

SESSION A: MIGRATION AND REFUGEES IN NORTHEAST ASIA

Where Migration Meets Gender in Northeast Asia: Marriage Migrants and Domestic Care Workers in Japan and South Korea Naomi Chi (Graduate School of Public Policy, Hokkaido University)

How many of you have seen the film called “My Wedding Campaign” (Figure 1). The Korean title is “*Na’euui Gyeolhon Weonjeonggi*”, or in Japanese, “*Watashi no kekkon shiki ensei ki*”. It’s a Korean movie that was produced in 2006. Basically, - I don’t want to spoil the movie and I hope you have a chance to watch it - the movie is about these two Korean gentlemen from the rural areas of Korea, who go to Uzbekistan to find their potential brides. Now, this is a fictitious movie, but it is based on real phenomena taking place in Korea.

So, today, my objective is to illustrate the dynamics of international migration of women in Japan and Korea. The second is to examine the background and the various pull factors of the feminization of migration in these two countries, and last, to give my observations on how cultural and institutional factors determine national policies and marriage and migration.

Japan and Korea used to be countries that exported migrants, but since the 1980s,



Figure 1

Source: IMDb database: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0492702/>

with the economic growth, industrialization, and also with the high education and participation of women in the labor market, more women began to go outside of the home to work. In Japan, this trend started in the 1980s. In Korea, it started about 10 years later. There are various institutional arrangements that allow these women to come to Japan and Korea. For instance, in Japan and Korea, there is visa status for spouses of Japanese and Korean nationals. In terms of domestic and care work, there are also quite a few institutional provisions. For instance, in Japan, since 2004, there is the economic partnership agreement with the Philippines. This agreement has been extended to Vietnam and Indonesia to bring nurses and care workers to Japan. Also, in Japan, since the beginning of 2017, the visa status for care (*kaigo*, in Japanese), is an official working visa status in

Japan. Also, there is the training and internship program, (*ginō jisshū sei*) through which people can enter domestic care work.

In terms of Korea, Korea also has various legal institutions and institutional frameworks. For example, there is the EPS, which is the employment permit system, which was implemented in 2004. What this allows is people to come work in Korea for up to 5 years, and they can work in specific areas, and one is, of course, service. And also there is the H-2 visa, which is the co-ethnic program for overseas Koreans, and they can come to Korea to work for up to 5 years, and they can work — again, this is also for a specific industry, and one of them is care and domestic work. So, you can see that there are various legal and institutional frameworks for these women to come to Japan and Korea to marry and to work in domestic and care work.

Now, I have been conducting field work for some time, for over 10 years. I do have in my paper some of their narratives. I don't have enough time to go through them all today, but they are based on interviews that I have conducted, of course, with the consent of the people that I interviewed. I have been able to put them on my paper, so I hope that you go through them. I think it's really important that we listen to the voices of the people that are the women that marry these people in Japan and Korea. The women that do care for the people in Japan and Korea. So, I hope you have a look at it later.

These are also photos that I've taken — of course, again, with the consent of the people that are in the photos. In Japan and Korea, in terms of marriage migrants, in Japan, the marriage migrants started to come in the 1980s, and in Korea, in the 1990s. Now, for Japan, this is a photo of a program in Korea (Figure 2), but first let me look at Japan.

In Japan, in the 1980s, there were women, in the beginning from Korea, and also from China, that came to marry Japanese men in the rural areas of Japan. Some of the popular destinations were Yamagata and Niigata. And in Korea, the marriage migrants, where did they come from? Originally, in the 1990s, in the beginning, they



Figure 2

came from China. Many ethnic Koreans in China would come to marry Korean men, and also the Han Chinese as well. Recently, since the 2000s, women from Vietnam, and also from Mongolia, and also from the Philippines, and some of the CIS countries, come to marry Korean men.

In Japan, many of the local governments were quite tactical in inviting or organizing these programs for women to come to meet their potential husbands. This is also the same in Korea as well. Some of the local governments have facilitated these meetings for people to find their potential partners. This is a photo of a program in Korea (Figure 2). This is from 2008. It's just when I started doing my field work. This is the opening ceremony for a support center for multi-cultural families in Korea.

This next photo is from 2013 (Figure 3). This is the opening ceremony for information technology. It's to teach the marriage migrants programming and basic computer skills.

Of course, marriage migrants — not all marriages end up in a happy ending.



Figure 3

Unfortunately, some of the women do experience some domestic violence. They do have quite a few challenges. In Korea, since 2000, many women from Vietnam and also from Mongolia and the Philippines have come to marry Korean men. The reason why these women are popular is because they are viewed as being traditional and very obedient. And if you look at the numbers, the marriage migrants in Korea peaked in 2006, where almost 30% of the total marriages were international marriages, of which 80% were between Korean men and foreign women. Since then, in 2007 and 2008, and they are still currently occurring, but there have been some very unfortunate cases where these women, these foreign brides, have been killed by their husbands. Now, this particular case was a case of a 22-year old Vietnamese woman who married a Korean man through international brokers, and she arrived in Busan, and two weeks into her stay in Korea, she was murdered by her Korean husband, who was schizophrenic. And this is the mother of the Vietnamese woman, and the Korean

embassy sent a special envoy to apologize to the mother of the foreign bride that was killed in Korea. So, these cases have been occurring and re-occurring in Korea. Of course, there are now laws in terms of domestic violence. There are also shelters for these women to go to. In the beginning, the shelters were for Korean women, so they only had people who were only able to talk in the Korean language, but now it's multilingual, there's a 24-hour hotline, for these women to seek help.

This is a photo of these Vietnamese women who are protesting (Figure 4). This is right in front of the General Assembly in Korea, in Seoul, and they are protesting for more rights and for more strict laws regarding domestic violence against women in general. And this occurs quite often in Seoul where you see these women who are married to Korean men come out to protest and to ask for more rights.



Figure 4

In terms of support, there is support from the local government. There is also support from NGOs. And it is becoming more and more active. For instance, in Japan, there is the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. It's a government organization that helps international migrants. There are also various legal affairs bureaus that help these women. Also, I work a lot with the NPOs in Japan. In Korea there are also quite a few support systems. There is the Korean women's hotline and emergency support centers all over major cities in Korea. Also, there are women's shelters in various areas where they have multilingual support.

The tentative observations that I have regarding the research that I've been conducting is that the idea of migrants having their own agency — this is something in migration studies where people now talk about the agency of each migrant — in terms of marriage migrants and also domestic and care workers, it's really difficult to say that they have agency, because many of these women, they feel obliged to come because they have pressure from their home country. Some of these women, they are college-educated, but because their family is poor, marriage is a quick way out to provide for them, not only for themselves, but for their family. The care and domestic work

itself is being outsourced to these women, and care and domestic work is obviously behind the doors. Many of the women who come to Japan and Korea, they work inside the family, so they are basically working behind shut doors. And so anything can occur, and there are human rights violations that take place, and we don't know very much about it, because it's behind closed doors. So, in the 21st century, we talk about mobility, it's more accessible, there are ways, it's easier to access resources, and it's also easier to go to another country because of logistics and transportation — technology has improved. But at the same time, when you look at the migrant women in both Japan and Korea, you see that they are very immobile, even in this age of mobility, because of the limitations of the institutional framework and also because of the way the programs are designed, and so I think it's important that we do look at agency, but also at the same time — people always say that marriage is something of a private affair, so we think that whatever happens at home stays at home, and the government shouldn't do anything about it. But that's not really the case. We need to have government step in to make sure these people's human rights are not violated.

Also, something I am now thinking about is the idea of justice of caring. I'm not a feminist scholar. I'm sort of learning from feminist theories, but I think the idea of justice of caring is something that we can work with. That is, instead of looking at just rights and morality in terms of justice, maybe we should approach from the care perspective.

So, with that, I will end my presentation. Thank you very much, everyone, for your attention.

[Question] I wondered if you could clarify the situation around domestic violence in Korea, because you mentioned that there were organizations supporting these women. Is it a broader social issue as well for South Korean women, and are there alliances between South Korean women and — you showed us a photo of the Vietnamese women protesting. So, what sort of alliances are there?

[Chi] Thank you for that question. Domestic violence used to be, and still is, very much a social problem. But because now many women are more highly educated — they also work; they're participating in the labor market, so in terms of the bigger cities, the cases of domestic violence have decreased, because there are laws that have been stipulated for domestic violence. The reason why domestic violence is higher with international migrants is because many of the women, they don't know how to access these resources. I didn't want to go into detail, but since 2016, there is a language proficiency test that they have to pass. Before that, some of these women didn't speak a word of Korean. Of course, there are Korean language classes in Korea that teach these women the language, but when they come to Korea and when they first marry, through the brokers and whatnot, they don't really speak the language, so when they come, they don't know how to access these resources that are available to them. And also, they feel that if they say something about what's happening at home, that they would be deported, because of the way that the institutional framework is

set up, because they are on a spousal visa, which means, when they renew the spousal visa, they have to have their husband come with them to the immigration office with them, and there is also a provision, they need to have at least more than 30,000 US dollars as savings. And of course, many of these women don't work, so they have to rely on their Korean spouse to have that certificate that they have that savings. So, the women feel that if they can't renew the visa, they have to go home, and if they go home, they don't have income to send to their family. So, it's all sort of a snowball effect, and so that's why many of them keep silent. But now because of many of these resources available, they have been able to come out and say it. Also, there is a group of public lawyers that help these women as well. So, there have been more reported cases than before, but we still think that there are more out there. We just don't know about it.

[Question] What do you mean by "agency"? In my field, in international relations, agency is just a simple word for actors, but when I heard your presentation and read your paper, I think it's not just simply actors. There may be various definitions from various fields, so I think it's important to clarify the meaning of this word.

[Chi] In terms of migration studies, when we say, "agency", it means that these women have specific reasons and purpose to migrate. And so, there is a debate between those people who talk about the importance of agency, versus people who think these women are victims and we need to protect them. So, there's sort of a debate between these two groups. The people that do emphasize the idea of agency, that these women choose to move, that these women choose to marry these men, if we don't look at the agency of these women, the perspective of these women as being victims re-victimizes them. That's why many of the scholars say that we need to focus more on the agency.