

### Background and Significance

In recent decades, marriages involving couples of different race/ethnic or national backgrounds have been on the rise globally (Heikkilä and Yeoh 2010; Lee and Bean 2010; Qian and Lichter 2011; Yang and Lu 2010). In the United States, increasing trends of interracial marriages have blurred group boundaries in a multiracial society (Qian and Lichter 2007; Qian and Lichter 2011). Globally, however, the phenomena of “transnational marriage” or “cross-border marriage” are often marriages involving couples from two societies within the same region such as Asia or Europe (Heikkilä and Yeoh 2010; Yang and Lu 2010). While these marriages would be categorized as same-race marriage in the US, they are viewed differently in the Asian region. These transnational marriages, which take place across ethnic and national boundaries and involve changes in both one spouse’s legal status and physical movement (Kim 2010), deserve further attention from demographers for at least three reasons.

First, these unions are typically comprised of female marriage migrants from cultures of similar yet different gender ideologies compared to the host societies (Soin 2001). This situation creates unique marital power dynamics which are not yet well-understood in the marriage literature. Second, these unions subsequently form “multicultural families” which nurture bi-ethnic children; an examination of these marriages and the wellbeing of migrant wives will inform research on the long-term development of “multicultural children.” Third, these unions often take place in countries undergoing demographic transition in which the forms and the functions of family are impacted by globalization, urbanization, and migration; not only that the conventional views on marital formation and dissolution are different from the West, but these countries are often new destinations of immigration, challenging the openness of the societies and the receptiveness of social policy to immigrants from other societies. Consequently, these unions signal a changing landscape of family demography in the global context. In-depth analyses of the wellbeing of these unions will inform practitioners about how to support these families, and policy makers about how to make effective marriage and family policies.

From a micro perspective, marriage and migration are two significant life events that affect marriage migrants’ mental and physical wellbeing. The growing “intra-Asia marriage migration” involves female migrants who move from poorer to wealthier countries in Asia via commercially arranged contacts (Constable 2005; Hugo 2005; Jones and Shen 2008; Piper 2008; Tseng 2010). These marriages are less studied in the marriage and family literature, which often assumes that marriages are based on romance. Thus, commercial marriages are typically viewed as behavior falling between human trafficking and arranged marriage. Consequently, public discourse and prior research tends to focus on the negative aspects of these marriages (Kim 2011b; Lee 2005; Lim 2009), such as social isolation, domestic violence, and suicide attempts (Choi, Cheung and Cheung 2012; Kim and Shin 2007; Lin et al. 2009; Williams and Yu 2006; Woelz-Stirling, Kelaher and Lenore Manderson 1998). As the number of ethnic intermarriages increase, further analyses of the wellbeing of marriage migrants with a focus on “what works”, and how these marriages’ institutional mechanisms interact with migration process will allow scholars and policy makers to design effective health and integration policies.

### Study Context and Research Gaps

South Korea (hereafter, Korea) is one of the new destinations for Asian marriage migrants in East Asia where the cumulative number of migrants has reached 284,000 in 2011 (Chosunilbo 2012). The majority of marriage migrants to Korea come from China, followed by Vietnam, Japan, Cambodia, and the Philippines. As one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world, Korea also holds a rigid culture of patriarchy and prevalent gender discrimination regardless of economic development (Cho 1998; Chun and Das Gupta 2009). In recent years, the visibility of migrant brides and their children have triggered continuous policy debates under the discourse of “Korean multiculturalism” (Kim 2011a; Lim 2010; Watson 2012). Demographers predict that multicultural marriages are likely to increase, because the imbalanced sex ratios at birth which peaked between 1990 and 1994 will soon produce proportionally more bachelors in the domestic marriage market (Hesketh and

Xing 2006). Relevant literature has not examined the wellbeing of these marriages from the perspective of marital power dynamics; most studies on marriage migrants were based on small-scale local surveys or a qualitative case study approach.

### Research Questions

Using social survey data from Korea, I focus on ethnic intermarriages involving Korean husbands and migrant wives from Japan, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. I seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the associations between marital power dynamics and the wellbeing of marriage migrants?
2. Do these associations change after considering marriage migrants' social integration?
3. Do these associations change after considering in-law factors?

### Data and Methods

The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families in South Korea was conducted by face-to-face interviews and was designed to study the living condition of marriage migrants. Government officials from the survey agency identified 167,000 married immigrant residents in South Korea including both naturalized and non citizens, marriage migrants whose spouses are naturalized foreigners or foreigners were excluded in the survey. A total of 130,001 migrants who married Koreans were identified to be living in Korea in 2009. Survey agencies recruited interviewers to conduct face-to-face interviews through home visits. 73,669 questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 56 %. The analytic subsamples of this paper (total N=64,972) are immigrant women from China who are Korean Chinese (N=24,561) and Han Chinese (N=9,292), marriage migrants from Vietnam (N=19,363), Japan (N=3,618), the Philippines (N=6,212), and Cambodia (N=1,924).

*Outcome variables.* I use three outcome variables to measure wellbeing of marriage migrants: (1) self-rated health represents general psychosocial and physical health; (2) life satisfaction measures general wellbeing including at least psychosocial and material aspects; and (3) one question in the survey asked respondents if they would recommend families or relatives to marry a Korean and migrate to Korea. This question represents an overall view of, and satisfaction with, marriage migration to Korea, and captures additional aspects compared to self-rated health and life satisfaction. All variables were dichotomized into very good and good versus the rest.

*Marital power dynamics.* I use variables representing dyadic relationships as a proxy for "relative resourcefulness" among couples, measured by gaps in age, education, and perceived socioeconomic status. (1) Dyadic differences in age: I classify age differences into four groups: wives older than the husbands or the same age, husbands who are 1 to 10 years older, 11 to 20 years older, and more than 20 years. (2) Dyadic differences in education levels: Education differences were calculated by husbands' education minus wives' education. According to the education level reported, level one to level six are: no schooling, primary school, junior high school, senior high school, college, and graduate school. I classify the dyadic differences into four categories: wives education higher than husbands, no gap (educational homogamy), husbands have one level of education higher than wives, and husbands have two to five levels higher than wives. (3) Dyadic differences in SES: Questions in the survey asked marriage migrants to identify their perceived the SES of natal family in home country, and the SES of marital family in Korea on a 0 to 10 scale. Gaps in SES were calculated by SES of marital family minus SES of natal family. I classify them into natal > marital, natal = marital (SES homogamy), natal < marital (1 and 2 levels), natal < marital (3 to 10 levels). In each model containing gap variables, I also include wives' age, education, and natal family SES, in order to examine the partial effects.

*Social integration.* Social integration is an individual's belonging and sources of support in a given community or society, which is positively associated with human wellbeing especially for immigrant. For marriage migrants, social integration represents their interpersonal skills and resources both in their marital families and in Korean society. Social relationships with co-ethnic network and social relationships with Koreans

were used to measure the level of social integration. The models also include length of stay measures and age at migration, citizenship status and Korean language proficiency. Citizenship status represents legal status and rights, while Korean language proficiency indicates communication skills and ability to get around by themselves.

*In-law factors.* Living with extended families such as parents-in-law may reduce wives' power compared to living in nuclear households. Besides, even if marriage migrants do not co-reside with parents-in-law, the in-laws still play an important role in making family decisions in Confucian cultures. Therefore, I created dummy variables measuring the differences between: living with both in-laws, living with either one of them, not living with in-laws but either or both are alive, and those whose in-laws have passed away.

*Control variables.* Based on the literature from marital wellbeing and immigrant wellbeing, other control variables that are associated with marriage migrants' wellbeing include: perceived discrimination, economic hardship (measured by if they had to borrow money for living and if they were unable to afford to see a medical doctor), marital status, if the Korean husbands are physically disabled, and how they meet their husbands (through commercial agencies, introduced by friends and relatives, via religious organizations, or met by themselves). In addition, wives' individual income and household income were also controlled.

*Analyses.* Multivariate logistic regressions were used to examine the association among key independent variables and wellbeing in reduced and full models. Likelihood ratio tests were conducted to examine model fit. To examine the effects of marriage migrants' ethnicity, I include them in regression models as dummy variables, and also plan to stratify all analyses by ethnic groups. I exclude those whose information on outcome variables were missing (self-rated health: 1.3%, life satisfaction: 1.5%, and views on marriage migration: 3.6%). Missing data imputation will be conducted with the code "mi impute chained" in Stata 12.0

### **Preliminary Findings**

Dyadic gaps in education and perceived SES are significantly associated with marriage migrants' wellbeing, yet the strengths and directions of association vary by different wellbeing outcomes. Among the three indicators of marital power dynamics, gaps in perceived SES represent the social mobility achieved through marriage migration by marriage migrants from various Asian countries. Clear gradients were observed among all outcomes: the larger and more positive the gaps in SES between natal and marital families were, the better of marriage migrants report themselves to be. Compared to couples with homogeneous characteristics in education and perceived SES, marriage migrants whose status is higher than their husbands, have worse health and also are less satisfied with life. Interestingly, wives who were more educated hold more negative views on marriage migration to Korea (and are also less satisfied with life), compared with wives with lower level of education. In contrast, wives who had more education than their husbands are more likely to recommend marriage migration to Korea (than those in marriages that are educationally homogamous). Dyadic age gaps were least important among the measures of marital power dynamics, only those who are 11 to 20 years younger than their husbands showed better health than those who were older than their husbands.

The effects of age and length of stay have similar effects on wellbeing. All else held constant, marriage migrants' health, life satisfaction, and views on marriage migration decreased as they stay longer in Korea ( $P < .000$ ); while age also showed similar effects on health and life satisfaction that both decrease as they age, marriage migrants tended to view marriage migration to Korea more positively when they enter a later life stage, as is illustrated by a reversed gradient compared to other outcomes.

Social integration factors are significantly associated with marriage migrants' wellbeing, as being an immigrant plays a significant part in their post-migration life, in addition to being a wife. Among the social integration factors, having social support from native Koreans are positively and significantly associated with all wellbeing outcomes, however, having social support with co-ethnic network are associated with worse health but

not other two outcomes. Among the control variables, ethnic discrimination was detrimental to all wellbeing outcomes.

An interesting finding on in-law factors was observed. Compared to marriage migrants whose in-laws have passed away, those whose in-law were alive (regardless of situation on co-residence or living with either or both) are significantly healthier ( $OR=1.12\sim1.16$ ,  $P<.001$ ), yet they are also less satisfied with life and held more negative views on marriage migration to Korea, especially for those who live with both parent-in-laws (for life satisfaction:  $OR=.82$ ,  $P<.001$ ; for views on marriage migration:  $OR=.88$ ,  $P<.001$ ).

In addition, different marriage channels had differential impact on wellbeing outcomes. Compared to those who married via commercial agencies, migrants whose marriages were arranged through religious organization had significantly worse health; however, they also hold the most positive attitude ( $OR=2.24$ ,  $P<.000$ ) toward marriage migration to Korea. Relatively speaking, the health of women who married via agency was not significantly different from those who married through other channels except for religious organization. On the contrary, they generally were less satisfied with life, and hold negative attitudes toward marriage migration.

Finally, by including ethnicity as dummy variables in the regression models, the results showed that effects of marriage migrants' ethnicity were significantly different from the base category (Korean Chinese). Compared to Korean Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese were less healthy, while the Filipinas and Cambodians had better health. The variation of life satisfaction was larger than self-rated health. Japanese were way less satisfied ( $OR=.40$ ,  $P<.000$ ) than Korean Chinese, and the Cambodians expressed the most satisfaction ( $OR=1.35$ ,  $P<.000$ ) followed by the Vietnamese. Regarding views on marriage migration to Korea, only the Filipinas were less positive than Korean Chinese, while the Cambodians ( $OR=1.78$ ,  $P<.000$ ) being the most positive.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

Preliminary findings indicated that the association between marital power dynamics and wellbeing of marriage migrants seem to be in line with the "marital hypergamy" assumption, that women seek spouses of higher status than themselves. If such cases happened through marriage migration, marriage migrants had better wellbeing outcomes. According to "resource theory in cross-cultural context" proposed by Rodman (1972), transnational marriages in Korea represent the lower class of a "modified patriarchy society", where traditional values are being emphasized. Under this scenario, imbalanced power relationships (that husbands holds more power) may not lead to worse wellbeing of the migrant wives, yet those wives who were more educated, or came from more affluent families, showed worse outcomes. Perhaps such cases were against the norms and the wish of Korean husbands (and marital families).

Among measures of power dynamics, even though the mean age gaps of ten years are larger than Korean-Korean marriages as well as other industrialized countries, it did not influence the wellbeing of marriage migrants as much as gaps in education and especially gaps in SES. Such results again resonate with Rodman's theory that marital power dynamics and the consequence of power differential should be interpreted with careful consideration of cultures or subcultures (Rodman, 1972), because it is a combination of relative resources and equalitarian ideology that are considered "conventional" in the social contexts where these marriages take place.

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