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SARAH A. SON

National Identity and Social Integration in International Marriages between Anglophone Women and Korean Men

When Love and Culture Clash

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the capacity and willingness of women from English-speaking countries, married to Korean men, to integrate into South Korean society, via examination of the expression of national identity in everyday life and the negotiation of relationships across socio-cultural boundaries.

KEYWORDS: Korea, marriage migrants, national identity, integration, multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the social integration of ethnically non-Asian women from Anglophone (English-speaking) countries, married to Korean men and living in South Korea. The study of female marriage migration to Korea has grown in response to rising numbers of women, primarily of Southeast Asian, Chinese, or Japanese origin, marrying South Korean men. In this research, the diversity in the population of foreign wives overall is often overlooked, and the much smaller population of ethnically non-Asian women from Anglophone "Western" countries remains unexamined.[1] However, the ethnic, socio-cultural, and economic differences between women who have come from other parts of Asia and those from Anglophone countries raise

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1. Keuntae Kim, "Cross-Border Marriages in South Korea and the Challenges of Rising Multiculturalism," *International Migration* 55:3 (June 2017): 74–88.

Asian Survey, Vol. 59, Number 4, pp. 630–652. ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2019 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/AS.2019.59.4.630.

important questions about the relevance for this group of South Korea's policy efforts to support the integration of female marriage migrants. This article thus investigates the integration of Western, native-English-speaking female marriage migrants, taking as its focus their personal identification with Korea and its people, in recognition of the salience of identity in facilitating a sense of social inclusion or exclusion.

In the research on female marriage migrants to Korea, some attention has been given to the agency of individual marriage migrants and their lived experiences of exclusion or inclusion in relation to the host society.[2] However, multicultural perspectives have tended not to consider a sufficiently wide range of variables influential in integration outcomes. There are a variety of lenses through which migrant social integration might be analyzed, across different disciplines. However, this study focuses on social collective identification, particularly that associated with national culture, as informing the terms of belonging and influencing migrant integration. This research is modeled in part on a similar study on Anglophone marriage migrants in southern Europe by Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou, which looked at the impact of what the authors termed "expatriate nationalism" on migrant integration.[3] Through analysis of 25 face-to-face and telephone interviews conducted in Seoul in 2017, this study addresses the self-described processes of identification manifest in the everyday interactions of Anglophone women with Koreans. It then draws links between these identification processes and the women's perceptions of the degree to which they feel integrated into Korean society.

This article begins by examining the literature on foreign brides and multiculturalism in South Korea, emphasizing the distinct characteristics of Anglophone women. I then discuss the links between identity and integration, particularly when identity is framed according to nationally derived cultural parameters. I analyze the social identification practices of Anglophone marriage migrant women, as manifest in their self-described relationships and interactions with their husbands, extended Korean family, and wider social circle. The analysis unpacks the tendency to frame social

2. Hyunjoo Jung, "Constructing Scales and Renegotiating Identities: Women Marriage Migrants in South Korea," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* 21:2 (2012): 193–215; Caren Freeman, *Making and Faking Kinship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

3. Irina Isaakyan and Anna Triandafyllidou, "Anglophone Marriage-Migrants in Southern Europe: A Study of Expat Nationalism and Integration Dynamics," *International Review of Sociology* 24:3 (September 2014): 374–90.

difference in "national" terms, and considers how certain types of identification may act as either a barrier or a conduit to social integration. I further highlight the areas where multiculturalism policy has failed to engage this group, in ways that differ from the experiences of Asian marriage migrants. This failure can result in Anglophone women living their lives as "eternal" expatriates, living somewhat apart from regular society.[4]

MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN SOUTH KOREA

Marriage migration to South Korea, particularly that of female marriage migrants, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to 1990, most international marriages were between Korean women and foreign men, who were predominantly US or Japanese citizens. But in the 1990s, a significant shift in both the patterns and reception of international marriages began to emerge. The normalization of relations between South Korea and China, as well as a series of other South Korean citizenship and labor policy changes, led to an increase in marriages with female foreigners from China (many of whom are ethnically Korean) and Southeast Asian countries.[5] In 2015, of 14,677 marriages between foreign women and Korean men, 12,299 were with women from (in order of volume) Vietnam, China (including Chinese-Koreans),[6] Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Cambodia, while just 577 were with women from the United States.[7] A common explanation for this trend toward Southeast Asian brides in particular has been an increase in matchmaking services to find brides from other Asian origins for certain groups of South Korean bachelors where there is a shortage of marriageable women.[8]

4. The study is limited to women of Anglophone-country origin, to document the experiences of this specific group, as distinct from women from countries such as Russia or parts of Europe who may self-identify as Western, but who research has shown can differ in their expectations and modes of integration from women from Anglophone countries (Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou, "Anglophone Marriage-Migrants"). Ethnic-Korean women born and/or raised in Anglophone countries were also excluded.

5. Timothy Lim, "Rethinking Belongingness in Korea: Transnational Migration, 'Migrant Marriages' and the Politics of Multiculturalism," *Pacific Affairs* 83:1 (2010): 64–65.

6. "Chinese-Koreans" (Chosonjok) refers to ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship.

7. Many of those women with US passports are of ethnic-Korean origin, which arguably presents different social dynamics. Government of the Republic of Korea, Statistics Korea, "Foreigners with Korean Ancestry," 2017, <http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2821>, accessed April 12, 2019.

8. Lim, "Rethinking Belongingness in Korea": 66.

This has led to a popular view of these women as "mail-order brides" and subjects of a "transaction" that is part of a national project to maintain marriage and fertility rates.[9] The same label cannot be applied to non-ethnic-Asian Anglophone women, who are a more recent group of marriage migrant arrivals, having sometimes met their husbands in their home countries, but more often while working as expatriates in South Korea, before they married for love.

Anglophone female marriage migrants to Korea tend to be well-educated, active participants in an increasingly mobile world, engaged in more permanent, international lives abroad via marriage. They have access to employment (many are English teachers),[10] online and offline social groups, and a range of services designed to assist with daily life in Korea. They are also able to travel to their home countries regularly. Their Korean husbands usually speak English with some competence (if not fluency), and many of those husbands have firsthand experience of life and cultural norms outside Korea.[11] By virtue of their economic position, education, and cultural background, Western women do not fit the common description of Asian female marriage migrants as representative of hypergamy (marrying a partner of higher social status). Instead, they bring greater perceived socioeconomic equality to the relationship.[12] Racial hierarchy and stereotypes present in Korea also create a distinction in the experience of the Anglophone migrants sampled for this study, who were all Caucasian but one.[13] Furthermore, the cultural elevation of English as a world language and a status symbol in Korea grants native speakers a higher position than

9. Eun Mee Kim et al., *South Korea Advances toward a Multicultural Society* (Paju: Nanam, 2012): 95.

10. Immigrant spouses from Anglophone countries are more often in white-collar, skilled jobs, compared to those from Southeast Asia. (Government of the Republic of Korea, Ministry of Gender Equality and Families, "2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families," <http://www.mogef.go.kr/mp/pcd/mp_pcd_s001d.do;jsessionid=YLSEhMnQ1BRSKGzhxx48Eins.mogef10?mid=plc503&bbtSn=63>, accessed April 12, 2019). In the eligibility survey for this research, 84% of the women were employed or in higher education, and of those employed, 81% were working in the education industry.

11. Korean government statistics report that Koreans married to immigrants from Anglophone countries are much more likely to be able to speak their spouse's mother tongue (English) than those married to non-English-speakers ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

12. Young Jeong Kim, "'Daughters-in-Law of Korea?' Policies and Discourse on Migration in South Korea," Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford, 2011.

13. The call for participants was open to women of all ethnic groups other than ethnic Koreans; however, only one non-Caucasian response was received.

migrants from non-English-speaking countries in many social and professional settings.[14] These women thus have a more privileged status than many other marriage migrants.

Scholarship on migrant wives has noted the South Korean state's tendency to seek to assimilate female marriage migrants; however, such policies have tended to be tailored to the larger population of women of other Asian origin.[15] One way the state has sought to do this is by constructing these migrants as "biological and cultural reproducers of 'Koreans'," while paradoxically "relegating [them] as gendered dependents and ethnic others."[16] Karen Kim describes the tendency for the wife to be pushed toward assimilation into Korean society in ways that meet Korea's traditions.[17] Studies in psychology and sociology have described how Southeast Asian wives of Korean men are expected to take on relatively traditional roles in the home, learning the Korean language and traditional cuisine and providing care for in-laws, while dealing with their own homesickness and loneliness.[18] The state- and society-led expectations imposed on these women has been found to be out of step with established definitions of what constitutes multicultural integration policy in other countries.[19] However, as will be seen, Western wives have tended to resist such policy provisions, exercising greater agency in their participation in social life and carving out a more culturally autonomous existence.

14. Government statistics state that couples including an Anglophone spouse reported speaking to their children in the foreign spouse's native language (English) far more than did couples with a foreign spouse of other origin. There was also a reported tendency for the Korean partner to encourage the Anglophone spouse to speak to the children in English in more cases than occurs when the foreign spouse is non-Anglophone ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

15. Dong Hoon Seol and John D. Skrentny, "Why Is There So Little Migrant Settlement in East Asia?" *International Migration Review* 43:3 (2009): 578–620; Dong Hoon Seol and John D. Skrentny, "Ethnic Return Migration and Hierarchical Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 9:2 (2009): 147–74.

16. Minjeong Kim, "Citizenship Projects for Marriage Migrants in South Korea: Intersecting Motherhood with Ethnicity and Class," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 20:4 (2013): 455.

17. Karen L. Kim, "Korea and the Gender Construction of Female Marriage Immigrants," *Pastoral Psychology* 66:13 (2017).

18. Kim et al., *South Korea Advances*; Won Hee Jun, Sung Sil Hong, and Soo Yang, "Effects of a Psychological Adaptation Improvement Program for International Marriage Migrant Women in South Korea," *Asian Nursing Research* 8:3 (September 2014): 232–38.

19. Dong Hoon Seol, "Which Multiculturalism?Discourse of the Incorporation of Immigrants into Korean Society," *Korea Observer* 41:4 (2010): 593–614.

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION AND BELONGING

In the scholarship on marriage migration to Korea, the social identification practices of incoming migrants as they relate to their integration are less often studied, despite such knowledge being useful to understanding the agency of migrants in facilitating their integration. Also less studied is the way identity may be activated and influenced by relationships with Korean family and friends. While some scholars argue that integration hinges on the interactions between immigrant communities and government institutions,[20] the identity-driven actions of immigrants and their collective communities are not without important social consequences, warranting investigation into the extent to which migrants exercise their cultural identities in daily life.[21]

Key questions this article must therefore address center around the nature of immigrant integration and the role of identity—particularly that linked to key markers of "national difference"—which can result in the formation of boundaries between the immigrant and the host culture. The construction of in-group/out-group dynamics is discussed in social identity theory, which has been widely employed in migration research to explain why identity matters in cross-cultural settings. Social identity theory describes the process of developing conceptions of the Self and Others, to distinguish the identity features of a collective from other collectives. It is argued that individuals and groups find a sense of safety and security with the familiar by gravitating to an "in-group" while excluding Others.[22] Social identity theory holds that individuals pursue inclusion in a group to enhance their self-esteem, identity, and sense of security. People value their culture, for example, because it helps sustain their group, with "groupness" serving basic cognitive and emotional needs.[23]

Applying theories of in-group/out-group identification to their research in Europe, Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou reveal the challenges inherent in cross-cultural marriages where the foreign wife lives in her husband's native

20. Jacqueline Hagan, "Negotiating Social Membership in the Contemporary World," *Social Forces* 85:2 (2006): 634.

21. David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, "National Identity and Social Inclusion," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31:7 (October 2008): 1262.

22. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (New York: Polity Press, 1991).

23. Tobias Theiler, "Societal Security and Social Psychology," *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003): 249–68.

country, and the social impact of the attempts by Anglophone women to feel at home. The authors situate their analysis largely in the contestation of identity framed in terms of "nation" and "culture," in recognition of the tendency in cross-cultural marriages to "nationalize" differences in the process of accepting or rejecting the attitudes and behaviors of the host culture. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou draw on Billig's work on "banal nationalism," a term he uses to describe the significance of everyday habits of social life, including in private spaces, in the reproduction and maintenance of national identity.[24] In the context of cross-cultural families, women play a particularly important role in the reproduction of identity at this often unseen, domestic level, by passing down traditions, songs, foods, and other domestic symbols, shaping the narrative of belonging to the common origin, and helping children grow into the social world.[25] Cross-border marriage thus provides a fascinating site in which to view identity contestation at the everyday level, as the "imported" partner both exercises her personal identity, derived from her own national culture, and engages with or resists a sense of identification with the host nation.

As described by Berry, integration occurs on two principal levels, the psychological and the cultural. While at the psychological level integration is marked by maximal learning of the new and minimal forgetting of the old, on the cultural level it is represented by the acceptance of the value of diversity by all those cultural groups in a society.[26] Assimilation, by contrast, focuses on maximal learning by non-dominant individuals, along with limited tolerance of diversity, which can result in a lack of equity among all social groups.[27] It follows that when performed in a multicultural society, integration should ensure the security of individual and collective identity by involving social change to meet the needs of all the groups living together in that society.[28] In practice, however, immigrant integration is a complicated

24. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

25. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou, "Anglophone Marriage-Migrants": 377; Lucy Williams, *Global Marriage: Cross-Border Marriage Migration in Global Context* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 54.

26. John W. Berry, "Integration and Multiculturalism: Ways towards Social Solidarity," *Papers on Social Representations* 20 (2011): 2.14–2.16.

27. Ibid.: 2.15–2.16.

28. Ibid.; Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, *Rethinking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and the New Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

process. Stigmatization and ostracism may result where the host society perceives immigrants as not sufficiently committed to assimilation. In response, when immigrants feel marginalized, they may withdraw from mainstream society.[29]

In the study of immigrant integration, parameters of the "national" are thus important, as it is primarily these parameters that define "diversity," and impact a sense of belonging. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou emphasize culture (principally national culture) as a primary site of in-group/out-group dynamics. These concepts provide a helpful lens through which to view the everyday practice of national culture in cross-cultural marriages, and its implications for social integration from the perspective of the migrant. The primary questions this article will therefore address are (1) how the parameters of national identity of the nation of origin are reinforced by Anglophone wives; (2) how the host nation is positioned as an Other in relation to the migrant Self; and (3) how these forms of identification shape the woman's social world and her self-described ability to achieve integration in Korean society. In focusing on Anglophone wives in Korea, this article engages with a population which has been largely overlooked in the literature, but which warrants attention, not least because of the contrast it provides to the much-researched population of Asian marriage migrant women.

DATA AND METHODS

This study involved narrative biographic interviews with 25 women from English-speaking, Western countries, including the United States, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa.[30] All the women are or have been in marriages with Korean men and currently live in South Korea (all names are pseudonyms). The sample was selected by posting a request for participants to a private Facebook group for self-identified "Western women

29. Rahsaan Maxwell, "Occupations, National Identity, and Immigrant Integration," *Comparative Political Studies* 50:2 (February 1, 2017): 233.

30. According to Korean government statistics, the resident population of female spouses from the US, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the UK totaled 832 in 2015. However, this reflects passport country, and many of these women are ethnic Korean. Government of the Republic of Korea, Ministry of the Interior and Safety, "Statistics on Foreign Residents by the Local Governments," 2015, <http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=110&tblId=TX_11025_A010&vw_cd=MT_ETITLE&list_id=A_7&scrId=&seqNo=&language=en&obj_var_id=&itm_id=&conn_path=A6&path=%252Feng%252Fsearch%252FsearchList.do>, accessed March 22, 2019.

married to Korean men," which was founded in 2007 and had 854 members at the time of writing.[31] Given the small, decentralized population and the lack of other online or offline fora in which to make contact with women who met the eligibility criteria, this was deemed the most viable method of sourcing participants. As this is a relatively young population (as evidenced by government statistics),[32] many use Facebook to stay in touch with family and friends abroad. The 25 women included members of all the national subgroups in the Anglophone sphere, and attempted to reflect the proportionate number of each country-group represented in government statistics, with Americans and Canadians making up the larger proportion of the interviews. Also, by the time the interviews were completed, many of the themes were repeating, suggesting saturation.

The semi-structured, narrative interviews covered a range of themes related to daily life in South Korea, in the context of marriage. The data were examined by applying critical discourse analysis, which is commonly used to provide insights into the construction of identity, belonging, Self, and Others, via narrative-biographic analysis.[33] This method helps elucidate the "national narratives" of the participants, as well as perceptions of "significant Others" which may become a source of conflict or insecurity.[34] The analysis pays particular attention to positive and negative Othering in the narratives, particularly where comparisons are drawn between things "Korean" and "Western."

The analysis which follows is organized in terms of the varying Others encountered by the Anglophone wife, arising from the different types of relationships in which she engages: with the husband, with parents-in-law, and with Korean society. The analysis then looks at the response of the woman to her host society in terms of her future plans, and the role of cultural practices as a mechanism for sustaining her identity.

31. The author of this study has been a member and participant in this Facebook group since 2008.

32. "2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families."

33. John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (London: Sage, 2007); Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2009).

34. Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security," in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33–75.

IRRATIONAL LOVE, RATIONAL CHOICE: NATIONALISM IN ANGLOPHONE–KOREAN MARRIAGES

Most of the participants interviewed for this study met their husbands while living and working in Korea. Many of the informants' husbands were former students or members of English clubs, and all but four of those husbands had lived abroad at some point prior to meeting their wives. This tendency led many of the women to remark that their husbands are more open to foreign culture than other Korean men. The weddings had mostly taken place in Korea, and most of the participants had spent all of their married lives there so far. It should be noted that this type of cross-cultural marriage is a relatively new phenomenon: all the women interviewed had been married for less than 13 years, and many for less than five. As a result, the children of those marriages were all still in elementary school or younger, and some had not yet had children, so the sample was a fairly cohesive group in terms of length of experience and their current stage of life.

Nation and Culture in the Home: The Husband

One of the main stereotypes described by Anglophone women entering marriages with Korean men is that those men subscribe to typically Confucian modes of behavior in domestic life. Certainly, this stereotype is affirmed in the reported experiences of women discussing married life in the Facebook group from which the participants were sourced. Yet the assumption that the husband has little involvement in domestic housekeeping or care for children was not supported by the interview participants' experiences. In many instances, this was negotiated by the woman in advance of the marriage, either by being satisfied that their choice of partner would contribute to the household as she wished, or by laying down "ground rules" prior to marriage:

> Jill: I told him, I'm not your mom, we're partners, we're equal at home.
>
> Olivia: He was very similar to the Korean male stereotype until I explained that I didn't like it, and he changed. He knows what he's doing with our second child also, and he's more helpful. . . . He's changed a lot.

A small minority, however, resented their husband's lack of participation in domestic chores, including caring for children. The blame was usually laid on the mother-in-law, for "babying" her son and keeping him at home until he

married and moved out. Despite the perceived lack of gender equality in the negotiation of domestic responsibilities in some instances, many of the women explicitly mentioned their belief that their husbands were not "typically Korean" but more "open-minded." Often the women put this down to their husbands having spent time living abroad, where they learned to appreciate Western thinking and ways of life, whereas others believed their husbands had always been unconventional:

> Alice: He's an un-Korean Korean. I definitely think he doesn't follow the normal stereotypes. I think that's part of what drew us to each other.

> Lily: He's very Western-minded. . . . He expressed an interest in wanting to go abroad. . . . He's an anti-Korean Korean. He doesn't like living here. . . . He is critical of the culture and the first to point out negative things about the society.

> Emma: He's more open-minded about gender roles, being able to help around the house, not thinking it's just a woman's thing. It's interesting that he struggles with being here, even though we've been back [in Korea] over eight years.

The participants reported that they had not sought out any particular sources of information on cross-cultural marriage or, with the exception of two cases, professional counseling. Instead, they had often worked out their own methods of overcoming and preventing conflict. The "nationalization" of disputes resulting from arguments was a common occurrence, particularly where cultural or linguistic misunderstandings lay at the heart of a problem. However, several women noted that separating cultural differences from more general interpersonal differences was helpful in improving communication with their spouses:

> Julie: We purposely made sure we would never blame things on culture. That is a discussion we had in the beginning. I don't see him as his culture, I see him as a person first. . . . One time when I was stressed about being in Korea I was complaining and my husband said, "Stop blaming my country," and after that I made a conscious effort not to do that.

Those who had been married longer mentioned the important role of the passing of time in their ability to process difficulties and overcome challenges in their relationship. Motivated by love, and the extent of the commitment

each had made to engage in a relationship laden with complexities, the participants described their willingness to tolerate certain external stressors to make their relationship work. What was perhaps more significant, however, was the negative construction of the "typical" male of the host culture as overly "patriarchal," "narrow-minded," and "old-fashioned," as opposed to the more tolerant, "open-minded" husband. This led to the idea, shared by many of the interviewees, that the wife is a participant in the husband's "liberation" from traditional Korean ideas of patriarchy, whether or not he had already begun that journey by himself prior to their meeting. She seeks to do this by introducing her own cultural practices and ways of thinking as liberated and developed, as evident in the repeated positioning by almost all the interviewees of "Western-mindedness" as a favorable trait in a husband. Moreover, she makes it clear that only if a "liberal" and "open" mentality is embraced by the husband can she experience happiness in the marriage.

Family Life: Having Babies and Negotiating with the In-Laws

Despite the tendency of writers of Korean television dramas to portray Korean parents-in-law as overbearing and even willing to obstruct the happiness of their children in the pursuit of their own marriage preferences, the women in this study reported little or no serious opposition from their parents-in-law to the idea of their son marrying a foreign woman. Several of the women mentioned that their in-laws welcomed the marriage, not necessarily in terms of marriage to a foreigner, but as marriage to anyone, because their son was getting "too old" or because he had, in their opinion, been struggling to "settle down." However, some parents-in-law were vocal about the conditions under which they would agree to the marriage, such as ensuring that their grandchildren speak Korean or, in Natalie's case, committing to staying in Korea:

> Natalie: My father-in-law was concerned that I wouldn't be willing or able to understand *jeong* [affectionate connection with community and family], that I wasn't going to be able to put enough into the family. . . . My mother-in-law said she would accept me, but don't leave Korea. We think you are a good person and our son really wants to marry you, but don't leave Korea.

The relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in South Korea is famously contentious. Many of the women interviewed were initially

nervous about how their relationship with their mother-in-law would develop; however, most felt that their status as a foreigner, and often their limited ability to communicate in Korean, perhaps removed some of the tension typically experienced in this setting. This is not to say that the relationship was trouble-free. Many of the women had struggled with setting boundaries for the "other woman" in their husband's lives:

> Zoe: My mother-in-law wants to see me, but being American and having those boundaries is important to me, so we usually see her once a month. . . . I have more of a need for independence. . . . She always asks if she can come and visit. I always say it has nothing to do with her, I just need some space. . . . Living here in Korea, it feels like my home is the only place where I'm comfortable, and so when I bring a Korean person in, it becomes less comfortable, and a visitor, no matter how kind, is exhausting for me.

Here Zoe directly equates Korea(ns) with discomfort and imposition, while "being American" necessitates the maintenance of boundaries and independence. She positions these traits as immovable and necessary for her comfort. Husbands assist in facilitating these conditions by mediating the relationship between their mothers and wives in varying ways. Some are reluctant to become an interpreter, resenting getting involved in discussions or negotiations over differences in opinions, or working out mutually agreeable arrangements. In some cases the husband would "always take his mom's side" (Sophia); in others, he would "always take my side and say no to her" (Georgina). For this reason, the wives often felt torn between wanting to please their husband and their in-laws, while protecting those things important to their own identity, especially the privacy of their homes.

These issues were magnified markedly once children entered the family. Those participants with children (16 of the 25) all noted that the experience had led to a range of new pressures related to cultural norms for raising children. In the absence of their own families from abroad, many needed the help of their mothers-in-law, whose methods were distinctly different. The mother-in-law often came to stay in the wife's home for an extended period, and many of the women came into conflict with the mother-in-law over childcare practices the wife deemed outdated or even unsafe, such as co-sleeping or over-dressing the baby. This led to a more serious perception of the host culture more generally (in addition to the mother-in-law specifically)

as outdated and even threatening to the child's well-being. Some informants noted that they would go along with their in-laws' wishes while they were together, to keep the peace, but would return to their own way of doing things when left alone.

> Sophia: I've tried to set routines for our baby. My mother-in-law tries to interfere, I get flustered and upset and I can't keep quiet and that causes stress, causes friction. . . . Westerners do things differently from Koreans. . . . When she's not around, I try to do what I want, but it's frustrating that I have to go to her schedule.

While the period after having a baby was described as especially difficult for mothers, as the children grew older, most also reported things becoming easier, along with an improvement in their relationship with the mother-in-law. After a particularly trying period after the birth of her first child, during which her mother-in-law "made [her] feel worthless," Camilla reported that things began to improve over time as a result of her coming to understand the background to her mother-in-law's actions:

> Camilla: A lot of things with my mother-in-law are good when we're in separate places, but not when we're together. My reading of her body language . . . I'm trying to see where she's coming from and then I can stop being angry and start listening. When I understand the back-stories [to why she does things] . . . It's taking years, and since my second son was born, I don't get so angry.

This process of learning might be understood as acculturation of sorts, a gradual acceptance of the Other, as the methods and reasons for engaging in "Korean"-style parenting become better understood. Evidence of such learning and the relief it brought to intergenerational tension was also found in other areas of engagement. Several women discussed the impact of realizing how to meet certain cultural expectations more easily and maintain familial harmony by making the right gestures in certain situations. They described, for example, learning the benefits of offering to help with the extensive food preparations for annual holidays, even while knowing the offer would be refused:

> Audrey: If I just say to my mother-in-law, "When do you want me to come [to help with Chuseok (harvest festival) preparations]?" she says I don't need to do anything—but if I don't ask, then I'm rude. The fact that I said something is enough for her. I just wash dishes, and that's all they expect.

Traditional Korean holidays (Chuseok and Seollal) are a time when families gather at the home of older relatives (typically parents), and those who hold to such traditions will be involved in paying respects to their ancestors through traditional food offerings and visiting gravesites (*jesa*). The time spent with the in-laws during these periods could be also testing for the foreign daughter-in-law:

> Camilla: We have to celebrate Korean holidays, but I try to avoid them—the typical *myeoneuri* [daughter-in-law] thing. It's important to my husband, and he gets upset if I show reluctance. At Chuseok he moved the time of our flight to return home by four hours and then told me, and I thought I was going to lose my mind. It was as if I'd been running a marathon and he'd moved the finish line further away.

The ability of the foreign daughter-in-law to contribute to family traditions in a meaningful way was also questioned at times by her Korean family, leading to a feeling of rejection. While this rejection could be perceived as a relief, reducing the expectations placed on her, for some women it caused them to raise a boundary of sorts against the host culture:

> Camilla: One Chuseok my parents-in-law came and asked if I could make traditional food, so I prepared proper traditional Italian food, and my mother-in-law said, "How can we digest this? The ghosts [of our ancestors] won't eat it." And she never asked me again.

Having their capabilities positioned as incompatible with certain Korean traditions was a source of disappointment at times, which the women came to terms with by retreating into the lower expectations assigned to them by their wider Korean family. Although this was not presented by those interviewed as a major concern, it nevertheless established a barrier to a more complete sense of belonging within the Korean family. This tendency once again led to a broadly negative Othering of the extended family as representative of a host culture less attractive, or even less tolerant, than the woman's own.

McCrone and Bechhofer describe this phenomenon as the creation of boundaries through "prejudice" (not to be confused with discrimination).[35]

35. McCrone and Bechhofer, "National Identity and Social Inclusion": 1248–49.

Various types of prejudice affect assumptions about the behavior of both the Western wife and the local Koreans around her, and the interviews revealed a tendency to frame prejudices in the language of national culture. This was evident in that although the experiences of the Western woman in her relationship with her in-laws may be very similar to those of a Korean woman married into another Korean family, the marriage's being cross-cultural results in the constant framing of social difference by both parties in terms of national culture. The result is that the "fault" in any conflict (and the construction of prejudice) is very often associated with the national culture from which the behavior is seen to arise: Korea versus the West.

Furthermore, the key difference between the husband and the extended family in regard to overcoming this negative Othering of national culture was that the in-laws represent an Other that is less malleable than the husband, for reasons related to intimacy, communication, and social hierarchy in relation to the wife. In other words, the Anglophone wife's ability to influence or alter the thinking of the in-laws is limited. The response of the wife is thus to keep the extended family at a distance, and to engage on her own terms as much as her power in the family setting allows.

Social Participation and Othering Korean Society

The community the woman is able to find locally in Korea is an important factor in her satisfaction with daily life. All the participants described having a relatively small social circle, stating that their "expat" friends were those they felt closest to, although those friends often end up leaving the country, shrinking the woman's social circle further. Making friends with Koreans in similar stages of life was described as challenging. The informants expressed two key barriers to forming deep social relations with Koreans: the language barrier and a perceived lack of things in common. While neither of these things represents an overtly negative mode of Othering, they nevertheless position the Korean Other as incompatible with the woman's social needs:

> Emma: I find it hard to get close to Korean women, again because of that hierarchy, and because especially at this stage of life most people connect through children, and most women with kids my age are older than I am. The meetings and interactions feel so formal and the topics are so uninteresting, so I choose not to get involved.

Kate: My Korean isn't good enough to have deep conversations. In Korean it is difficult to say certain things in certain situations. English is more freeing. Because of the way Korean is structured, the level of politeness and so on. . . . I can't make small talk with [my husband's] friends, because that's not done here. . . . I'm bound by the socio-linguistic rules.

Despite the barriers to making friends, a number of the women did express a willingness to pursue friendships with Koreans. Christina shared her enjoyment at participating in local hobby classes with other Korean women, going on day trips and receiving offers of help with aspects of life in Korea from her newfound friends. Others also reported being grateful for getting "inside information" from their Korean friends which helped them understand relations with their husband's family:

Victoria: Relationships are different with Westerners and Koreans. Koreans aren't nit-picking at things. . . . Western women are always looking at the culture like an experiment. But with Koreans it's just everyday life, and it inspires me not to look at it like I'm a foreigner.

Here also, we see the direct or indirect Othering of Koreans, whether because of language, social norms, or the ability of Koreans to make the woman feel accepted and achieve a sense of social belonging. Many of those interviewed stated that social life would be easier if their Korean skills improved, yet most expressed little motivation to progress beyond the level needed for basic daily transactions and familiar conversation. All the women spoke English to their children and were encouraged to do so by their spouse, while many of the Korean spouses also spoke English at a level sufficient for daily communication, which aligns with the Korean government data on the language habits practiced at home by Anglophone marriage migrants.[36] This was often seen to result in the phenomenon described earlier whereby the immigrant tends to self-segregate, perhaps then ceasing any further effort to reduce the identity gap between themselves and the host society. At this point it is necessary to turn to the question of how, taken together, these concentric circles

36. According to Korean government data, Anglophone spouses have slightly weaker Korean-language skills than foreign spouses from most other countries, but they are much less likely to say they need state-run Korean-language education than those from all other origins. Foreign spouses who have higher household incomes, who have graduated from university, and who work in skilled, white-collar employment were also more likely than other foreign spouses to say that they have no need of Korean-language education ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

of relationships and the othering of the host society make the women feel about the future.

Future Plans: To Lean In or Out?

The need for an "escape" was significant in almost all of the women's plans for the future, regardless of how likely it was that they would be leaving Korea in the near term. For some it was a condition of marriage that the husband agree to move back to the wife's home country by a fixed date. For others it was more a matter of having a loose mutual agreement to move out of Korea within a set number of years, which had often been pushed back due to life getting in the way.

> Chloe: We had that discussion early on. I told him that my long-term future was not here. . . . Thankfully he is very open-minded and he was okay with that. . . . Had he been reluctant to move to [my home country] or if he had had stronger family ties here, then I would have had to seriously rethink getting married to him.

> Anna: I've definitely thought about living outside Korea. I've been thinking about it more and more as time has gone on. I start to feel tired and want my own culture and the familiar back again . . . somewhere else [my husband] would understand all the more the things I do for him. . . . Everything about me as a person never wanted to be in the US, but since marrying, I've wanted the familiar again, because I know I can't have it unless I'm back home.

The practicalities of moving back to their home country were described as complicated in many instances, primarily due to the limited job prospects of the husband and his own lack of confidence about being able to secure work. For some women, the push to leave in fact came from the husband, but in these instances the wives often felt that their husband's expectations of how "easy" or "wonderful" life would be in the West were unrealistic. Nevertheless, some of the participants had clear plans in place to leave within the next year or two.[37] Lily's husband, the "anti-Korean Korean," invested in a medical

37. Korean government statistics report that the most common reason foreign spouses wish to have their children educated in their home country is to have their children learn their culture and language. This is more common in female marriage migrants than in male marriage migrants ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

degree to ensure that he had highly transferable skills for their forthcoming move to Canada. She said,

> Lily: If I came back to Korea I would feel like a failure. I want my son to be raised [in Canada]. . . . When I originally came I wanted to stay, and had no intention of having kids, but having kids is a game changer, because you start to worry about things that you didn't before. . . . I want to mimic my childhood for him.

A minority of the interviewees were much more positive about staying in Korea long-term, having fashioned a lifestyle and a commitment to the local community that gave them enough of a sense of satisfaction for the time being:

> Olivia: Wherever you go is your home, you make it how you want it to be. I find it better to focus more on the positives and try to make it work for me and my family.

In between these two extremes—those with definite plans to depart, and those happy to stay—were the majority, who appeared to need to keep open the option of leaving Korea, but had no fixed date for this. Rather, they stated a need for the psychological reassurance that a "way out" is always possible, to cope with the present. In the meantime, many of the women referred to the importance of being able to live as "themselves" in the sanctuary of their home, including via the practice of their own cultural traditions, to maintain a connection with the familiar:

> Julie: Whenever my husband comes home from work, we say "Welcome to Canada." Our house is not Korean at all.

> Lily: Our family routines are all Western. . . . For myself and my friends and where the wife is the foreigner, our families abide by Western standards.

Whether consciously or not, for Anglophone wives living in South Korea, the creation of a "new" family culture is an important security-giving process, to insulate the woman against the foreignness of the culture she lives in, and to provide a space of comfort and enjoyment where she feels accepted and valued. However, choosing a Korean spouse involves entering uncharted territory, where she must work out how to represent both cultures in the relationship in a way which values the identity of the individuals involved.

Events like Christmas and birthdays were described as very important by almost all the women, who wanted to continue enjoying the festivals of their home countries, and all felt it was important to introduce these traditions to their children. Yet despite these efforts to mold a new family culture, many of the women indicated that they had given up an important part of themselves and their ability to practice their own traditions, in order to meet the perceived priorities of the host culture.[38] The consequences of this mindset bring us to the final part of this analysis, where the perceived necessity or desire to pursue social belonging and integration in South Korea is examined.

INTEGRATION OF ANGLOPHONE MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN SOUTH KOREA

> Audrey: You can never be Korean, no matter how long you stay here.
>
> Jill: Citizenship could give me a sense of belonging, except not. I can hold a Korean passport and still get called a "foreigner" in the street.

"Being Korean" was unanimously viewed by the participants as an impossibility: all expressed an acute awareness of their eternal Otherness in Korean society, which was reinforced by day-to-day treatment in public. This involved regular references to them by strangers as "the foreigner" and frequent questions about when they planned to "go home." While these encounters were rarely, if ever, intentionally negative or aggressive, the constant reminder results in a permanent sense of being set apart. To cope with the "foreignness" assigned to their identity by local people, the participants reported a sense that they existed in a "bubble," or a cultural "ghetto" of sorts, not entirely outside, but also not completely embedded in society. The interviewees described this place as an easy one to remain in, despite its limitations:

> Audrey: I'm still trying to improve my Korean, because I think I could be more accepted if I could speak it better. But I don't know that I need to integrate more. I feel like it's better for us to be foreign, we get better benefits, we get excuses made for us, it seems better for us to be a foreigner over here.

38. In a Korean government survey, foreign spouses from Anglophone countries were the least likely to agree that foreigners living in Korea should forget their own culture and "live as Koreans" ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

Grace expressed relief that her status as a foreigner gives her freedom from the socio-cultural structures that create and perpetuate the environment ordinary Koreans live in:

> Grace: Not being a full member of society is not really a problem for me. I have a choice to participate as fully as I want to. I sometimes feel that not being born into this culture is empowering.

Taking a somewhat different approach to their sense of being "within" society, a minority of the participants described feeling content and deriving a sense of belonging of their own making in Korea, very much tied to their individual choice to subscribe to a version of being Korean that gave them satisfaction:

> Kate: Part of the reason I left the US was because I felt at odds with my own culture. . . . I am not a hundred percent American in my thinking. . . . I think a lot of people who feel at odds with their own culture tend to assimilate in a different culture.

> Emma: I was up for [moving to Korea]. I joke often about how my spirit wasn't born in America, only my body. I was always in another country mentally.

This attitude was less common than the tendency described earlier, to exist in a space above or separate from the mainstream, getting by in a linguistically and socially limited fashion. In Korea, where it is possible to be a permanent resident without fulfilling any language requirements, most of the participants had instead defaulted to "expat bubble" status, stating that they saw "no benefit" in applying for Korean citizenship.[39]

INCOMPLETE INTEGRATION OF ANGLOPHONE WIVES IN SOUTH KOREA?

Through the lens of social identity theory, it is possible to see how in-group / out-group dynamics are manifest in those private spaces that shape the individual and her experiences most profoundly, but these dynamics often escape

39. Korean government statistics from 2015 reported that only 7.8% of foreign spouses from Anglophone countries expressed an intention to be naturalized. Spouses from all other Asian countries except Japan had a notably larger percentage ("2015 Statistical Data of Multicultural Families").

the gaze of the state and its policies. We have seen throughout the preceding analysis how certain identity parameters—cultural practices, social behaviors, and so on—are accepted or rejected by the Anglophone wife in her interaction with the Korean host culture, depending on the value she sees in those behaviors. The wife holds onto certain identity markers because they give her a sense of comfort, security, and/or power in a setting where the language barrier, cultural differences, and lack of access to certain social goods results in a sense of disempowerment or alienation from the host culture.

We have also seen how the wife acts to perpetuate in-group identity parameters over time and even intergenerationally, as children are born, via her preferred cultural practices. While the informants for my study were not as militant in their negative evaluation of the host culture as those described by Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou in their study, my participants concurred that undesirable traits related to differing degrees of social intimacy, gender inequality, and child-rearing practices they deemed outdated led to a degree of rejection of the host culture, with adverse effects on integration.[40] This was evident in the tendency for the relationship with the Korean in-laws around raising children and maintaining a private home to become, at times, a site for the concerted expression of the wife's everyday nationalism.

In terms of the women's interactions with wider society, the constant assumption of their presence being temporary, or part of a time-limited life stage, despite having made a long-term commitment to life in Korea via marriage, created an additional incentive to situate the host culture at a distance, and participate in a limited fashion, while seeking comfort in the familiar. Keeping open the possibility of leaving Korea with their husband and immediate family, whether likely in reality or not, was also seen as an important source of security. With all of that said, 32 (71%) of the 45 women who initially responded to the call for participants described themselves as "quite satisfied" with their lives in Korea, with only 10 (22%) saying they were either "quite" or "very *un*satisfied." Although five of those interviewed stated directly that they were unhappy in Korea and had plans to move away with their husbands, most had settled on a way of life that suited them. However, this way of life did not generally fulfill what might be described as an integrated life in the context, where the woman felt she had a meaningful, permanent place in society, experiencing both acceptance of the diversity she

40. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou, "Anglophone Marriage-Migrants": 384.

added to the context, and a position of equity. Only two participants had taken the citizenship eligibility tests and become citizens, and many of the others stated they saw no benefit in doing so. Indeed, most of those interviewed did not see citizenship as worth the paperwork and language-acquisition requirements. Several mentioned a psychological barrier of sorts to gaining citizenship, linking it to a greater sense of commitment to long-term life in Korea than they were willing to make at the time.

This article has shown that Anglophone women married to Korean men and living in South Korea are far from conforming to the Korean state's more assimilationist vision of social integration and resist its policy provisions to a greater degree than the Asian marriage migrants discussed in previous research. However, due to the agency granted by their relative economic empowerment, their socially respected status as English-speaking foreigners, and their ability to live out their own culture to a certain extent, they can maintain a satisfactory existence, for the time being. Their integration might match what Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou describe as "broken": belonging "neither here nor there."[41] Yet perhaps a better descriptor is "incomplete." Berry notes that intercultural relations take place over time, during which individuals explore, learn, forget, adapt, and eventually settle into a preferred way of living.[42] As South Korean society gradually refines its understanding of multiculturalism and adapts to the reality of a growing immigrant population, female marriage migrants may find a greater sense of belonging, as the host culture becomes more accepting of the diversity they represent. Through this snapshot of the experience of Anglophone female marriage migrants, this study contributes to the research on long-term immigration to Korea, not only by illuminating the value of a social identity perspective in understanding the social integration of migrants, but also regarding the lack of consideration of the experiences of non-Asian female spouses in South Korea. It also provides insight into immigrant agency, which is worthy of note as South Korean policymakers grapple with the challenge this agency poses to the narrative of what it means to be Korean.

41. Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou, "Anglophone Marriage-Migrants": 385.
42. Berry, "Integration and Multiculturalism": 2.17.