

# **Women Marriage Immigrants in Korea: Immigration Process and Adaptation\***

Dong-Hoon Seol

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Chonbuk National University

## **I. Introduction**

A steep increase of international marriages between immigrant women and Korean men is observable in today's Korean society, on which the study aims to give a systematic analysis. Specifically, the study attempts to scrutinize the lives of couples of international marriage, an assessment on their medical and social welfare needs, and recommend government policies on the matter.

The study was conducted during the period from December 2004 to June 2005. Research methodologies used in the study include data analysis, interviews with female marriage based immigrants (hereafter "marriage immigrants") in Korea and cross-border marriage agencies both in their home countries and in Korea, research on welfare policies for marriage immigrants of Japan and Taiwan, literature review and expert interviews.

Surveys on female marriage immigrants were conducted during three weeks from May 23rd to June 12th, 2005. The questionnaires encouraged the participation of both the female immigrants and their husbands, as the family was used as the unit of analysis in the study. A total of 1,082 responses were gathered, surpassing the targeted number of a thousand. Among the total, 137 responses were excluded from the data analysis as they had been filled out only by the husbands. Among the 945 responses finally

---

\* The earlier version of this paper was presented at the 9th lunch seminar in 2005, organized by the Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies (CAPAS), Academia Sinica, Taiwan, December 16, 2005.

analyzed, 27 respondents participated in the in-depth interviews. The process included their husbands and families-in-law, as well as the female immigrants themselves.

**Table 1. International Marriage in Korea, Number of Cases and Rates, 1990-2004**

Year	Total Marriage Cases	Unit: cases, %					
		International marriage		Foreign wives		Foreign husbands	
		Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
1990	399,312	4,710	1.2	619	0.2	4,091	1.0
1991	416,872	5,012	1.2	663	0.2	4,349	1.0
1992	419,774	5,534	1.3	2,057	0.5	3,477	0.8
1993	402,593	6,545	1.6	3,109	0.8	3,436	0.9
1994	393,121	6,616	1.7	3,072	0.8	3,544	0.9
1995	398,484	13,494	3.4	10,365	2.6	3,129	0.8
1996	434,911	15,946	3.7	12,647	2.9	3,299	0.8
1997	388,591	12,448	3.2	9,266	2.4	3,182	0.8
1998	375,616	12,188	3.2	8,054	2.1	4,134	1.1
1999	362,673	10,570	2.9	5,775	1.6	4,795	1.3
2000	334,030	12,319	3.7	7,304	2.2	5,015	1.5
2001	320,063	15,234	4.8	10,006	3.1	5,228	1.6
2002	306,573	15,913	5.2	11,017	3.6	4,896	1.6
2003	304,932	25,658	8.4	19,214	6.3	6,444	2.1
2004	310,944	35,447	11.4	25,594	8.2	9,853	3.2
1990-2004	5,568,489	197,634	3.5	128,762	2.3	68,872	1.2

Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Population Dynamics (Marriage and Divorce). <http://kosis.nso.go.kr>.

From June 1st to 6th, 2005, researchers visited Shenyang, China, to conduct a field study on the process of gathering brides-to-be, conditions of the agencies, and the local perception on the migration to Korea for cross-border marriages. Six cross-border marriage agents were interviewed in China and 24 in Korea on how they operate and what their realities are.

**Table 2. Countries of Origin of the Female Marriage Immigrants,  
April 2005**

Countries of origin	Unit: persons, %					
	Total foreign wives		Foreign citizens not-naturalized		Korean citizens naturalized since 2002	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
Total	66,912	100.0	55,964	100.0	10,948	100.0
Korean Chinese	31,739	47.4	24,681	44.1	7,058	64.5
Chinese	11,577	17.3	9,721	17.4	1,856	17.0
Japanese	7,097	10.6	7,076	12.6	21	0.2
Filipinas	5,457	8.2	3,692	6.6	1,765	16.1
Vietnamese	4,675	7.0	4,592	8.2	83	0.8
Thais	1,364	2.0	1,340	2.4	24	0.2
Mongolians	1,072	1.6	1,055	1.9	17	0.2
Russians	950	1.4	933	1.7	17	0.2
Other CIS countries and Eastern Europe	1,190	1.8	1,161	2.1	29	0.3
Other Asian developing countries	595	0.9	549	1.0	46	0.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	35	0.1	28	0.1	7	0.1
Latin America	140	0.2	124	0.2	16	0.1
Other advanced countries	1,021	1.5	1,012	1.8	9	0.1

Source: Ministry of Justice, Database (2005).

## II. Globalization and Women's Marriage Migration

A woman's marriage may seem to be made by her own choice, but actually there operates a wider power of influences on her decision to travel abroad for marriage: the social realities of both the country of origin and the destination country, the structure of the global economy including the matchmaking agencies, and interactions between the two concerned governments. Therefore, the study points out the following as factors contributing to the increase of cross-border marriages, and sheds light on (1) the uneven development among countries in the global economy which consequently encouraged the commercialization of women, (2) the country of origin's patriarchal culture and government that seem indifferent or

covertly encourage female migration in order to find a solution to the country's poverty and unemployment, (3) the same of the destination country that promote such migration as a way to solve its lack of young female population for marriage, and (4) the marriage agencies that benefit from the aforementioned structural problems.

## **1. Global System**

As the gap between the developed and developing economies grows wider, exploitation by males from developed economies of women in the latter is increasing. In developing countries, where poverty and unemployment are chronic, women are migrating to rich countries for marriage as a way to improve the lives of hers and her family. They are directly influenced in many ways by the complicated global phenomenon of gender and migration. A woman in this structure plays the role of a breadwinner for her family in her hometown and for her family-in-law, the role of a wife and mother in her marriage, and has a complex status as a citizen of both countries.

## **2. Conditions in the Countries of Origin**

In developing countries with desperate economy, many women dream of an international marriage to the USA, Japan, Korea or Taiwan, wishing to move up to a higher social rank. One of the most fundamental reasons for such a marriage is poverty. For low-income women in those countries, it is a much cheaper option to marry abroad than to seek for employment as migrant workers.

Many of the governments are actively promoting labour migration and are paying indifferent eyes on cross-border marriages of their female citizens - two types of migration considered as important sources of foreign currency flow. Such a response of the governments gives a very hospitable environment for international marriage agencies to expand their businesses.

**Table 3. Sex Ratios by Age and Place of Residence, 1960-2000**

Age	Year	Total	Urban	Rural	
				<i>Eup</i>	<i>Myeon</i>
Aged 20-24	1960	106.50	100.49	101.63	110.23
	1970	106.06	92.81	104.94	125.80
	1980	104.12	89.49	109.72	151.61
	1990	109.15	96.55	124.37	187.70
	2000	111.44	105.84	122.66	161.82
Aged 25-29	1960	92.00	83.10	87.46	97.31
	1970	99.04	99.63	93.04	99.57
	1980	99.98	98.00	97.87	108.05
	1990	99.46	96.49	99.23	123.15
	2000	100.87	98.46	98.61	130.72
Aged 30-34	1960	87.68	85.96	85.12	89.05
	1970	102.25	109.05	100.82	95.70
	1980	105.53	105.79	106.15	104.44
	1990	103.77	102.70	107.09	109.43
	2000	102.13	100.61	102.80	117.60
Aged 35-39	1960	94.29	99.54	93.50	91.72
	1970	97.44	103.77	98.59	91.86
	1980	102.83	107.34	103.66	92.40
	1990	106.13	105.72	111.55	105.60
	2000	102.32	100.16	112.65	114.21

Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census, annual.  
<http://kosis.nso.go.kr>.

### 3. Korea's Marriage Market and Legal System

Traditionally preferring boys over girls, Koreans have been conducting illegal sex tests on fetuses that more than often lead to feticide. As a result, there is a serious imbalance between males and females of marriageable age. In addition, increases in high-level education and women's economic activities are delaying marriages. All of these are disturbing the marriage market. Marriage immigrants are demanded under such circumstances in Korea. Considering the difficulties in the domestic marriage market,

Koreans increasingly agree to the trend though they still may not think it desirable.

The Nationality Act, the Departures and Arrivals Control Act, and related laws on social welfare provide a systemic footing for a marriage immigrant to legally stay and lead a life in Korea. However, there remains the problem that they as well as other immigrants in Korea are treated the same as foreigners temporarily visiting Korea unless they become a naturalized Korean citizen.

#### **4. International Marriage Brokerage Agencies**

Most international marriages are made by the facilitation of specialized brokerage agencies. In many cases, their jobs are to connect their clients across borders and to take care of necessary documentations for marriage and migration. Some of the agencies, however, would cheat the clients for money with false information, or dare to forge documents and bribe officers. International marriage agency is a highly profitable business. Systemic regulations are required so that the agencies become responsible in doing their business.

### **III. Process and Economic Aspects of Cross-Border Marriage**

#### **1. Demographic Backgrounds**

The average age of couples of cross-border marriages is 34 for females and 41 for males, resulting in a seven years age gap on average. Of the participant-couples, 34% had age gap of ten years or more. The specific percentages, according to the nationalities of the wives are as follow: 72% of the Vietnamese, 60% of the Mongolians, 57% of the participants from the CIS countries, 37% of the Chinese. In case of marriages made through international marriage agencies, 60% of the husbands are older than the wives ten years or more.

The majority of the couples both husband and wife were high school

graduates. About 15% of the participants were both college graduates or completed higher education. Three quarters of the couples of cross-border marriages lived in cities. While most couples with Chinese females were found to be concentrated in cities, couples of other nationalities, females from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam were found to reside in rural areas.

Couples of Chinese Hans reported the most family breakdowns. 28% of them were either divorced or separated, followed by 14% of the ethnic Korean Chinese respondents. Considering that breakdown cases were not easy to be identified under the current study, a more complicated survey and research is required on the matter.

Many couples were found living with the family of the husband: 14% of the couples in cities and 45% of the couples in rural areas. This implies care work of the immigrant women for the family-in-law and more specifically, for the elderly, which requires supportive policies of the government.

## **2. Immigration Process to Korea**

In the 1980s, international marriage migration started with Japanese women of Moon's Unification Church. Marriage migration of Chinese women, both ethnic Koreans and Chinese Hans, increased since 1992. Other nationalities were added: Filipinas, Thais and Mongolians since mid-1990s; Vietnamese and women from the CIS countries since the late 1990s. Though 77% of female migrations have been for marriage and the remaining 23% for employment, marriages between Korean men and immigrant women already residing in Korea are recently increasing as well, especially in urban areas.

Two thirds of marriage immigrants had an already established social network in Korea before entering the country. It was relatives for ethnic Korean Chinese while it meant friends for people of other nationalities.

## **3. Marriage Process**

Couples of cross-border marriage meet each other the first time by

being introduced by their acquaintances or through personal interactions, religious associations, or marriage agencies. Introduction by acquaintances was the most popular way for ethnic Korean Chinese and Chinese Han women. Chinese Hans and Mongolians met their counterparts by personal interactions, while Japanese, Filipinas and Thais mostly met through religious associations. Most Vietnamese, Mongolians and peoples from the CIS countries utilized marriage agencies.

How they met each other decided whether they had to pay for the matchmaking. In most cases with marriage agencies, 94%, a fee was paid to the agencies: 50% by the husbands, 18% by the migrant wives, and 14% by both of them. Of the marriages, 45% were made through religious associations that also made a payment, showing the commercialization of such marriage even in the religious realm.

How they met each other also determined how many times the couples could see each other before marriage. A large number of couples reported that they had never seen each other before marriage: 27% of cases through religious associations and 17% of cases through marriage agencies.

The marriages were either their first marriage for both husband and wife - or not. The result was not irrelevant to the women's nationalities: 25% of Chinese Hans, 23% of ethnic Korean Chinese and 21% of Mongolians answered that the marriage was not their first one for both of the couple. Overall, 30% of the Korean husbands answered that the marriage was not their first one.

The predominant reasons for migrant wives to make up their minds to get married to a Korean man were first, "economic reasons" (41%) and second, because they "loved the husband" (37%). Among those who got married through marriage agencies, 73% of the women pointed out "economic reasons" the most.

More than one fifth of the wives said that the information on their husband they had received before marriage was not true. The majority of such experiences come from the couples made through marriage agencies



with the percentage of 44%. Therefore critical problems of cross-border marriage are mostly rising from the cases of marriage agencies. Regulations and monitoring over such agencies are vitally required.

**Table 4. How Much Different Female Immigrants View Premarital Information from Reality**

Unit: persons, %

	Introduction by family or friends (460)	A dating agency (119)	A religious organization (142)	Direct contact without a mediator (150)	Others (52)
More than 90%	26.3	27.7	23.9	34.0	25.0
70-80%	33.9	16.8	31.0	36.7	30.8
50%	18.9	11.8	28.2	14.0	23.1
20-30%	12.8	11.8	7.7	13.3	11.5
Less than 10%	8.0	31.9	9.2	2.0	9.6
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 5. Contents of Information Different from Reality**

Unit: persons, %

	Introduction by family or friends (217)	A dating agency (67)	A religious organization (44)	Direct contact without a mediator (67)	Others (21)
Family members (children)	29.7	25.0	31.4	20.4	30.0
Assets of husband (housing)	34.2	54.4	26.5	35.7	10.5
Occupation of husband	33.3	43.9	50.0	25.0	10.5
Husband's education background	19.2	17.3	38.9	12.5	5.6
Income level of husband	47.7	49.2	45.9	32.1	10.5
Husband's state of health (handicap)	24.7	40.4	39.4	4.1	16.7
Husband's character	57.1	59.7	56.8	35.8	57.1
Others	35.0	25.0	41.2	54.2	69.2

#### **4. Women's Economic Status in Country of Origin**

Women of cross-border marriages are mostly from the middle-class rather than the low income families. Their age and previous marriage experiences are related to the fact that whether or not they had been the primary provider of the family in their country of origin. That is, the older a migrant woman is, or if she had been married before, the more likely she is to have been the breadwinner for her family. 91% of migrant wives had been employed previously in their country of origin.

#### **5. Immigrant Women's Economic Activities in Korea**

In total, 60% of the marriage immigrant women answered that they jobs, which is higher than the statistics for Korean women (51%), which was officially announced in May 2005. Almost half of the respondents (52%) were working at restaurants, followed by 14% working at factories, and 13% teaching or running their own business. More percentage of ethnic Korean Chinese were found to work at restaurants than any other nationalities. The latter would work at factories if they lived in urban areas or work as manual workers if they lived in rural areas, as many as they worked at restaurants.

Marriage immigrant women work 47 hours a week on average, which is slightly more than that of Korean women. This is because more immigrant women work at restaurants where they have to work longer than in other jobs. 70% of the women work more than 40 hours a week on average, whereas the figure for the ethnic Korean Chinese slightly grows to 73%.

The average income of the marriage immigrant women was 1.4 million Korean won, and this time again, the figure was slightly higher for the ethnic Korean Chinese with 1.5 million won. As seen before, this is because of the longer working hours of ethnic Korean Chinese. There was no significant difference between the wages per hour of the whole population and the ethnic Korean Chinese: 13,000 won and 12,000 won, respectively. However, women of other nationalities would have professional jobs such as teaching, which led the average wage per hour slightly higher than that of

the ethnic Korean Chinese at 15,000 won.

Most of the women's Korean husbands were in favor of their wives having jobs. The women pointed out economic needs as a reason to have a job: to make a living for the family (26%), to contribute to earning a living (25%), and to compensate children's educational expenses (17%). A majority of 21% of the women answered long working hours as one of the biggest difficulties caused by having a job, closely followed by raising the children (18%) and discrimination and prejudice against foreigners (12%). With considerations for the fact that 70% of the marriage immigrant women with jobs were working for economic reasons; women in rural areas felt more burden in managing their work with raising the children. This suggests that the need to develop public child care or after school services is more urgently required in rural areas.

Policies to address discrimination and prejudice against other nationalities should be constructively developed as well. Immigrant women showed a very strong will to work: 88% of those currently with jobs wished to continue work henceforth, and 93% of those currently without jobs wished to work in the future. Obstacles to immigrant women having a job were "raising children" (43%), "difficulties in finding a suitable work" (21%), and "poor at the Korean language" (10%).

## **IV. Marriage Life**

### **1. Characteristics of Marriage and Family Values**

62% of cross-border marriages are first marriages. In 2002, the statistics for Korean marriages in general were 77.7% first marriages and 22.3% others. This shows that more second marriages or others can be found among cross-border marriages than in general. 39% of couples of cross-border marriages were found to live by themselves, and 19.6% living with the family of husbands.

Giving 100 points to the idea that husband and wife should equally share family duties or household duties, the couples were found to be

comparatively progressive than the general public in Korea: 85 points for female respondents and 82 for males. However, women of Japanese nationality had more traditional standpoint regarding patriarchal values, issues such as divorce, sharing of duties, etc. Women of Mongolian and Chinese Han nationalities put higher values on the authority of the family head.

## **2. Quality of Married Life**

90% of the respondent couples used Korean for communication. 53% of the Filipinas used English as well as Korean. Vietnamese and Thai women were less fluent at Korean compared to other nationalities. 9% of the Vietnamese wives answered that they hardly have conversations between husband and wife. Very rarely could husbands speak the language of wives. The women gave 70 points for their Korean on average, but evaluated their husbands' ability to speak their mother tongues as 31 points.

Married couples and cohabiting couples combined, their level of satisfaction with the couple's life was 74 points on average, which is higher compared to that of Korean couples. 41% of marriage immigrants answered that they rarely have quarrels and 8% answered once a week. Vietnamese and Filipina women reported less quarrels than any other nationalities. The most popular causes of such quarrels were different personal characteristics (33.4%), followed by different way of life (22%), economic reasons (12%) and drinking problems (11%). Many of the women (30%) talk to their friends of the same nationalities over problems of their marriage, and 19% talk to families and relatives. However, 15% answered that they talk to no one over such matters. As many as 40% of the respondents that experienced divorce reported that they had no one to ask for help when their marriage had been in trouble.

**Table 6. Domestic Violence by Marital Status within the Past One Year**

	Unit: persons, %					
	Total	Married	Separated	Divorced	Living together without being married	Widowed
	(921)	(755)	(76)	(38)	(32)	(20)
Teasing by verbal abuse	31.0	24.1	84.2	68.4	22.6	30.0
Threatening of physical violence	18.4	11.1	74.7	50.0	16.1	26.3
Throwing things	23.7	19.5	60.5	52.6	3.1	20.0
Pushing aggressively	13.9	7.6	57.6	52.6	6.3	26.3
Kicking or slapping	13.5	8.1	48.7	57.9	0.0	20.0
Coercion of sexual intercourse without agreement	14.0	6.9	63.2	47.4	21.9	20.0
Coercion of unwanted abnormal sexual intercourse	9.5	3.4	47.4	42.1	15.6	20.0
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2=224.859$ ,  $p<0.000$ **Table 7. Domestic Violence by Type of Marriage within the Past One Year**

	Unit: persons, %				
	Total	Both first-marriage	Husband first-marriage and wife re-marriage	Husband re-marriage and wife first-marriage	Both re-marriage
	(930)	(575)	(74)	(127)	(155)
Teasing by verbal abuse	31.0	23.5	43.8	37.8	47.1
Threatening of physical violence	18.6	11.8	27.4	28.6	31.6
Throwing things	23.7	18.8	27.0	31.0	34.2
Pushing aggressively	13.7	7.7	21.9	22.8	24.5
Kicking or slapping	13.3	7.1	21.9	27.8	20.0
Coercion of sexual intercourse without agreement	13.9	8.0	26.0	27.0	19.4
Coercion of unwanted abnormal sexual intercourse	9.5	4.5	20.5	21.4	12.9
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 8. Domestic Violence by Country of Origin within the Past One Year**

	Unit: persons, %									
	Total (948)	Korean Chinese (449)	Chinese (164)	Japanese (101)	Filipinas (78)	Vietnamese (66)	Thais (20)	Mongolians (15)	Russians (30)	Others (25)
Teasing by verbal abuse	30.5	25.7	57.3	29.0	20.8	9.1	47.4	26.7	26.7	26.9
Threatening of physical violence	18.4	15.1	41.7	13.9	11.7	9.1	15.8	20.0	6.9	4.0
Throwing things	23.5	19.2	37.8	34.7	14.3	4.5	30.0	20.0	26.7	34.6
Pushing aggressively	13.4	11.6	25.8	8.0	13.0	1.5	21.1	13.3	17.2	8.0
Kicking or slapping	13.1	12.1	21.5	14.0	6.5	6.1	10.5	13.3	13.8	12.0
Coercion of sexual intercourse without agreement	13.8	12.3	31.3	11.0	9.1	4.5	5.3	.0	3.4	4.0
Coercion of unwanted abnormal sexual intercourse	9.3	6.9	28.0	2.0	7.7	1.5	.0	.0	3.3	4.0
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

31% of the respondents reported being verbally abused by their husband within the past one year, and 10 to 14% reported physical abuses. These figures were much higher among those who are currently separated or divorced: 70% to 80% experienced verbal abuses and 50% experienced physical abuses. Over 40% of them experienced forced sex by their husband.

Vietnamese wives showed the lowest rate of abuse experiences, less than 10% in all types of abuses. Only about 10% of those experienced abuses have reported domestic violence to the police. Those who did not answer, their reasons for not reporting to the police were “to maintain their marriage” (20%), “did not know how to report” (14%), “thought the police would not be helpful in handling the problem” (13%) and “feared they might lose their status in Korea” (10%). About 13% to 14% of the respondents have used services such as hotlines for women or help service for immigrant women, but the level of satisfaction is not that high. 20% to

40% answered it had been helpful, while 30% to 50% answered it had not been of any help at all. 34% of the respondents have given serious thoughts over divorce, and pointed out the most important reasons why they could not divorce as children and their status in Korea.

### **3. Parents-Children Relationships**

49.5% of the respondents were living with children and 41% had children from the current marriage with their husband. Among 229 immigrant women whose marriages in Korea were their second one, 88.2% had children from their previous marriages. Only 16.6% of them were living with the children in Korea. Among those who left their children in their home countries, 144 (75.4%) showed their willingness to bring them to Korea, and pointed out the complicated legal procedures as being the biggest obstacles in doing so (45%).

Among those immigrant women raising preschoolers, only 14.5% send their children to daycare centers or preschools, which is radically lower than the rate of 56.8% of Korean households. Expensive private education and cost of childcare are two serious problems that immigrant women face in raising children in Korea. 17.6% of them reported that their children had experienced organized shunning from their peer groups. Children of immigrant women in rural areas were found to be more likely to have such experience than those in the cities.

64.3% of immigrant women have conversation with their children over daily matters everyday. Mothers of Japanese and Filipina nationalities were found to have better communications with their children than ethnic Korean Chinese or Chinese Han mothers. When the children are not from the women's own marriage, such communication rates were significantly dropped down: 39% of the mothers had no conversation with the children, and 55% answered that they did not help the children with their homework.

Overall, 60% to 70% of the respondents answered that they were satisfied with their relationships to the children. This was more so in cases of

Thai and Filipina mothers and less so in cases of Japanese and Chinese Han mothers. The women were more satisfied with the conversations with the children than their attitudes or achievements at school.

#### 4. Relationships to the In-Laws and Relatives

58% of the respondents were having difficulties in communicating in Korean and understanding the Korean ways of thinking, value systems and lifestyles. The majority of immigrant women reported difficulties in their relationships between their parents-in-law. 76% of the women have phone calls with their families in hometown once a week, or once or twice a month. 6.5% answered that they talked over the phone with their families in their home country everyday. Ethnic Korean Chinese had more frequent communications with their families from hometowns than any other ethnic groups.

Dining out was the most popular family gatherings than any other activities such as family trip or cultural activities among participating families: 57.2% of the families dine out at least once or twice a month. While 23% of the families in urban areas answered that they had cultural activities once or twice a month, the rate was 12% to 13% for families in rural areas.

**Table 9. Average Monthly Household Income**

Household income	Total (945)		Korean Chinese (340)		Other foreign wives (605)	
	Won	%	Won	%	Won	%
Earned income	966,009	64.8	1,143,340	67.7	805,845	61.5
Wives	(415,677)	(27.9)	(507,629)	(30.0)	332,627	(25.4)
Husbands	(529,773)	(35.5)	(616,353)	(36.5)	451,574	(34.5)
Others	(20,559)	(1.4)	(19,357)	(1.1)	1,644	(1.7)
Income assistance or support	13,563	0.9	5,155	0.3	20,832	1.5
Government	(7,555)	(0.5)	(4,864)	(0.3)	9,986	(0.8)
Family or civil society	(6,008)	(0.4)	(651)	(0.0)	10,847	(0.8)
Income from assets	24,894	1.7	23,881	1.4	25,808	2.0
Income from social insurance	15,156	1.0	15,508	0.9	14,839	1.1
Other income	470,758	31.5	501,266	29.7	443,203	33.8
Total income	1,490,380	100.0	1,689,511	100.0	1,310,528	100.0



## V. Social Welfare Needs

### 1. Economic Conditions

As is the case for typical households, an earned income was the primary source of income for households of cross-border marriage. The earned income took up 64.8% of their total income, while only 0.5% was taken by supplementary living allowances from the government. It can be concluded that the current public welfare system rarely supports households of female marriage immigrants.

### 2. Poverty of Marriage Immigrant Households

More than half the households of female marriage immigrants, 52.9% of the participants were found to have a household income less than the official minimum cost of living. What is worse, the figure increases to 57.5% when considering only households with children younger than 18 years old. That is to say, an absolute majority of children who live with migrant mothers do not enjoy the minimum standard of living in Korea, showing serious shortfalls of the social security net of the country.

**Table 10. Experience of Skipping Meals or Cutting down Food Expenses for Financial Reasons during the Past One Year**

Unit: persons, %

	Total (907)	Korean Chinese (302)	Other foreigners (605)
Every month	4.5	2.8	6.1
For several months	2.6	2.8	2.4
For one or two months	8.4	5.0	11.5
Seldom / Never	84.5	89.5	80.0
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0

The survey also showed that 15.5% of the households of female marriage immigrants had the experience of skipping meals for economical reasons. The experience proved how serious poverty those households put

up with. Those women also have problem with housing. Many of the female immigrants did not enjoy basic facilities such as bathroom. 24.3% of the female respondents answered that they were dissatisfied with their housing conditions. Overall, many households of female marriage immigrants do not enjoy proper housing or diet, and suffer from serious poverty; requiring active response on the matter from the Korean society.

### 3. Social Welfare Services

According to the research, the existing social welfare system was observed to be not operating properly. Most of the marriage immigrant women rarely use public services such as county offices, nor private ones, including social welfare facilities or counseling services for marriage immigrant women. One of the most significant reasons for this weak use of services is because the women simply do not know of the services and facilities. This suggests a huge loophole in the promotion of public services in Korea.

**Table 11. International Marriage Support Programs Participated in**

Unit: %

	Total		Korean Chinese		Other foreigners	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Public assistance (living support)	10.2	89.8	3.9	96.1	16.7	83.3
Medical assistance	11.6	88.4	7.3	92.7	16.2	83.8
Good assistance (food, clothes, etc.)	7.2	92.8	2.9	97.1	11.8	88.2
Homecare service (cleaning, laundry, etc.)	5.9	94.1	3.6	96.4	8.4	91.6
Meal delivery service	16.3	83.7	9.9	90.1	23.3	76.7
Housing service (home repair, painting, etc.)	12.0	88.0	4.5	95.2	19.7	80.3
Employment counseling, job training, job referral	12.9	87.1	7.2	92.8	18.8	81.2
Counseling (problems, mental health issues, etc.)	9.7	90.3	8.1	91.9	11.5	88.5
Alcohol and other drug counseling	4.4	95.6	1.6	98.4	7.4	92.6
Abuse or family violence counseling	7.5	92.5	6.6	93.4	8.4	91.6
Education for understanding conjugal/family relationship	8.6	91.4	2.4	97.6	15.0	85.0
Parenting skills training	8.5	91.5	3.0	97.0	14.3	85.7
Cultural adjustment training or education	22.4	77.6	7.6	92.4	36.6	63.4

Secondly, even the small number of women using those services does not seem to be satisfied. Especially for the ethnic Korean Chinese, the women answered all 13 types of services were not helpful. This implies that the government should pay more attention in developing demand-oriented services when targeting marriage immigrant women as well as putting more efforts on the promotion of those services.

#### **4. Social Security System for Minimum Standard of Living**

It is already shown that very few cross-border marriage households are benefiting from supplementary living allowances despite the fact that over half of such households suffer from absolute poverty. Social security system for minimum standard of living does not operate for the needy families when they were of marriage immigrant women.

The reasons for such a policy failure are as follows. First, more than half do not even know such a social security system, with only 7.8% having sought for the benefits. In addition, their nationality arose as a barrier when seeking for benefits that were expected. 55.0% of those families that had failed to get the allowances for minimum standard of living reported that their economic hardships worsened after that. Not only was the system poorly known among households of marriage migration, but they were likely to fail to meet the eligibility.

Second, many of the immigrant women overcame the hardships by entering the job market by themselves. This implies the possibility to promote self-reliance among families of immigrant women living in poverty when accompanied with well-developed employment policies.

Alternatives to improve the social security system deserve attentions at this point. In expanding the eligibility for the minimum standard allowances to migrant marriage households, calculation methodologies - such as whether to combine properties with incomes or not bring radical differences in the budget - is required. According to the revision bill proposed by a National Assemblywoman (Choon-Jin Kim), the budget may range from 4

billion won to 75.6 billion won when only considered the income levels. The figure increases from 6.4 billion to 128.7 billion when income is combined with properties.

Considering that the system works on application basis, it is not expected that the whole immigrant women population could benefit from it. Thus, a practical estimation would be around 38.1 billion won, targeting families with children younger than 18 years old at the current rate of benefiting families.

## **VI. Medical Needs**

### **1. Utilizing the Existing Medical Delivery System**

22.5% of marriage immigrant women pay the whole amount of medical bills for their own medical needs. Especially among those of other nationalities than the ethnic Korean Chinese, over 30% of the women pay the full amount. Only around 10% get support from acquaintances or use free medical centers. One third of the whole marriage immigrant women population is not covered by the official medical welfare system. According to the survey, 23.6% of the women gave no answer to any of the medical benefits. Most of them were mistaken that foreigners were not eligible for those benefits such as medical insurances in Korea. This implies that the problem may be easily handled through primary solutions such as education and promotional policies. As there may be other obstacles hindering the women's access to the medical welfare system, a close inspection on the matter is required at the same time tackling the issues identified.

18.0% of the women had experiences within the past one year where they did not get the necessary medical assistance or had to give up treatment. While it is unquestionable that the biggest reason for this is the economic burden of medical fees, accessibility of medical services in rural areas is another important factor to take into consideration. In addition, the loss of income for quitting work and the time consuming process were raised

among the obstacles they pointed out. Thus, a detailed and client-oriented policy design is advised in the policy making process.

**Table 12. Type of Health Insurance or Medical Care Allowance Insured for the Family**

Unit: persons, %

	Total (544)	Urban		Rural	
		Korean Chinese	Other foreigners	Korean Chinese	Other foreigners
		(216)	(203)	(52)	(73)
Worker's health insurance	28.3	26.0	33.6	36.2	15.0
Regional health insurance	43.3	44.2	37.9	46.8	53.0
Medical care allowance type I	3.1	0.0	4.4	1.9	9.4
Medical care allowance type II	1.7	1.5	0.7	1.9	5.1
None	23.6	28.3	23.4	13.2	17.6
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 13. Experience of Not Getting Medical Treatment or Giving up Treatment for Financial Reasons during the Past One Year**

Unit: persons, %

	Total (702)	Urban		Rural	
		Korean Chinese	Other foreigners	Korean Chinese	Other foreigners
		(293)	(246)	(66)	(96)
Yes	18.0	17.4	19.7	14.9	17.2
No	82.0	82.6	80.3	85.1	82.8
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

## 2. Common Health Problem

Anemia was one of the most commonly found diseases among marriage immigrant women with 12.1%, followed by 10.6% with allergic disorders, 8.0% with ulcers, 5.5% with asthma, 5.1% with uterine fibroid tumor and 4.5% with high blood pressure. Immigrants except for ethnic Korean Chinese showed comparatively more cases of allergic disorders including asthma,

anemia, uterine fibroid tumor, etc. It is suggested that the health care for the immigrant women is vitally necessary for the improvement of their quality of life. In addition, critical diseases such as heart diseases and apoplexy was reported at 8.1%, which is - when simply compared - five to six times higher than that of the general public and requires a close management of the matter.

Psychiatric diseases such as melancholia and schizophrenia show low treatment rates as well: 26.0% and 32.7%, respectively. Low treatment rates are common in every pathological area including gynecological diseases (for example, 35.4% for uterine fibroid tumor) and others (32.2% for high blood pressure and 32.7% for high fat blood), suggesting the need for more proactive medical care services.

A one-way ANOVA analysis showed relationships between the aforementioned diseases and the participants' life experiences, including education level, length of stay in Korea, stability of marriage and domestic violence. On top of that, melancholia and anxiety were found to increase as well in cases of unstable marriages or marriages with violence or when the women were under much economic burden. A close scrutiny on the determining factors and the effects of social interventions is advised.

### **3. Protection of Motherhood**

25% of marriage immigrant women residing in rural areas were having difficulties with reproduction. Over 13% of them have experienced miscarriage, and 2.7% of the ethnic Korean Chinese in rural areas alleged to have given birth to deformed children, though it is yet to be confirmed. Upon the release of information confirming these allegations, a systemic scrutiny is required on the causes of such reproductive disorders.

18.6% of immigrant women in rural areas, excluding the ethnic Korean Chinese, reported that they had abortions for fear of mixed blood babies. This suggests that a multidimensional policy design is vitally required for the protection of motherhood of marriage immigrant women.

**Table 14. Experience of Abortion**

Unit: persons, %

	Total (825)	Urban		Rural	
		Korean Chinese (324)	Other foreigners (288)	Korean Chinese (75)	Other foreigners (138)
Yes	20.2	22.2	21.1	19.1	14.0
No	79.8	77.8	78.9	80.9	86.0
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 15. Reasons for Abortion**

Unit: persons, %

	Total (198)	Urban		Rural	
		Korean Chinese (94)	Other foreigners (64)	Korean Chinese (14)	Other foreigners (26)
A Spontaneous abortion	29.0	25.8	31.3	48.2	24.7
Husband's opposition	4.3	3.8	4.7	0.0	7.2
Family's opposition	1.6	1.9	0.0	0.0	4.9
Not the right time to have a baby	21.0	19.1	29.0	7.2	15.5
Already have too many children	2.8	1.4	5.9	3.6	0.0
Afraid of having an interracial (mixed blood) baby	3.4	1.9	0.0	0.0	18.6
For health reasons	5.9	6.0	3.2	26.6	1.0
For the baby's health condition (deformed fetus)	5.6	6.4	3.2	7.2	7.6
Others	26.5	33.6	22.7	7.2	20.5
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

## VII. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The current systems and conditions in Korea lead marriage immigrant women to abandon their own nationality and way of life and to seek for assimilation. One of the evidences is found in the fact that it is harder for them to achieve permanent residency than Korean nationality. While the Nationality Act requires two years of stay in the country for a marriage

immigrant to be eligible for simplified naturalization, one should have stayed in Korea for five years to meet the requirements for an F-5 (permanent residence) visa under the Departures and Arrivals Control Act. To correct this reversed system, an exception should be made for marriage immigrants regarding permanent residency. In addition, these statuses should not be limited to the right to reside in the country but be expanded to the rights of a citizen when corresponding duties were conducted.

A migrant married to a Korean can get an F-2 (residence) visa and legally have jobs in the country. When divorced, however, this status changes into a F-1 (visiting and joining family) visa that does not allow employment in Korea. Their right to work should be protected at least to protect legal rights of those taking legal procedures for divorce.

Life of marriage immigrants is closely related to the lives of her husband and children, and thus their happiness. Therefore, marriage immigrants should be protected under the Livelihood Protection Act. Protecting those migrant mothers is to protect the children of Korea. The unit of assistance for public allowances should be a family with members of non-Korean nationalities included, so that the allowances and the practical realities of the benefiting family could match.

One of the priorities to protect the marriage immigrants is to improve the country's regulatory system over the international marriage agencies. Registration at local governments should be mandatory for an agency to start operation, and the existing procedures and documentation requirements for operation should be reinforced. An international marriage should be registered at the immigration office and a necessary fee paid at the local tax office. A license system, however, may strengthen the agencies' privileges and business interests, and increase the burden of the marrying couples. One last thing that should not be neglected in the policy making process is the realities of the countries of origin.

It is required to prepare an environment for the immigrant women to lead an independent life, both economically and socially. The first step



would be to integrate them into the existing welfare programs for women, before creating special programs for their own demands. The policy design should take into consideration the duties and roles that immigrant women are playing, and their family structure and realities.

A childcare service for immigrant women is required more urgently in rural areas than anywhere else. Existing farming household assist programs and childcare subsidies provided by local governments should be expanded to the households of immigrant women. The women's desire for work would meet the lack of a work force in the Korean society when suitable programs are developed and implemented to support their needs and desires.

In addition, a marriage support service is required for marriage immigrant families to handle the family problems at early stages. First, local government should have a concrete and practical analysis of the realities of marriage immigrant families, by fully utilizing the existing family policy offices. Second, practical action plans to promote support services for marriage problems are required at the local level. Third, a pool of counselors who can communicate in the women's mother tongues should be secured and built as a national support network, so that the women could ask for help at any time at any region. Finally, policies should be expanded from concentration on marriage immigrant women to encompassing their family and social networks.

It is also required to provide assistance in multicultural aspects, and encourage the immigrant women to maintain and develop their own culture in Korea. In order for the women and their children to have pride in her culture, opportunities to understand various cultures are vital so that the Korean society can become more open-minded. Not to mention programs to teach the women's culture at the family and local levels. Efforts could be made in a broader sense by utilizing community programs and schools. They (who?) should come together with efforts to uproot discrimination against immigrants: the central and local governments should cooperate to

develop programs and guidelines on the matter.

Self-assistance groups of same or similar countries of origin can also be helpful. It will produce a synergy when they learn Korean language and culture together while sharing information and skills. The women's groups or services provided by Korean NGOs should be encouraged and assisted. All of the aforementioned, however, should definitely include the family members of the immigrant women, since pride in the women's culture should be shared within the family in order to strengthen their family ties and social integration.

Marriage immigrant women are not covered by the current social welfare system in Korea because of the nationality regulations. A systemic change is required in the current social security net so that the immigrant women could also be eligible for benefits including public allowances and other services. Considering that many of the women desire to work, and seek compensation for the lack of public allowances by entering the job market: job creation for the immigrant women and vocational training should be prepared. It is also very important in the sense that jobs can lay the foundation for the women to lead a sustainable life as an independent citizen in Korea.

Social welfare systems should be further developed to cater the needs of the immigrant women. Many of them are exposed to domestic violence and in the survey many replied that they "just bear with it." Developing appropriate and accessible channels to solve the problem are vitally important.

In order to meet the demands for social services of the marriage immigrants, multicultural and practical services should be further developed, and at the same time, proactive promotions of services should be well planned. In addition, a comprehensive scrutiny should be given to the existing resources and services, so that they could meet the needs and demands of the immigrant women when these resources and services are expanded to them.

Policies should be developed to find ways for the immigrant women to fully make use of the existing medical welfare systems, such as increasing their accessibility to the services and compensating their medical bills.

Medical treatments for women need to be adapted to their special needs, and especially a holistic view should be paid to their status and environments in giving psychiatric and psychological treatments. In order to protect their motherhood, problems identified in this study should be dealt with special policy considerations.

## References

- Han, Geon-Soo, and Dong-Hoon Seol. 2006. *Matchmaking Agencies in Korea and Their Regulation Policies*. Gwacheon: Ministry of Health and Welfare. (In Korean)
- Lee, Yean-Ju, Dong-Hoon Seol, and Sung-Nam Cho. 2005. Increasing International Marriages in Korea: Immigration Laws and Social Positions of Southeast Asian Wives. Paper presented at the SEASREP's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Conference "Southeast Asia: A Global Crossroads," organized by the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program, December 8-9, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- Piper, Nicola, and Mina Roces, eds. 2003. *Wife or Worker? Asian Women and Migration*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Seol, Dong-Hoon. 2004. International Sex Trafficking in Women in Korea: Its Causes, Consequences, and Countermeasures. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 10(2): 7-47.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. Marriage, Migration, Market, and State: International Matchmaking Agencies in Korea and Their Regulation Policies. Paper presented at the symposium on "the Global Householding: A Comparison among High-Income Economies of East Asia," co-organized by the Globalization and Governance Project, Hokkaido University, and the Globalization Research Center, University of Hawaii, February 7-8, Sapporo, Japan.

- Seol, Dong-Hoon, Yun-Tae Kim, Hyun Mee Kim, Hong Sik Yoon, Hye-kyung Lee, Kyung Taek Yim, Ki Seon Chung, Youngsu Ju, and Geon-Soo Han. 2005. *Foreign Wives' Life in Korea: Focusing on the Policy of Welfare and Health*. Gwacheon: Ministry of Health and Welfare. (In Korean)
- Seol, Dong-Hoon and Kyung Taek Yim. 2005. *Regulations on International Marriage Agencies and Social Integration Policies for Marriage Based Immigrants in Japan*. Seoul: Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion. (In Korean)
- Seol, Dong-Hoon and Hong Sik Yoon, 2005. Socioeconomic Adaptation of Marriage Immigrants and Welfare Policy. Pp. 237-265 in *Proceedings of the Biannual Meeting of the Korean Association of Social Welfare Studies*. City: Publisher. (In Korean)
- Wang, Hong-zen and Shu-Ming Chang. 2001. The Commodification of International Marriages: Cross-border Marriage Business in Taiwan and Viet Nam. *International Migration*, 40(6): 93-116.