building the modern industries of South Korea. This dichotomy of tradition-bearing Korean Chinese and tradition-breaking South Koreans implies different roles for each group in national community. It is implied that Korean Chinese would keep the old Korean tradition while South Korea would innovate technologies and develop the national economy. In this respect, such 'pure' Korean females are highly valued as spouses for South Korean males, particularly those who are not desired by materialistic South Korean women regardless of their good personalities. But, they are the ones who worked hard in their profession. These male losers are rescued by their female lovers (ethnic

Koreans from China and Uzbekistan or even North Korea) through the redemptive love of the latter. [6]

In any case, ethnic return migration does not happen only in the side of returnees, but it is also called by host society. Such a widely spread myth on ethnic Korean women of China and Uzbekistan not only helps ethnic return migration, it also boosts “de-territorialized nationalism.” The “redemptive love” that South Korean society long for is a reflection of the national worries for the future of the national economy. South Korean perceptions on overseas Koreans are somewhat similar to the “Orientalism” that Edward Said showed in his study of the Western view of the Orient in the modern era. According to Said, Europe was merely fashioning an antipodal point of reference for itself by bringing into existence the conceptual category of the “Orient.” Thus, Europe could establish its own identity, against that of Asia, and justify its own hegemonic sense of culture and social superiority (Said 1978). Through the nationalist discourse, domestic Koreans have utilized overseas Koreans to provide themselves with hope when the former were in dire situation, viewing the latter as a source for help. At the same time, domestic Koreans have used overseas Koreans to define themselves as proud and civilized members of the Korean nation against the latter, considering that overseas brothers are the objects of the former’s guide.

Nonetheless, host society’s such nostalgic and idealistic expectations for ethnic return migration (or ethnic Koreans from less developed countries) do not fit to the realities.

Ethnic Korean brides from China experience higher level of dissatisfaction, and the divorce rate is high.

In this regard, the case of transnational marriages as the ethnic return migration to a certain degree fits into the general trend of the negative experiences of returnees in their ancestral homeland (Tsuda 2004, Song 2007). Viewing transnational marriages from the imagination of host society sheds light on the new global trend of ethnic return migrations.

Park Heh-ran (1996) criticised the South Korean government-initiated “movements for aiding rural bachelors’ marriage” program as an “international trafficking of women” (1996:127-30).

Endnotes

[1] Media is important in making modern nation as Anderson (1983) emphasized. Especially, the role of electronic media – television and cinema -- is stressed by Appadurai (1996:161) in the development of national as well as translational community.

[2] In the original storyline Lara is an ethnic Korean from Uzbekistan. Later, however, the film director changed her to be a North Korean defector in Uzbekistan, who is in search for an opportunity to go to South Korea. [Source: web].

[3] Korean Chinese intellectuals also shared a similar belief that they can contribute to the unification of their divided homelands (*cf.* Kim 2001b; Chǒng 1996). One of such contributions is their helping dispersed families of South and North Korea to meet in China. Such hopes and expectations were reinforced by South Korean historiography which acclaims the anti-Japanese struggles of Korean Chinese during the colonial period.

[4] In the documentary one of the two male protagonists, Kwang-tae, states that Korean women of Uzbekistan are “not materialistic as contemporary Korean women are.” (Nochonggak Ujübek Kada, KBS documentary *Human Theatre*, 2002).

[5] Recently there was a report that a Vietnamese wife of a Korean farmer in Chungghong Province became the leader of village women’s association.

[6] This shows somewhat uncertain future of the nation.

[10] International and domestic marriage migrations cause a shortage of brides in more remote rural regions in China. → See (1) Fan, C. Cindy and Youquin Huang. 1998. “Waves of Rural brides : female marriage migration in China” *Annals of the Association of American geographers* 88/2: 227-51; (2) Gilmartin, Christina, and Lin Tan\ . 2002. “Fleeing Poverty: Rural Women, Expanding Marriage markets, and Strategies fpr Social Mobility in Contemporary china” in *Transforming Gender and Development in East Asia*. Esther Nganling Chow ed. Pp 203-16. New York: Routledge. Caren Freeman also states that the marriage of Chosonjok women into South Korea created a shortage of Korean brides for Chosonjok men in China, who have looked to North Korea as a possible source of marriage partners. Marriages between women in China and men in South Korea began in the 1990s. The annual rate increased each year until 1997, with 1,463 such marriages in 1993; 7,683 in 1995; and over 10,000 in 1996. In 1997, the number dropped to just over 7,000, and in 1998 decreased again to just over 6,000. → all from Freeman, Caren. 2005. “Marrying up and marrying down: the paradox of marital mobility for Chosonjok brides in South Korea”, pp.81-100 in Nicole Constable ed. *Cross Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

[12] In this drama Li Tibu is a half-Korean Vietnamese girl who was borne between a South Korean soldier and Vietnamese woman. In the post-war Vietnam they were called *Lai Dai Han* and were a target of resentment.

[put in appropriate place] The growing cosmetic surgeries industries and related beauty industries in cities such as Yanbian show the scale of the popularity of international marriages. Their male counterparts, of course, consider that their women are taken by South Korean males, and they tend grow resentments towards the latter.

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