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Where Migration Meets Gender in Northeast Asia: Marriage Migrants and Domestic and Care Workers in Japan and South Korea

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1. Introduction

Rapid industrialization, economic growth and urbanization have resulted in an influx of international migrants to Japan and South Korea (hereinafter Korea) since the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. Since the 2000s, there has been a significant increase in the migration of women, which is an illustration of the global trend of feminization of migration. The number of migrants is on the rise in Japan and South Korea, including foreign brides and female domestic and care workers.

In Japan, international marriages started to increase from the late 1980s and peaked at 2006 at 6.1% of total marriages being international marriages with 80% involving Japanese men and foreign brides¹⁾. In Korea, the number of international marriages started to rise in the 1990s and peaked in 2006 with almost 13% and 80% of those marriages involving Korean men and foreign brides²⁾. Since then, the numbers in both countries have decreased due to various reasons such as the economic recession resulting from the Lehman shock in 2008 and enforcement of strict criteria for international marriages, however, statistics show that 3.4% and 8% of marriages in 2016 were international marriages in Japan and Korea, respectively. With rapid urbanization and women entering the work force, both Japan and Korea experience a shortage of brides in the rural areas, especially in the farming and fishing villages in both countries. In Japan, many women from Korea, China and the Philippines came to marry Japanese men in the rural areas. In Korea, in the beginning many Chinese women (both ethnic

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- 1) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Japan, "Statistics on Demographic Change," <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?lid=000001190826> (last accessed on October 1, 2017).
- 2) National Statistics Office, "Marriage and Divorce Statistics 2006," <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/11/index.board?bmode=read&bSeq=&aSeq=273509&pageNo=2&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=> (last accessed on September 5, 2017) and National Statistics Office, "Marriage and Divorce Statistics in 2016," <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/8/11/index.board?bmode=list&bSeq=&aSeq=273496&pageNo=1&rowNum=10&navCount=10&currPg=&sTarget=title&sTxt=> (last accessed on September 5, 2017).

Korean Chinese and Han Chinese) sought for marriage with Korean men, however, since the 2000s, women from Asian countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia and other CIS countries come to Korea as marriage migrants. Marriage migrants are one of the most dynamic forms of permanent migration in both Japan and Korea. However, it has also become a new and growing avenue for exploitation, forced marriage, illicit trafficking and sites for domestic abuse.

In terms of female domestic and care workers, Japan had begun to accept foreign care workers from the Philippines in 2004, and then expanded it to include care workers from Vietnam and Indonesia. In terms of domestic workers, the Japanese government had under the “New National Strategic Special Zones” programme initiated pilot programme of hiring foreign domestic housekeepers in specially appointed cities in Japan. In the past, the Japanese government did not allow Japanese households to hire foreign maids “except those highly skilled ³⁾” expatriates such as diplomats returning to Japan. In Korea, the market for foreign housekeepers existed since the early 1990s as many ethnic Koreans in China found themselves seeking for better opportunities in economically flourishing Korea, and many of them worked as housekeepers and care workers of affluent Korean families.

Even though there is an increase in the population of foreigners and more representation of them in both Japan and Korea, their ideal of racial homogeneity die hard, and the concept of “multiculturalism” or ethnic coexistence has yet to reach the stage where people can discuss how to integrate different cultural groups into a harmonious society and benefit from the diversity. Even today, many interracial couples and their family experience discrimination, and many domestic and care workers face various challenges in fitting in and integrating to the respective societies.

This article will look at the dynamics of international migration of women in Japan and Korea and argue the importance of recognizing that the migration processes of migration of women have internal dynamics, but at the same time the migrants’ agency should not obscure the real constraints that they face. Secondly, the paper will examine the background and various pull factors of the feminization of migration in Japan and Korea and consider several case studies and narratives of women migrants to analyze the complex dynamics of agency, victimization and vulnerability. Lastly, the paper will make some tentative observations on how cultural and institutional factors determine national policies towards marriage, care and migration.

3) Isabel Reynolds and Norman P. Aquino, “Learning to bow: Japan reluctantly opens door to foreign housemaids,” *The Japan Times*, January 10, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/01/10/national/learning-bow-japan-reluctantly-opens-door-foreign-housemaids/#.WeMg3WcUnSc> (last accessed on October 1, 2017).

2. Feminization of Migration in East Asia

Asia is the second largest and fastest growing epicentre for international migration, with 75 million international migrants living and working in the region and much of the migration is inter-regional⁴⁾. The increase in transnational migration in East Asia have been facilitated by factors such as the rapid aging population, low birth rate, increase in women's participation in the labour market and labour shortage in non and less skilled jobs (or the 3D jobs—difficult, dangerous and dirty) due to the high education level of nationals⁵⁾. Unlike in the past, more women are becoming active in transnational migration.

In both Japan and Korea, the economic growth in the two countries has accelerated the international migration of women from economically developing countries to developed countries. This includes both women who seek to “marry up” or to marry affluent male partners as well as the global transfer of female care work service in these countries⁶⁾.

The following sections will examine the marriage migrants and domestic and care workers in the two respective countries, more specifically the pull factors and the institutional provisions that facilitate the movement of these women across borders.

(1) Marriage Migrants in Japan and Korea

As aforementioned, marriage migrants in Japan started in the late 1980s, and then spread to Korea in the 1990s. While marriage migrants can meet their spouse through tourism, work or even chance encounters, large shares are organized through commercial brokers. With rapid urbanization, high level of education and improved job opportunities, many “modern” Japanese and Korean women have the financial means to escape the burdens of “traditional” society which dictate that women are expected to take care of all household chores and care for the parents-in-law. Cultural norms, particularly of the parents-in-law generation, are changing much more slowly than female job markets, thus there is an increase in the trend of late marriage and non-marriage among Japanese and Korean women.

Kawaguchi and Lee estimate that in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, a college-educated woman is 50% to 200% more likely to remain single than her counterpart with no

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- 4) Ito Peng, “Explaining Exceptionality: Care and Migration Policies in Japan and South Korea,” paper presented at International Political Science Association Conference (IPSA, 2016) p. 4. See also UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UN-DESA), International Migration Report 2015: Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/375), 2016.
 - 5) See Rhacel S. Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); R.S. Parreñas and J.K Kim, “Multicultural East Asia: An introduction,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Vol. 37, No. 10, 2011) pp. 1555-1561.
 - 6) Jiyeoun Song, “Labour Markets, Care Regimes and Foreign Care Worker Policies in East Asia,” *Social Policy and Administration* (Vol. 49, No. 3, 2015) p. 377.

tertiary degree. Moreover, many statistical data and opinion polls suggest that Asian women generally prefer hypergamy whereby they seek a spouse of equal or high socio-economic status. Men with a low socio-economic status (non and less skilled jobs) are more likely to have a migrant wife, rather than a native one, even though many foreign brides have college degrees, and many of them marry men from fishing and farming villages in rural areas of Japan and Korea.

In Japan, in the late 1980s and 1990s, many Chinese and Korean brides made their way to Japan to marry Japanese men in the rural areas. During the late 1980s, several Tohoku municipal governments (including Yamagata, Yamanashi and Niigata prefectures) arranged marriages between local bachelors and women from South Korea, China and the Philippines in an effort to solve the serious shortage of brides in rural farming villages⁷⁾. Moreover, in the 1980s, many Filipina women came to Japan as entertainers on entertainer visas, however, many of the women chose to marry Japanese men and obtain spousal visa in order to avoid overstaying their visas or at times deportation. With the revision of Immigration Law in 2005, heavy restrictions were put into effect on entertainer visa, therefore, the number of Filipinas entering Japan decreased⁸⁾.

In Japan, once you marry a Japanese national you are eligible to obtain the spousal visa (*Nihonjin haigusha biza* 日本人配偶者ビザ) which is valid for one year and must be renewed every year. Since the visa status is dependent upon the marriage with a Japanese national, in the case of divorce or death of the spouse, there is a chance that the visa could be revoked. However, after 3 years of domicile in Japan, the spouse can apply for permanent residency at which point the foreign spouse's status is not determinant upon the marital status. This criterion can increase the level of vulnerability of foreign spouses, because in the case there is domestic violence many people do not report it in the fear that their visa may be revoked and in worst case scenario become subjects of deportation.

There are various pull factors that attract marriage migrants to Korea, where many of the brides are from China (both ethnic Korean Chinese and Han Chinese), Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia and CIS countries. The obvious reason is the economic imbalance between developed and developing countries, where women from developing countries seek to marry affluent men in developed countries. For some women this could be a way out of poverty for herself and her family, therefore, there is also a push factor such as the pressure

7) Takuya Asakura, "Foreign Brides Fill the Gap in Rural Japan," The Japan Times, January 8, 2002, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2002/01/08/national/foreign-brides-fill-the-gap-in-rural-japan/#.WeNZTWcUnSc> (last accessed on September 15, 2017).

8) See Masaaki Satake, *Migration and Multicultural Coexistence: International Marriage between Filipinas and Japanese* (original title in Japanese 『フィリピン - 日本国際結婚-移住と多文化共生』) (Tokyo: Mekon Publishing, 2006).

from the family in source countries.

The other factor is the role of marriage brokers. Commercial marriage brokers are particularly important as they often play an intermediary role in organizing marriage migration. Commercial marriage brokers in Korea are legal, but have only been regulated since the enforcement of the Marriage Brokerage Law in 2008 with amendments in 2010 and 2012 following many cases of abuse and deaths of foreign brides⁹⁾. Many of these cases involved Korean husbands with history of violence and mental illness, yet, it has been reported in the media that such information was not given to the foreign brides by the brokers.

While brokers facilitate international marriages, there are serious problems with marriage brokerage in Korea such as the commodified nature of commercial marriage brokerage, where the economic imbalance between Korea and the source countries dictate that the Korean husband to be the high paying customer. As such, foreign brides are often treated as commodity, thus increasing their vulnerability. There is even “warranties” in cases where the bride does not meet the expectations of the husband and his family¹⁰⁾. Many Korean husbands consider themselves to be high paying “consumers” which give them a sense of ownership to demand their foreign brides to bear children, do the domestic work, take care of the husbands’ parents and even fulfill the husband’s sexual desires.

One of the other challenges that marriage migrants face is their residency status. In the past, marriage migrants were granted the spousal visa (F-6) upon registering their marriage, however, as of 2014, there is a Korean language criteria that must be met before a foreign spouse can obtain the F-6 visa¹¹⁾. A marriage migrant’s status in Korea depends on her marriage until she can obtain permanent residency or naturalization, which requires the

9) See “Matchmaking in Korea: Mentally Ill Grooms Need Not Apply,” *ABC News*, July 16, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/mentally-ill-korean-grooms-apply/story?id=11177251> (last accessed on June 25, 2017); “Another Vietnamese Bride Murdered in South Korea,” *NamViet News*, May 29, 2011. These are just the tip of the iceberg, and such kind of violent crimes have continued to occur even with legal provisions. See also <https://namvietnews.wordpress.com/2011/05/29/another-vietnamese-bride-murdered-in-south-korea/> (last accessed on June 25, 2017); “Second Vietnamese Bride Murdered in South Korea within 3 Weeks,” *Thanh Nien Daily*, December 18, 2014, <http://www.thanhniennnews.com/society/second-vietnamese-bride-murdered-in-south-korea-within-3-weeks-35461.html> (last accessed on June 25, 2017); “South Korea’s Foreign Bride Problem,” *The Diplomat*, January 29, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/south-koreas-foreign-bride-problem/> (last accessed on June 25, 2017). Most recent case include: Dong-hwan Ko, “Elderly Man Stabs his Vietnamese Daughter-in-Law to Death,” *The Korea Times*, June 27, 2017, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/06/251_231977.html (last accessed on September 15, 2017).

10) *Ibid.*, Cheng, 2011.

11) As of 2014, the Korean Immigration Law stipulates that a foreign spouse married to a Korean national must comply with the Korean language criteria. He/she must have at least Level 1 proficiency at the time of the issuance of the visa, or if this cannot be provided, then the foreign spouse must pass an interview with the immigration officer to prove language proficiency.

migrant to fulfill strict criteria. Due to the heavy dependency on the husband and his family when applying for permanent residency or nationality, often times the husband threatens the foreign bride with divorce and deportation and is able to control her movements so long as she remains on the spousal visa which is granted when the two people register their marriage. The spousal visa itself is a precarious form of residency because it is highly dependent on the Korean spouse. Therefore, even though foreign brides may experience domestic violence or abuse, often times they do not notify the police in fear of divorce or deportation. Moreover, some women seek to remain in the marriage because they are under pressure from their families back home to send remittances.

While commercial brokerage is more of an issue in Korea than Japan, in both countries marriage migrants are often very vulnerable and their precarious residency status makes them very highly dependent on their Japanese and Korean spouse. Not to mention that the language and culture barriers weigh heavy on the marriage migrants, because in many cases a newly arrived wife (unless she is familiar with Japanese/Korean culture prior to arrival) is at the mercy of her new family. Once they arrive in Japan or Korea, they are often confined to their homes with little or no contact with the outside world, which make them more vulnerable to abuse. With the increase of marriage migrants, there are more information available for foreign brides in their mother language and/or English, however, important legal information as well as services are often available only in Japanese or Korean, therefore, it is extremely difficult to access such information.

(2) Domestic and Care Workers in Japan and Korea

The significant increase in domestic and care workers in Japan and Korea can be attributed to the global dimension of care work, identified as the “international division of reproductive labour”, the “global care chain” and the “transnationalization of care¹²⁾” or in other words, to reduce the “care deficit” due to the increase of Japanese and Korean women entering the labour force. Moreover, another common feature in Japan and Korea is that the cultural and social values shape the national policies toward foreign domestic and care workers, and both countries have adopted a more “regulated and institutional approach” to care and immigration¹³⁾.

In Japan, there was strict regulation on who could hire domestic housekeepers, and only highly skilled expatriates (eg. diplomats) could utilize such service. However, to increase

12) See Arlie Hochschild, “The Nanny Chain,” *American Perspective* (Vol. 11, No. 4, 2000) pp. 32–6; Rhacel Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Nicola Yeates, “Going Global: The Transnationalization of Care,” *Development and Change* (Vol. 42, No. 4, 2001) pp.1109–30.

13) *Ibid.*, Peng, 2016, p. 6.

Japanese women's participation in the labour force, the Abe administration in 2015 sought for deregulation and under the new "National Strategic Special Zones" has allowed households to hire foreign domestic workers in designated cities in Japan, including the Tokyo area, Kansai area, Niigata City, Yabu City, Fukuoka City and Okinawa Prefecture¹⁴⁾. Foreign domestic workers are required to be 18 years or older, single and have at least one year of experience in domestic work in their home country. Moreover, they are required to have a direct contract with one of the six household staffing services companies including Pasona, Bears, Poppins, Duskin, and Chez Vous, among others. The actual programme was implemented in 2015 and has opened its doors to the first group of foreign domestic workers in 2016. It is a pilot programme that the government plans to continue for the next three years.

In terms of care work, Japan has not pursued an active recruiting of care workers despite its expanding aging population, increase in demand but decrease in supply of domestic care workers. Instead, the Japanese government compromised to sign an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with three Southeast Asian countries, namely the Philippines (in 2004), Vietnam and Indonesia (in 2008). In the fear of negative responses from the Japanese people, the Abe administration stated that the increase of foreign care workers from the three respective countries was not an active migration policy but part of an economic stimulus. Moreover, prospective care workers must fulfill several criteria including more than three years of experience in the care industry in their home country, proof of Japanese language proficiency (at least Level 3 of JLPT) and passing the Japanese national examination after the third year in Japan.

In Korea, since the implementation of the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2004, it has become much easier for migrant workers to seek jobs in South Korea. The EPS is a government-to-government migrant labour programme which enables employers in the manufacturing, construction, fish breeding, agriculture and livestock breeding and some service industries to recruit workers from countries with which South Korea has signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) under the EPS framework. However, the interesting point is that even against the backdrop of the aging society, high demands for outsourcing care from the traditional household care, the EPS did not cover employment to the care industry. Rather, the Korean government implemented the Employment Management System in 2002 to overseas ethnic Koreans workers in services including child care, domestic work and long term care. In addition, the Korean government also introduced the Working Visiting System to

14) In the future, the Japanese government intends to extend the zones to Senboku City, Sendai City, Hiroshima Prefecture, Kitakyushu City, and Aichi Prefecture. For more information please refer to: The Cabinet Office of Japan, "National Strategic Special Zones," <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/tiiki/kokusentoc/index.html> (last accessed on October 10, 2017).

expand employment of overseas ethnic Koreans which grant them residency through a special visa or H-2 visas (which allows for entry and departure from Korea for five years without requiring re-entry permits) and allowing them to work exclusively in categories with labour shortages including domestic and care work)¹⁵⁾. One of the most significant reasons for such co-ethnic programmes is the Korean people's insistence on "ethnic proximity" of those people who come to work in their houses as well as taking care of their elderly and children. It is also worthy to note that the marriage migrants, although the original intent was to fill in the gaps in rural areas in Korea were regarded as an important reserve of the paid and unpaid care workforce¹⁶⁾.

3. Case Studies and Narratives of Migrants

Based on interviews conducted with migrant women in both Japan and Korea, this section will look at the actual narratives of the women to illustrate some of the real problems that the marriage migrants and domestic and care workers face in both countries.

(1) Marriage Migrants in Japan and Korea

A: Japan

1) Case # 1: Ms. K¹⁷⁾ was a semi-professional dancer in Korea who came to Japan on an entertainer visa in the mid-1990s. She obtained the job through a friend thinking she would be dancing on a stage, but when she arrived in Japan she quickly realized the job description was not completely accurate. However, she needed to work to pay off her debts in Korea, so she worked very hard and sometimes worked without days off. She met her husband while she was working at this bar. He was a regular customer and they became very close in the course of 6 months. Though company policy was that she could not date customers, they had started to see each other outside the bar, though at times she was frightened that she may get caught and get deported. Her visa was valid for only 1 year and could not be renewed, so she had told this man that she would be returning to Korea soon. Heartbroken, the man proposed to her and they decided right away to get married. After all the tedious paper work they were finally married, but this was just the beginning of very difficult challenges to come. Her husband had introduced her to his family and friends, and they were not very accepting of her. Her mother-

15) *Ibid.*, Song, p. 10.

16) E. Kim, "Women Migrant Laborers of Reproductive/Care work: The Case of South Korea," in R. Ogawa, E. Kim, F. T. Wang and H. C. Liu (eds), *Transnational Migration from Southeast Asia to East Asia and the Transformation of Reproductive Labor*, (Kitakyushu: Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, 2010) p 70.

17) Ms. K is a Korean woman married to a Japanese man. They had met when she was working at a Korean bar in Tokyo. Interviews with Ms. K have been conducted several times throughout 2010-2015. Ms. K has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

in-law would ask her questions like, “Did you marry my son for the money?” When she got pregnant with her first baby, the mother-in-law had told her, “Are you sure that it’s my son’s baby?” She was so stressed and upset that she almost had a miscarriage, but at the end the baby was born without any complications. Her husband was quite supportive of her but as soon as the baby was born, he started to become distant, and he would come home late from work. Eventually, she found out that he was having an affair. Devastated, she was ready to demand a divorce but quickly realized that she could jeopardize her status in Japan. Afraid of being deported, she remained in the marriage. After three years, she was able to get her permanent residency, but by that time she had 2 children already and being a housewife she has no source of income. Even if she got a divorce she would not be able to provide for herself and her children, therefore, after 20 years of marriage she still remains married to the Japanese man.

2) Narrative # 2: Ms. A¹⁸⁾ is a Filipina woman who came to Japan as an exchange student. She met her husband, who is half Japanese and half American, while she was studying at a university in Tokyo. They immediately hit it off and started to date, but sadly she had to return to the Philippines. After a year of long distance relationship, her boyfriend had asked her to marry and live with him in Japan. She was anxious of her future in Japan, but she believed in him and their relationship so she agreed to marry him and moved to Japan in 2005. When she went to the immigration office to get her spousal visa, they asked for their photos while they were dating, and asked them to provide at least two people who could “confirm” their relationship. The visits to the immigration office were less than pleasant, but they were relieved that the paper work had gone through, but they were certainly not ready for what was to follow. When they were walking in the streets of Tokyo, she would often hear people whispering, “Do you think they met in a bar?”, “She must be after his money!”, “He must be having an affair with her.” When they had their first baby, her neighbours had come to congratulate them, when one of them mentioned, “Did you marry your husband so that you can have a good looking *hafu* (Japanese word meaning mixed ethnicity) baby?” Though she meant no intentional harm, these are the kinds of stereotypes and discrimination she faced.

B: Korea

1) Narrative # 1: Ms. N,¹⁹⁾ met her Korean husband through a marriage broker in Vietnam, and

18) Ms. A is a Filipina woman married to a half American, half Japanese man. They met when she was an exchange student in a university in Japan. Interviews with Ms. A have been conducted twice, in June 2013 and September 2014. Ms. A has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

19) Ms. N is a Vietnamese woman married to a Korean man. They had met through a marriage broker in Vietnam, and decided to marry her Korean husband in matter of hours. Interviews with Ms. N have

within couple of hours decided to marry this man who was 20 years older than her at the time. She moved to Korea in 2007 and lived in a farming village in Southeastern part of Korea. There, she lived with her parents-in-law and her husband. She immediately got pregnant after arriving in Korea and became a mother to two sons. However, she claims that it has been a very stressful marriage. Ms. N had to not only work in the family farm, but also take care of her parents-in-law, where her father-in-law was bedridden and mother-in-law was very sensitive about her taking care of her husband. When she made a complaint to her husband he would get very angry with her and sometimes verbally and physically abuse her. He would always say to her, “I paid a large amount of money to marry you, so you better do your part and make my money worth it.” She would often think of running away or going back to Vietnam, but was terrified that she may never see her children again, so she endured the abuse. After fulfilling the three years of residency for her permanent residency, she had repeatedly asked her husband to help her file the documents with the immigration office, but he would brush her off and tell her he would do it later. A turning point for her was when she was watching the news in 2012 where a Vietnamese woman was murdered by her Korean husband, and the TV anchor mentioned an emergency phone service for foreign marriage migrants who were victims of domestic violence. Fearing for her and her children’s lives, she called the number when her husband was away and was able to get help. She still lives in Korea with the full custody of her two children, thanks to the public lawyers and social workers that helped and supported her. She said, “I am very grateful to all the people who helped me, but not everyone is as lucky as I am. So many young innocent Vietnamese women’s lives were taken at the hands of their spouses who were supposed to love and protect them. I still shudder at the thought that I could have been one of them.”

2) Narrative #2: One of the women interviewed, Ms. C²⁰⁾, had the following narrative to share: “What some Koreans fail to recognize is that there are many foreign wives in Korea who weren’t picked by marriage brokers, women who married their husbands because of love and desire to have their own family, women with no hidden agenda when they decided to leave their home countries to be in Korea with their husbands. One of my husband’s relatives said to me, ‘You are very lucky to come to Korea. Many Filipinas want to go but they cannot.’ Some Koreans think that when a Filipina marries a Korean, she is after financial gain. Not all Filipinas marry for money. Not all Filipinas are dying to step foot on Korean soil. Not all

been conducted twice, once in January 2014 and second time in February 2015. Ms. N has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

- 20) Ms. C is a Filipina woman married to a Korean man. They had met 10 years ago, dated and was in a long distance relationship until they got married in 2010. Interviews with Ms. C have been conducted twice, once in February 2015 and second time in March 2016. Ms. C has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

Filipinas are after visas.” She also added that: “Marriages of convenience are sought for by not only Filipinos, but by people from various countries. People can be hypocrites, judging others because of their choices in life. I have much respect for women who marry for convenience, and yet turn out to have a more successful life and dedicate their time to becoming good wives and mothers. These women DO exist, but are overshadowed by the wrong perception of bigoted people.”

(2) Domestic and Care Workers

A: Japan

1) Narrative #1: One of the trainers of housekeepers at the Magsaysay Global Service in Manila, Ms. Contessa Tadena, stated that “The doors have just opened for foreign housekeepers in Japan, but attitude is as important as skills. I teach my students the value of honesty, respect, politeness, and humility. These are the values that Japanese respect the most. Two participants have already been rejected from the course for failing to show sufficient humility.” Also, Ms. Yuki Takahashi, a founder of Tokyo-based housekeeping company Bears KK, says that “If the regulations aren’t relaxed, this will be a loss-making venture for the companies concerned. Japanese housekeepers don’t need qualifications — if someone is of good character we can hire and train them. Why can’t we do the same with the foreign workers?”²¹⁾

2) Narrative #2: “Under the EPA programmes, qualified care workers receive Japanese language training, followed by professional training at a Japanese medical or care facility. When we pass the national board examination, we become eligible to work in Japan indefinitely, renewing their residence status every three years. We put in a lot of time and effort to complete the training and earn our license, but up to 40% of people return home. The reasons are because of the working conditions and long hours that make it impossible to balance work and family. Some even end up with health issues and injuries.”²²⁾

B: Korea

1) Narrative #1: Ms. S²³⁾, an ethnic Korean Chinese (referred to as *Joseonjok* in Korean) woman who came to Korea with her husband and children in the early 2000s. While she was

21) See also Reynolds and Aquino.

22) See also Yuko Hirano, “Foreign Care Workers in Japan: A Policy Without a Vision,” *Nippon.com*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00288/> (last accessed on October 1, 2017).

23) Ms. S is an ethnic Korean Chinese who came to Korea with her family in the early 2000s. She worked as a housekeeper and a nanny for affluent Korean families. Interviews with Ms. S have been conducted several times since 2008-2014. Ms. S has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

on a family visa as her husband was working in a Korean company, living expenses in Korea were far more expensive than they had expected, so she decided to get a job as a housekeeper and nanny. Though she was registered in one of the housekeeping services company, she replied to several classified ads in the newspaper and went for the interviews. One of the potential client in the interview asked her to get a blood test to prove that she did not have any pre conditions or disease, and asked her to submit her family registry with her family and her personal information on it. She also told Ms. S to speak the Seoul dialect of the Korean language because she did not want her children to speak with the “Yonbyon (or Yanbian)” accent. The client had told her that they had problems with their previous *Joseonjok* housekeepers, who stole and lied to them. The client had also asked her whether she knew of any illegal business among the *Joseonjok* housekeepers community, as she heard of terrifying cases of housekeepers abducting their children and selling their organs. Ms. S was furious that on the one hand housekeeping and private child care is specifically intended for co-ethnic people like herself because of their “ethnic proximity” yet when it actually comes down to hiring them they are looked down upon and excluded from the community.

2) Narrative #2: Ms. T²⁴⁾ is a friend of Ms. S who works as a private care worker looking after the elderly mother-in-law of her client. Her client is a housewife with two children. She has hired a separate nanny for her two children, and her job is to look after the client’s mother-in-law who is in a wheelchair. The mother-in-law was furious that her *meonuri* (the Korean word for daughter-in-law) had hired help to look after her, because after all a good, obedient *meonuri* should be looking after her husband’s mother. In the beginning, the mother-in-law did not want Ms. T to even touch her and called her “unreliable” because she was a *Joseonjok*. However, with time, the mother-in-law realized Ms. T was there to help her and they became very close. She apologized to Ms. T for calling her “unreliable” and said that many Korean people still have discriminatory feelings towards *Joseonjok*. The mother-in-law said to her that now she believes that Ms. T is “more Korean than her ungrateful daughter-in-law”.

The important lesson to be learned here is that it is crucial to consider the complex dynamics of agency and at the same time the vulnerability of marriage migrants and domestic and care workers in Japan and Korea. It is not enough to simply consider all marriage migrants as victims of the commodification of foreign brides or domestic and care workers as “disposable” workers, but also very important to provide legal institutions, devise ways to minimize the violence against women and deter violation of human rights.

24) Ms. T is also an ethnic Korean Chinese who came to Korea with her husband who works in a Korean company. Interviews with Ms. T have been conducted on various occasions since 2008. She has given the author consent to share her narrative in this paper.

4. Tentative Observation and Conclusion

Japanese and Koreans are rediscovering their Asian neighbors now through the influx of marriage migrants and migrant workers, and yet both countries have a long road to establishing and implementing effective measures to ensure human rights for these people, and to connect them to local communities where they can feel a sense of belonging to the community.

Moreover, the negative sentiments by the public towards immigration have a significant impact on not only the national policies towards but also the actual lives of international migrants. From the standpoint of human security, with the rapidly aging population, low birth rate and shortage of labour, both Japan and Korea must seek for measures to tackle these serious issues. Yet, traditional security issues in Northeast Asia obscure the seriousness of issues concerning human security in this region. We have to come to an understanding and embrace the fact that migrants are also valuable and important members of the community. Making of ethnicity is often gendered, and gendered bodies can become symbolic representation of the nation. Therefore, in this sense, the ethnically diverse women in the region could pose as a measure to transform the “ethnically homogenous” model of Japan and Korea to embrace a more “multicultural” Japan and Korea.

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Where Migration Meets Gender in Northeast Asia: Marriage Migrants and Domestic and Care Workers in Japan and South Korea

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Abstract

Rapid industrialization, economic growth and urbanization have resulted in an influx of international migrants to East Asia since the 1980s. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the migration of women, which is an illustration of the global trend of feminization of migration. Consequently, the increase of migration (both legal and undocumented) in this region brought about new avenue for exploitation. The objective of the paper is to explore the gender dimension within the dynamics of international marriages and labour migrants in domestic and care work in Northeast Asia, including the factors such as the “agency” vs. “immobility” of these women, the difficulties in mainstreaming, the victimization of these women and make some tentative observations on how cultural and institutional factors determine national policies towards marriage, care and migration. In terms of methodology, the author relies on primary and secondary sources such as government documents, reports by human rights organizations and memoirs as well as personal encounters with these women.

Keywords

Industrialization, feminization of migration, Northeast Asia, agency, mobility, marriage migration, domestic workers, care workers