

## Immigrant Brides in the Korean Rural Farming Sector: Social Exclusion and Policy Responses\*

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The purpose of this article is to examine the difficulties with which immigrant brides in the Korean rural farming sector are confronted and to suggest policy responses that address these difficulties, from the viewpoint of social exclusion. To that end,

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this article divides "social exclusion" into five categories: culture, education, linguistic communication, economy, and community life. With regard to research methodology, this article primarily depends on various kinds of formal or informal documents and data, and conducts unstructured, in-depth interviews with immigrant brides who live in the rural farming area of Gyeongbuk Do, in order to complement and support the documented research.

**Key Words:** Immigrant Brides, Social Exclusion, Vietnamese Brides, Policy Response, Korea

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## I. Introduction

Although the number of international marriages has been rapidly increasing in Korea — a country which has, for some time, been otherwise racially homogeneous — they are not a completely new phenomenon. There have been many international marriages between Korean women and American soldiers since the stationing of American troops in the 1950s, and since the 1990s, the number of international marriages between Korean women and Southeast Asian migrant workers has also increased. These types of international marriages tend to share the common characteristic of Korean women matched with foreign bachelors.

Recently, however, a main pattern of international marriage has fundamentally changed. The greater part of the marriages is being made between brides from Southeast Asia or China and bachelors in the rural farming sector. This phenomenon is largely due to Korean women's unwillingness to marry rural farming bachelors. With the growing numbers of international marriages, the number of multicultural families is also increasing in racially homogeneous Korean society, and this trend affirms the widely held

belief that Korean society is opening its door to cultural diversity.

Meanwhile, international marriages produce not a few problems in rural farming communities, which are not accustomed to taking in racial diversity. Many immigrant brides suffer from racial discrimination and confront economic, cultural, educational, and linguistic problems. The conflict between immigrant brides and their Korean family members becomes serious because of a lack of mutual understanding *vis-à-vis* their cultural differences.

Against these backdrops, this article aims to examine the reality of immigrant brides in the Korean rural farming sector, from the viewpoint of social exclusion; it also looks to explore adequate policy responses to that social exclusion. In detail, this article will answer the following research questions: What are the difficulties with which immigrant brides are confronted in adapting themselves to the Korean rural farming sector, in terms of culture, education, language, economy, and community life? In what ways are immigrant brides excluded from the mainstream of Korean society? Which kinds of policies should be implemented for tackling the social exclusion of immigrant brides? In order to respond to these research questions, this article, at first, widely refers to the literature of relevant fields. In preparation for this article, we also conduct unstructured, in-depth interviews with immigrant brides who live in the rural farming sector of Gyeongbuk Do, with the intention of complementing that literature review.

## **II. Theoretical Foundation**

According to the U.K.'s Social Exclusion Unit, "social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown" (<http://www.crimereduction>.

gov.uk]). Even though "poverty" is occasionally used synonymously with "social exclusion" and is one of its main components, the term "social exclusion" is more multi-dimensional, as it involves housing, education, health, and social services. Therefore, social exclusion is a broader concept than poverty. Unlike the term "poverty," which largely connotes a lack of economic resources, "social exclusion" includes the deprivation of an opportunity to participate in the sectors of social life, politics, and culture, as well as in the economy. Accordingly, the factors causing social exclusion are complicated, interactive, and multi-dimensional (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion is also a concept that includes a series of processes as well as definite causes and effects — that is, social exclusion places an emphasis not only on causes and effects but also on the processes by which particular groups or individuals are marginalized, via economic deprivation and social isolation. In these regards, Berghman's (1995) comparison of related concepts through the criteria of static/dynamic and one-dimensional/multi-dimensional traits is useful in understanding social exclusion in comparative settings (refer to Table 1). Social exclusion also arises from causes that the victim cannot control; thus, cases in which social relationships are hampered through the willingness of the victim cannot be considered as social exclusion.

*Table 1. Comparison of Related Concepts with Social Exclusion*

	<b>Static Results</b>	<b>Dynamic Process</b>
One-Dimensional (Income)	Poverty	Impoverishment
Multidimensional	Deprivation	Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is part of a larger social phenomenon. Social exclusion involves the whole of a society, and therefore social exclusion fluctuates in the midst of dynamic changes within that society. Particular social phenomena can lead to serious social

exclusion in a particular time and place, but may not be acknowledged as parts of social exclusion within another setting. Moreover, social exclusion pays attention to the relationships among human beings and between human beings and society, while the term "poverty" focuses only on the relationship between human beings and economic resources.

Social exclusion is multi-dimensional. Most generally, it can be divided into three dimensions: the economic dimension relating to income and production; the social dimension, including the limited access to social services, labor market, and social participation; and the political dimension, involving the violation of human rights and disapproval of political rights for particular groups (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997). Berman and Phillips (2000) introduce and use the term "social quality" rather than "social exclusion," and classify it into four dimensions: social and economic security/insecurity, social inclusion/exclusion, social cohesion/anomie, and empowerment/disempowerment. Robinson and Oppenheim (1998) suggest four dimensions of social exclusion — income, employment, education, and health — and develop specific indices to measure them. Meanwhile, Burchardt et al. (1999) classify social exclusion into five categories of activities — consumption, savings activity, production activity, political activity, and social activity — and measure social exclusion in British households. Bradshaw et al. (1996) establish the dimensions of social exclusion by focusing on four variables — namely, income/resources, labor market, services, and social relations — and also develop indices to measure each variable. The E.U. Social Protection Committee refers to 18 variables as common indicators of social exclusion and poverty, although they appear to be too complicated to apply to the real world. The Social Exclusion Unit (1997) suggests seven dimensions of social exclusion: unemployment, low levels of technology and education, poor health condition, inferior housing conditions, high crime rates, broken family, and poverty.

In summary, the dimensions or variables of social exclusion fluctuate among various researchers. Therefore, from a practical point of view, it is recommended that researchers select adequate dimensions of social exclusion that suit their research aims, sectors, and targets, and then develop specific indices to measure each dimension. Finally, the causes, process, and effects of social exclusion should be examined on the basis of empirical data analysis.

### III. International Marriages and Immigrant Brides in Korea

As of 2006, the number of international marriages in Korea was 39,690, accounting for 11.9 percent of the 332,752 marriages that took place that year. This number had increased about 3.2 times from the 12,319 international marriages that took place in 2000, suggesting Korean society's rapid progress from homogeneity to multicultural diversity. Even though the number of international marriages in 2006 was decreased somewhat from 2005, it seems to be a transitional phenomenon that is attributable to the introduction of the "visiting employment system" for Korean-Chinese individuals

*Table 2. Changes in International Marriages in Korea*

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total Marriages (A)	334,030	320,063	306,573	304,932	310,944	316,375	332,752
International Marriages (B)	12,319	15,234	15,913	25,658	35,447	43,121	39,690
B/A (%)	3.7	4.8	5.2	8.4	11.4	13.6	11.9
Korean Men + Foreign Women	7,304	10,006	11,017	19,214	25,594	31,180	30,208
Korean Women + Foreign Men	5,015	5,228	4,896	6,444	9,853	11,941	9,482

\* Source: Adapted from KNSO (2007).

Unit: case

(i.e., Korean-origin residents in China). There were 30,208 international marriages between Korean men and foreign women in 2006 (9.1 percent of total number of marriages). Table 2 shows Korea's recent trends *vis-à-vis* international marriages.

With regard to international marriages between Korean men and foreign women according to nationality of immigrant brides, the number of marriages involving Chinese women — more precisely, Korean-Chinese (*Chosunjok*) — were 14,608 in 2006 (48.4 percent of all Korean men/foreign women marriages), but that number has decreased with the introduction of the “visiting employment system.” In comparison, the number of marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women was 10,131 in 2006 (33.5 percent of all Korean men/foreign women marriages) — an increase of 74 percent from 2005.

In particular, while many women from China and other East Asian countries marry urban Korean bachelors, most Vietnamese women marry into the rural farming sector. Vietnamese women are preferred by rural farming bachelors because they share the tradition of an agricultural society and the extended family system. The socio-cultural similarities between the rural farming sectors of the two countries facilitate Vietnamese women's assimilation into the Korean rural farming sector. In addition, Vietnam does not have a strong religious tradition, and this too helps Vietnamese brides adapt easily to life in the Korean rural farming sector, which is largely atheist. For similar reasons, international marriages in 2006 with Cambodian women have also rapidly increased — by 151.0 percent compared to 2005 — although the actual number of such marriages was not particularly large. Table 3 compares the number of international marriages between Korean men and foreign women, according to the nationality of immigrant brides.

Meanwhile, as shown in Table 4, 41.0 percent of Korean men in the rural farming sector married foreign women in 2006; that number represents an increase of 5.1 percent from 2005. Many

*Table 3. Int'l Marriages between Korean Men and Foreign Women,  
by Nationality*

Unit: case (%)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
China	3,586	7,001	7,041	13,373	18,527	20,635	14,608 (48.4)
Vietnam	95	134	476	1,403	2,462	5,822	10,131 (33.5)
Japan	1,131	976	959	1,242	1,224	1,255	1,484 (4.9)
Philippines	1,358	510	850	944	964	997	1,157 (3.8)
Mongolia	77	118	195	318	504	561	594 (2.0)
Cambodia	-	-	-	19	72	157	394 (1.3)
U.S.	235	265	267	323	344	285	334 (1.1)
Uzbekistan	43	66	183	329	247	333	314 (1.0)
Other	779	936	1,046	1,263	1,250	1,135	1,192 (3.9)
Total	7,304	10,006	11,017	19,214	25,594	31,180	30,208 (100.0)

\* Source: KNSO (2007).

Korean bachelors in the rural farming sector marry foreign women, because they are not preferred by Korean women: Most Korean women are reluctant to settle down in the rural farming sector, because of the associated low levels of income, poor cultural benefits, and difficulties in acquiring education for their children. Therefore, many Korean bachelors in the rural farming sector select brides from nations with lower economic levels, such as China and Southeast Asian countries.

*Table 4. International Marriages of Korean Men  
in the Rural Farming Sector*

Unit: case

	2005	2006
Total Marriages	316,375	332,752
Korean Men + Foreign Women	31,180	30,208
Total Marriages of Korean Men in the Rural Farming Sector (A)	8,027	8,596
Korean Men in the Rural Farming Sector + Foreign Women (B)	2,885	3,525
B / A (%)	35.9	41.0

\* Source: Adapted from KNSO (2007).



Among the 3,525 international marriages involving Korean men in the rural farming sector in 2006, 68.0 percent (2,396 cases) were matched with Vietnamese women. Korean bachelors in the agricultural sector prefer Vietnamese women, who are familiar with agricultural society and the extended family system; for this reason, many Korean international matchmakers recommend that Korean bachelors marry Vietnamese women. Table 5 compares the nationalities of immigrant brides who have married Korean men in the rural farming sector.

*Table 5. Immigrant Bride Nationality in the Korean Rural Farming Sector*

	Unit: case	
	2005	2006
Vietnam	1,535 (53.2)	2,394 (67.9)
China	984 (34.1)	718 (20.4)
Philippines	198 (6.9)	170 (4.8)
Others	168 (5.8)	243 (6.9)
Total	2,885 (100.0)	3,525 (100.0)

\* Source: Adapted from KNSO (2007).

However, with the increasing number of international marriages, the concomitant divorce rate is also rapidly increasing. While there are many reasons for divorce, many can be attributed to the failure of foreign women to adapt to Korean society and its family system. The total number of divorces among international marriages between Korean men and foreign women was 4,010 in 2006 — a steep increase from the 2,444 cases in 2005 (MOGEF, 2007). A total of 90.6 percent of the 4,010 divorces in 2006 involved marriages with a duration of four years or less, suggesting that many immigrant brides fail to “take root” in the early stage of the marriage. As a result, divorced couples involving Korean men and foreign women maintained an average of only 3.2 years of marriage, far shorter than the 11.8 years averaged by fully Korean cou-



ples. Table 6 outlines trends in divorce and marriage duration in international marriages between Korean men and foreign women.

*Table 6. Divorce in International Marriages between Korean Men and Foreign Women*

Unit: case (%)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total Divorces (A)	401	583	1,611	2,444	4,010
Marriage Duration of 0-4 Years (B)	347	509	1,443	2,178	3,632
B/A	86.5	87.3	89.6	89.1	90.6

\* Source: Adapted from MOGEF (2007).

While it is true that Korean extended families can take large responsibility for the success of an immigrant wife's cultural assimilation — and therefore for the high level of early divorce involving immigrant brides — the immigrant brides themselves are also not completely blameless. Many immigrant brides acquire very little information on future Korean husbands before marriage, marry for financial reasons, and lack the responsibility needed to make marital life succeed.<sup>1</sup> By nationality, Chinese brides' divorces are the most numerous (2,551; 63.6 percent of total divorces), followed by Vietnamese brides' (610; 15.2 percent).

1. In relation to immigrant brides' motivations in marrying Korean bachelors, 21-year-old Vietnamese bride (initial name, NT) candidly mentioned the following: "I married a 39-year-old Korean husband in order to overcome poverty. Of course, I was reluctant at first. But I was filled with the responsibility, as an eldest daughter, to keep up my 12 members' big family. My husband's age is similar to that of my father. But he looked younger and attentive for his age, and thus I decided to marry him" (Interviewed on October 12, 2007).

#### **IV. Social Exclusion of Immigrant Brides in the Korean Rural Farming Sector**

Most immigrant brides experience social exclusion from the mainstream of Korean society and culture. In particular, the social exclusion of immigrant brides in the Korean rural farming community is much higher than that in urban areas, because the Korean rural farming sector works hard to preserve the characteristics of traditional Korean social and cultural heritage, such as cultural exclusivity, the extended family system, and social homogeneity. As mentioned earlier, there are diverse dimensions of social exclusion in theory; however, as this article discusses in particular the social exclusion of immigrant brides who live in the rural farming sector, it mainly focuses on immigrant brides' social exclusion in terms of culture, education, language, economy, and community life.

##### *A. Social Exclusion from Korean Mainstream Culture*

It is widely understood that there are cultural similarities among countries in South and East Asia. Particularly, China and Vietnam — from which the majority of immigrant wives come — have similar cultural values. For this reason, Chinese and Vietnamese wives are expected to share some cultural values, such as respect for the family and harmonious relationships among family members; in reality, however, many immigrant brides confront serious problems in adapting themselves to Korean social and family systems.

Above all else, many immigrant brides lack knowledge of and information on Korean culture and its family system. Many of them come to Korea with a vague admiration for the Korea's booming economic success and the "Korean Wave" or *Hanryu*, but that is far removed from the reality of the Korean rural farming

sector. Also, even though some Asian countries share Korea's cultural values by way of a shared Confucian heritage, the detailed cultural characteristics of each country in South and East Asia are very different with each other.

Also, rural farming communities themselves are greatly alienated from the cultural conveniences and facilities that are enjoyed by the average (i.e., urban) Korean. Currently, rural farming communities mostly consist of the elderly; thus, almost all cultural facilities — including museums, theaters, and art galleries — that cater to youth are concentrated in urban cities. To be frank, there is little cultural life, *per se*, in the Korean rural farming sector.

Immigrant brides suffer from difficulties in entering the Korean family system within the rural farming sector (Kang, 2006). Rather than be like the nuclear families of the urban centers, the rural farming sector tends to focus on the extended family system. In such a system, hierarchical authoritarianism pushes immigrant brides to obey parents-in-law and their husbands. Korean men in the rural farming sector tend to be more authoritarian than their urban counterparts in how they treat their wives; a 28-year-old immigrant bride (LN) from China attests to this.

I am familiar with the Korean language, as I had been a guide for Korean tourists in China. But I feel a sense of linguistic and cultural alienation when I cannot understand internet languages, Korean cants and jargons. In particular, I really feel a big cultural gap when confronting my husband's patriarchal attitudes and stubbornness on matters of the children's education (Interviewed on October 15, 2007).

In Korea's extended family system, family members frequently become antagonistic. Occasionally, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law becomes seriously antagonistic. Conflicts among family members *vis-à-vis* their roles in the extended family system are frequently witnessed.<sup>2</sup> Mothers-in-law

usually demand their daughters-in-law be obedient to and sacrifice for family members, whilst daughters-in-law want to be free of unilateral obligations to family members. Also, in most Korean families, the difference of recognizing the role expectations tends to be great. While immigrant brides often want to share household chores with their Korean husbands, Korean men in the rural farming sector are unfamiliar with doing housework. A 23-year-old Filipina bride (LM) testifies to her Korean husband's unwillingness to share in household chores:

In the Philippines, husbands are very willing to help with household chores. But my husband never tries to help me at home. He even orders me to go and fetch a glass of water. I think Korean husbands are not considerate of their wives. When I complain of hard work at home, he says that I live in luxury. We can't properly communicate with each other (Interviewed on October 9, 2007).

Immigrant brides even face problems in understanding Korean food and national holiday cultures. They are not familiar with the hot and salty styles of Korean food, and some impatient family members become irritable with regards to the immigrant brides' lack of skill in making Korean food. Also, Korean families cele-

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2. With regard to the conflict between immigrant brides and their Korean family members, two brides who came from Vietnam and China made mention of the following:

"My husband is a very gentle person and tries to understand my situation. But the relationship with his family members and my role as daughter-in-law, which I had never experienced in Vietnam, make it very difficult" (NN, 25-year-old Vietnamese bride, Interviewed on October 12, 2007).

"My husband is a good man. But his family members sometimes make fun of me as 'China-made' and my nephews also call me 'China-made aunt', following their parents or grandparents' cues. These things ruffle my temper, and I nurse a grievance against my husband and his family members. I feel alienated from my husband's family system" (JM, 26-year-old Chinese bride, Interviewed on October 6, 2007).

brate big holidays, such as the lunar New Year and *Chuseok*, but immigrant brides who are uneducated about Korean traditions usually become highly nervous in celebrating Korean big holidays, thus adding to their sense of alienation.

Immigrant brides are excluded from the mainstream of Korean culture for a number of diverse and complicated reasons; of course, while many of them are attributable to Korean society itself, immigrant brides bear the burden of many of them. For their part, the most important reason they are excluded from Korean culture is their lack of ability in communicating with Korean society. With the exception of Korean-Chinese individuals, most immigrant brides are poor commanders of the Korean language, and therefore cannot properly interact with members of Korean society. According to a survey undertaken by the Gyeongbuk Women's Policy Development Institute (2006), 82.9 percent of the 350 respondents had at least some difficulties in using or understanding the Korean language. A broader discussion of Korean-language skills among immigrant wives is taken up later in this article.

Table 7. Immigrant Brides' Abilities in Using the Korean Language

Unit: case (%)

	Frequency	Percent of Total
Unable to Listen to or Speak	14	4.0
Can Listen to but Not Speak	28	8.0
Listen to, and a Little Bit of Speaking	248	70.9
No Difficulties in Hearing or Speaking	60	17.1
Total	350	100.0

\* Source: Adapted from GWPDI (2006).

The route of international marriages, as well as immigrant brides' motivations in marrying Korean men, also explains some of the reasons why immigrant brides are excluded from cultural life in Korea. It is undeniable that many immigrant brides marry

Korean men in a hastened manner, with an eye to the inherent financial and economic benefits (Kim, 2006); it seems they hardly consider the potential difficulties of adapting to an unknown society. According to Gyeongbuk Do's (2007) survey, 45.8 percent of the 3,469 respondents came to Korea through matchmaking performed by professional agencies; in the case of Vietnamese women, that number reaches 81.2 percent. However, international marriages arranged by professional matchmakers are often made hurriedly, and many immigrant brides lack information on Korean culture and the cultural traits of Korean husbands. The following excerpts from newspaper articles illustrate the hastiness of professionally arranged international marriages.

It was midnight here in Hanoi ... But after a five-hour flight on a recent Sunday, Kim Wan Su was driven straight from the airport to the Lucky Star karaoke bar, where 23 young Vietnamese women seeking Korean husbands sat waiting in two dimly lit rooms. "Do I have to look at them and decide now?" Kim asked, as the marriage brokers gave a brief description of each of the women sitting around a U-shaped sofa. Thus, Kim, a 39-year-old auto parts worker from a suburb of Seoul, began the mildly chaotic, two-hour process of choosing a spouse. In a day or two, if his five-day marriage tour went according to plan, he would be wed and enjoying his honeymoon at the famed Perfume Pagoda in the Huong Tich Mountain ... (Adapted from *International Herald Tribune*, February 21, 2007).

Immigrant brides' motivations in marrying Korean men are largely economic. According to the survey of Gyeongbuk Do (2007), among 3,469 respondents, only 30.9 percent and 8.7 percent married Korean men for love or religion, respectively. Another 32.1 percent married to live in a wealthier country, while 11.6 percent married to financially support their maiden home family. A smaller proportion (1.7 percent) married to get jobs in Korea. Particularly, 77.7 percent of the 1,483 female Vietnamese respondents

married Korean men for economic reasons: to live in a wealthier country, support their family members, or to seek a job. In relation to the economic motivations behind international marriages, two immigrant brides mention the following:

I decided to marry my Korean husband in order to escape economic deprivation and get a job in Korea. I paid a job broker five million Won to take me to Korea. I met my 43-year-old husband in the restaurant where I served and we married in December 2005 (KS, 25-year-old Vietnamese bride, Interviewed on October 6, 2007).

In China, I heard I could make lots of money in Korea, and I came to Korea to get a job in an industrial complex. I met my 36-year-old husband through my boss's introduction and married him after one year's acquaintance (JM, 26-year-old Chinese bride, Interviewed on October 6, 2007).

With regard to responsibilities attributable to Korean society and culture, one can point to the homogeneous and closed nature of Korean society. Korea, for a long time, has been racially homogeneous and its acceptance of foreign culture has been very low. Koreans — particularly residents in the rural farming sector — are impatient with different cultures and unilaterally force immigrant brides to assimilate to Korean culture. Also, many Koreans tend to underrate immigrant brides who largely come from poorer countries (Kim, 2006). Moreover, Korean culture in the rural farming sector is usually authoritarian, and Korean husbands are not very attentive of their wives, thus making immigrant brides' adaptation to Korean rural culture especially difficult.

Rural farming communities are typically deficient in facilities by which one can enjoy cultural life. In rural farming areas, there is a dearth even of social welfare facilities that provide some educational programs. It is a matter of course that most Korean farmers do not have time to enjoy a cultural life; in such a situation, where



family members are extremely hard-working, it is nearly impossible for immigrant brides to enjoy cultural lives and adapt on that basis.

The typically large age gap between immigrant brides and their Korean husbands also obstruct immigrant brides' understanding of Korean family culture. In 2006, the average age gap between them was 11.5 years, while that of fully Korean couples was only 2.4 years. This large age gap, together with the fact that immigrant brides tend to be so young, produces frequent culture-based conflicts with family members. A 25-year-old Vietnamese bride (KS) vividly explains the problems caused by the large age gap with her 43-year-old Korean husband:

There is a big emotional distance between my husband and me, largely due to our big age gap. I don't have many acquaintances in Korea and therefore I need friends with whom I can consult with my problems. I have tried several times to plead my grievous situation with my husband. But I have always felt a big generation gap when communicating with him (Interview on October 6, 2007).

Also, even though most young immigrant brides are not proficient in handling household affairs, family members tend to have high standards of expectation, thus exacerbating an already acrimonious situation. Table 8 compares the age gaps between Korean couples and international marriage couples, over the last several years.

*Table 8. Comparison of Average Age Gaps*

Unit: years

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Korean Men+ Foreign Women	6.7	7.4	7.8	8.2	8.3	9.1	11.5
Fully Korean Couples	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.4

\* Source: Adapted from MOGEF (2007).

### *B. Social Exclusion from Educational Opportunities*

Currently, various kinds of educational opportunities are offered to immigrant brides. At the inter-department level, the government announced the “scheme to socially integrate multicultural families” in April 2006. It includes the establishment of the following gradual educational systems: Korean-language education through broadcasting programs and a community-based educational system, pre-immigration education for the understanding of Korean culture, education for improving mutual understanding of different cultures, and the formation of cultural zones in each country.

Each government department, as well as local governments, carries out various educational programs for immigrant brides. At the central government level, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family runs Korean-language, children’s schooling, and family counseling programs. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism manages such programs as culture and art education, cultural experience, traditional culture and propriety, and cultural relic exploration; regional cultural academies educate immigrant brides about Korean language and culture. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development provides immigrant brides with lifetime education and supports several programs, such as Korean-language education and cultural experiences (KWDI, 2006). Each local government also implements many programs — including Korean language, Korean cuisine, traditional culture, and decorum — so as to help immigrant brides adapt to Korean culture and its lifestyle. Also, immigrant wives are offered lessons to enhance computer skills and technical education in areas like therapeutic massage.

However, many immigrant brides cannot benefit from this diversity of educational offerings, for several reasons. First, education programs tend to be offered closely together and are not systemic, and many of them are ceremonial or for mere display. All in

all, many government-sponsored programs are not helpful to immigrant wives in adapting to Korean culture and life.

Second, immigrant brides in the rural farming sector often cannot make time for such educational opportunities. Geographically, most educational programs are carried out in town centers and therefore wives from rural areas require more time in accessing them. Also, immigrant brides are deficient in adequate information on educational programs. In this respect, the following appeal of 33-year-old Filipina bride (HJ) deserves attention:

It is hard to find proper educational academies for learning the Korean language. Also, I can't spare the time to learn the Korean language. Moreover, I don't have much information on where free language courses are provided. Sometimes I learn about the Korean language from my husband, but he is not very sincere in teaching me. Becoming proficient in the Korean language seems to be so far off, for me (Interviewed on October 11, 2007).

Table 9 lists the reasons why immigrant brides do not participate in language educational programs.

*Table 9. Reasons Why Immigrant Brides are Absent from Korean-Language Programs*

Unit: case (%)

	China	Vietnam	Philippines	Japan	Others	Total
No Information on Education Programs	78 (10.7)	144 (22.5)	21 (20.6)	22 (13.2)	29 (24.8)	294 (16.8)
Lack of Daycare	19 (2.6)	58 (9.1)	12 (11.8)	10 (6.0)	11 (10.0)	110 (6.3)
Long Distance	49 (6.7)	122 (19.1)	16 (15.7)	28 (16.8)	14 (12.0)	229 (13.1)
Opposition from Family Members	0 (0.0)	29 (4.5)	3 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	33 (1.9)
No Perceived Need	388 (53.2)	74 (11.6)	13 (12.7)	48 (28.7)	16 (16.2)	542 (30.9)
Others	195 (26.7)	212 (33.2)	37 (36.3)	59 (35.3)	43 (36.7)	546 (31.1)
Total	729 (100.0)	639 (100.0)	102 (100.0)	167 (100.0)	117 (100.0)	1,754 (100.0)

\* Source: Adapted from Gyeongbuk Do (2007).

Third, most educational programs attach importance to learning the Korean language and experiencing Korean culture. However, many immigrant brides want or need to work and therefore need professional job-related education; for this reason, many immigrant brides cannot afford to enjoy educational programs that focus on hobbies or cultural experiences.

Fourth, many family members, including husbands, dislike immigrant brides acquiring an education (Kim, 2006), for a number of reasons. Besides the fact that there is no daycare to take care of children while immigrant brides attend educational programs, Korean family members worry about immigrant brides' close contact with unknown persons, as there have been some cases of immigrant brides being enticed to run away from home and find jobs in urban areas. Also, there are no nannies to take care of the babies of immigrant brides attending educational programs.

With regard to education for the children of immigrant brides, the government makes an effort to build a multicultural educational system, to strengthen the multicultural nature of the education system and prevent the children of multicultural families from being left behind. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has adopted the educational rights of multicultural families' children as a policy agenda, and also manages pilot schools for multicultural education and educational program for preschool children (KWDI, 2006).

### *C. Social Exclusion from Language and Communication*

Except for those of Korean-Chinese origin, most immigrant brides have difficulties in properly communicating with family members and Korean neighbors. According to the Gyeongbuk Do survey (2007), 71.5 percent of the 3,469 targeted immigrant brides have average or below-average expertise in commanding the Korean language. In particular, most Vietnamese brides have a

Table 10. Immigrant Brides' Ability to Command the Korean Language

	China	Vietnam	Philippines	Japan	Others	Total
High	665 (58.7)	68 (4.6)	50 (15.7)	148 (48.2)	37 (16.3)	968 (27.9)
Middle	360 (31.8)	637 (43.0)	184 (57.6)	129 (42.0)	110 (48.5)	1,420 (40.9)
Low	100 (8.8)	769 (51.9)	84 (26.4)	27 (8.8)	80 (35.2)	1,060 (30.6)
No Response	8 (0.7)	9 (0.5)	1 (0.3)	3 (1.0)	0 (0.0)	21 (0.6)
Total	1,133 (100)	1,483 (100)	319 (100)	307 (100)	227 (100)	3,469 (100)

\* Source: Gyeongbuk Do (2007).

poor command of the Korean language.

With regard to immigrant brides' understanding of the Korean language, the Korean National Statistical Office (2005) corroborates the results of the survey. According to the survey, 96 percent of immigrant brides use the Korean language in communicating with family members, but 30.4 percent of the Vietnamese brides who responded, as well as 41.3 percent of the Filipina brides, face great difficulties in properly using the Korean language. Some immigrant brides never talk to their husbands, because their command of the Korean language is so poor.

Also, even though most immigrant brides can roughly speak at least some of the Korean language, they did not receive systemic training, and so problems still occur as a result. According to the survey undertaken by the Korean National Statistical Office (2005), 25 percent of respondents learned the Korean language from their husbands and other family members, whereas 16.3 percent were self-taught. Therefore, despite the provision of various government-sponsored language programs, only a small number of immigrant brides (i.e., 9.2 percent of respondents) benefited from systemic learning programs.

Meanwhile, immigrant brides' language problems bring forth other problems in adapting to Korean society. A deficiency of appropriate communication tools can, at first, lead to conflicts between immigrant brides and their Korean family members,

including their husbands. Without a proper command of a common language, achieving any mutual understanding on any issue becomes virtually impossible. Under such conditions, a conflict can become aggravated, once begun. In practice, many cases of domestic violence are derived from an absence of dialogue between immigrant brides and other family members.

A low level of Korean language ability in an immigrant bride can influence the home-based education of her children. In most cases in Korea, mothers are fully responsible for their children's education at home, and pre-school children undergo socialization by interacting with their mothers. Thus, immigrant brides who are not proficient in the Korean language cannot adequately socialize their children, in terms of preparing them for Korean society.

A low level of Korean language ability on the part of immigrant brides also interferes with their social and cultural lives. Often, immigrant brides cannot make full use of cultural and social welfare facilities, due to the language barrier. They are also limited in terms of forming social networks and establishing solid relationships with neighbors. This lack of social networks produces a vicious cycle of alienating immigrant brides from community life. A 25-year-old Vietnamese bride (NT) sighs about her difficulties in assimilating into Korean rural society:

I become fainthearted when I realized that I speak the Korean language with a different accent and intonation from those of Korean people. Now I can just understand about 60 percent of the Korean language. I am therefore afraid of going out of doors. In turn, this makes me be more "invisible" to neighbors in the village (Interviewed on October 12, 2007).

The Korean language has complicated honorific expressions, and that tends to arouse immigrant brides to make mistakes that can be misconstrued as being rude or disrespectful.

#### *D. Social Exclusion from Economic Life*

Most immigrant brides come from countries that are economically less developed than Korea; the main reason they leave their home countries and marry unknown foreign men is to support their family members financially. Many Korean men who marry immigrant brides send some money to the bride's maiden home (Kim, 2006); thus, economic matters are very important to most immigrant brides, and economic status is a critical factor that determines happiness within Korean life.

However, contrary to what they had hoped for, most immigrant brides in the rural farming sector suffer from economic hardships and are excluded from such economic rights as holding property. Immigrant brides' poor understanding of the Korean economic culture gives rise to serious conflict with husbands or other family members, and their exclusion from economic life hampers their active involvement in Korean culture and their own community. Such problems lead to adversities in raising and educating their children.

More specifically, the critical factor that excludes immigrant brides from a viable economic life is the generally low level of economic standard within the rural farming sector. With the transformation of the Korean economy into one that focuses on manufacturing and service industries — not to mention the deregulation of the Korean agriculture market — the household income level within the Korean farming sector has gradually decreased. Consequently, the income gap between Korean rural farming and urban sectors has widened. The income level of immigrant brides' Korean families is only 59 percent of the average Korean household income. A 23-year-old Filipina bride (LM) tells of the poor economic life associated with the Korean rural farming sector:

My husband is working irregularly. He usually has no job during the

winter season. In particular, there were lots of rainy days this year, and thus things were very difficult financially. Rather, he is waiting for me to get an English teaching job in the school. But, as you know, getting a teaching position in the primary or secondary schools is very difficult and miserably paid (Interviewed on October 9, 2007).

According to the Gyeongbuk Do survey (2007), the average monthly income of the 3,469 survey respondents was 1,439,000 Won; 34.3 percent of the respondents were below 1,000,000 Won. Thus, as shown in Table 11, 44.1 percent of the immigrant brides' households in the rural farming sector of Gyeongbuk Do are under the national income minimum for a four-member household (i.e., 1,205,000 Won in 2007), while the ratio in the urban sector of Gyeongbuk Do is 36.5 percent.

*Table 11. Household Incomes of Multicultural Families in Gyeongbuk Do*

Monthly Income Per Household	Frequency	Percent of Total
Less than 1,000 Thousand Won	1,192	34.3
1,000-1,999 Thousand Won	1,280	36.9
2,000-2,999 Thousand Won	641	18.5
3,000-3,999 Thousand Won	148	4.3
4,000-4,999 Thousand Won	30	0.9
More than 5,000 Thousand Won	23	0.6
No Response	155	4.5
Total	3,469	100.0

\* Source: Gyeongbuk Do (2007).

Under these economic conditions, many immigrant brides try to work outside the home; in reality, however, it is very difficult for immigrant brides to become regularly employed. According to the aforementioned Gyeongbuk Do survey (2007), 48.6 percent of respondents are housewives, while 10.3 percent work in the agricultural or fishery industries; 27.6 percent of respondents engage



in unpaid family labor. Therefore, a clear majority of immigrant brides are housewives or otherwise take part in housework efforts; only 13.2 percent of respondents have independent, paying jobs.

Meanwhile, 43.2 percent of immigrant brides express a desire to work outside the home, but have very little chance of becoming so employed. The main obstacle is their lack of effective Korean communication skills. It is not easy for immigrant brides who cannot speak the Korean language to acquire an outside-the-home work life. Also, the small and medium-sized companies found in rural areas usually need strong, physical (and therefore male) labor, and thus job opportunities for immigrant brides are limited to small numbers of service-related jobs. Foreign workers employed in small and medium-sized companies are primarily males from Southeast Asian countries since those companies only require employees for physical labor. For this reason, some local governments — like that in Gokseong City, Jollanam Do — provide English-speaking Filipina brides with opportunities to work as assistant English teachers in high schools. However, such opportunities are rare indeed.

The traditional role of child-rearing also constrains immigrant brides from finding paying jobs. However, compared to Korean brides, immigrant brides are in a much more disadvantageous situation, due to their lack of a social network; they often must rely on government subsidies, whenever they are provided. The results of the Gyeongbuk Do survey (2007) lists immigrant brides' job-hunting concerns, in descending order: local government's work placement (39.9 percent of respondents), daycare (25 percent), Korean language education (13 percent), and the understanding and support from family members (12 percent).

Finally, most immigrant brides cannot exercise property rights. In the Korean patriarchal system, it is typical for all family property to be registered under the names of the immigrant brides' husband or father-in-law. In the rural farming sector, where incomes are

usually unstable, immigrant brides cannot secure their own property and thus achieve a level of independence that could facilitate cultural assimilation. Moreover, most immigrant brides in the rural farming sector are unemployed outside the home, and thus do not have their own incomes — and because immigrant brides are unfamiliar with Korean economic life, family members are usually hesitant to give them the right to manage family property or finances. Immigrant brides therefore manage the household finances within restrictions set by family members. In relation to this, the stories of a 26-year-old Chinese bride (JM) and 21-year-old Vietnamese bride (NT) attract our attention, in particular:

Both my husband and I are working in the nearby industrial complex. Thus, even though we are working in so-called “3-D types of businesses” and are low-paid, we don’t feel any financial difficulties. But my husband and my mother-in-law manage all the money. I don’t have any information on how my salary is spent. In this regard, I don’t know any of the pleasure that comes with making money (Interviewed on October 6, 2007).

I married my Korean husband in order to be liberated from poverty. But now I feel that I have become a slave to making money. I work every day, but I can’t handle any money. I receive living expenses from my mother-in-law, and keep a housekeeping book where I very carefully report where I spent the money. I can’t send any money to my maiden home in Vietnam. I am very disappointed (Interviewed on October 12, 2007).

### *E. Social Exclusion from Community Life*

Immigrant brides in the Korean rural farming sector are also greatly excluded from community life. Homogeneity and solidarity among community members are very high in Korean rural communities, in comparison to urban centers. Many immigrant

brides experience a low level of belongingness to the communities with which they are affiliated. Of course, there are some reasons for their lack of belongingness in community life that are attributable to the immigrant brides themselves; they tend not to participate actively in community life, largely due to language barriers and the heterogeneity of Korean culture and its lifestyle patterns.

However, a larger part of immigrant brides' social exclusion from community life is drawn from the closed and authoritarian nature of Korean society and culture. Korea's strong propensity for an in-group orientation also promotes immigrant brides' exclusion from community life. In contrast to urban life, which is characterized by heterogeneity and anonymity, the rural farming sector preserves well the tradition of kinship networks. Consequently, there remains an aversion to strangers, particularly to racially or nationally heterogeneous persons (Cho, 2004). This sentiment is reflected in the experiences of two different brides:

I am frequently very disappointed when I am disregarded or unfairly treated simply because that I am a Korean-Chinese (*Chosunjok*). In the work place, my colleagues don't listen to me and they shut their minds down. Even though I carry out the same level of work, my wage level is much lower than that of my Korean colleagues (26-year-old Chinese bride JM, Interviewed on October 6, 2007).

At first, my neighbors disregarded me and I also never tried to associate with them. But I feel their attitudes towards me have greatly changed since I have become a part-time English teacher in the nearby primary school. I also acknowledge that Korean people don't respect immigrant brides, particularly those from Southeast Asian countries. I think things are not monolithic, though; they depend on situation (23-year-old Filipino bride LM, Interviewed on October 9, 2007).

The authoritarian nature of rural farming communities also adds an extra weight to immigrant brides' exclusion from commu-

nity life. Authoritarianism is a socio-cultural concept in which all things are hierarchically ordered and distinguished by their respective status (Baek, 1995). The authoritarian nature of Korean society and its rural communities is also applicable to foreigners: Foreigners are treated differently in Korea, according to their races and mother countries. While Caucasians from Western countries are highly respected, non-Caucasian people and foreigners from economically less developed countries are prone to be treated contemptuously (Kang, 2006). This attitude is exemplified in how foreign workers and immigrant brides are afforded less respect in Korea, given that those individuals mainly come from Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and mainland China. Under this social and cultural authoritarianism, which prompts Koreans to discriminate foreigners according to skin color and economic status, immigrant brides are naturally alienated from community life. Their sense of affiliation with their respective communities is diluted, and thus they avoid participating in community affairs.

## **V. Concluding Remarks: Policy Responses**

Immigrant brides are being excluded from general aspects of Korean culture, language, education, economy, and community life. Of course, the causes of this social exclusion are diverse and complicated; the causes can be traced from various sources, such as the various social and cultural aspects of Korea, related administrative institutions, the characteristics of the Korean rural farming sector, immigrant brides' Korean family members, and the immigrant brides themselves. Thus, policies that confront immigrant brides' social exclusion cannot help but be diverse in kind. Of such necessary policies, some should be undertaken by the central government, while others can be undertaken at the local level. Engagement of the private sector, including religious and civic

groups, can be more effective in tackling immigrant brides' social exclusion. In any case, the success of these policies requires the active participation of family members and the immigrant brides themselves.

Above all else, it is important to establish within the general public and government the correct consciousness *vis-à-vis* matters affecting immigrant brides and to set the ultimate goals of policy engagement. Until now, both the general public and the government have regarded immigrant brides as persons who come from economically less developed countries, driven by economic motivation. The ultimate goal of current policies with regards to immigrant brides has been to assimilate them into mainstream Korean society and prevent problems from occurring. Also, great emphasis has been placed on controlling issues caused by international marriages, because it is believed that many international marriages are arranged as a means of promoting illegal immigration into Korea (Lee, 2007). However, so long as the general public and the government treat the matter of immigrant brides as a problem that needs to be managed and controlled, it may be impossible to establish policies to solve related issues adequately. Immigrant brides should be regarded as independent entities, and the government should introduce policies to integrate them into Korean society, all while fully respecting their distinctive cultures and lifestyle. International marriages are not a means of giving Korean men who have failed to find Korean wives the opportunity to marry foreign wives; rather, they are efforts to include immigrant brides in Korean society. Ultimately, policies should be decided and managed in a direction whereby homogeneous Korean society becomes accepting of and flexible to multicultural heterogeneity.

With regard to policy management, display and event-oriented administration should be corrected. Currently, many different levels of government and the departments therein put forth many policies and programs without carefully considering and securing

the relevant budgets. In particular, while local governments tend to neglect the needs of foreign workers who are unqualified voters, they suggest various kinds of unproven benefits to immigrant brides, in order to garner the votes of immigrant brides' family members. However, the over-issuance of policies without first securing relevant personnel and budget will give rise to a cynical distrust of government policies and thus make future policies, however sound, less feasible.

The delivery system of policies for immigrant brides should be made more systematic and integrated. At the level of central government, diverse departments such as the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare are competing against one another as they provide immigrant brides with various policies or programs. Local governments also manage several programs for immigrant brides without creating links or synergies among them. For example, Korean language programs are being offered by several government departments in similar patterns and with similar course content. However, implementing policies without making them realistic in practice is only a waste of public money. Members of the private sector, such as religious and civic groups, are also engaging in programs, and thus compete with the public sector. Future policies and service delivery should be coordinated more systemically, and relevant programs should be provided more consistently through adequate task allotment between the public and private sectors and between central and local government entities.

The accessibility of all policies and programs should be enhanced. Unlike the urban sector, the rural farming sector lacks cultural and educational facilities, and the dissemination of information there is also very poor. As a consequence, immigrant brides in the rural farming sector are excluded from cultural and educa-

tional benefits, except for a basic level of language education. Currently, it is most necessary to expand and improve cultural, lifetime educational, and welfare facilities in the rural farming sector, based on a zone of life. Of course, the development of programs whereby immigrant brides are directly visited is also recommended. The accessibility to information is as important as geographic accessibility. Introducing a mentoring system might be effective in improving immigrant brides' accessibility to relevant information.

Tailor-made policies and programs should be implemented, in order to reflect regional characteristics, as well as the demands and intellectual level of immigrant brides. Even though diverse policies are under implementation, most of them are being enforced uniformly without taking into account individual brides' attributes and their related circumstances. As a result, the outcomes of such nominal, "cookie cutter" policies are largely ineffective. In the future, it is urgent that we implement policies with an eye to the characteristics of the regions in which the immigrant brides live. Policy demands differ by region, and different policies or programs should be implemented between the urban and rural sectors. Moreover, policies should take into account differences in immigrant brides' policy demands, as dictated by their different environments, mother countries, knowledge levels, and language abilities.

It is also desirable to implement policies at the community level. Currently, even though central and local governments enforce several policies, they cannot provide region-based services. Without giving due consideration to the specific cultural and social properties of the rural farming sector, providing the same kind of policies nationwide may produce undesirable side effects. Rural farming communities do not frequently communicate with other regions, and thus it is more practical to establish social networks for immigrant brides at the community level. Language and social adaptation programs, especially, should be offered at the community level.

Assigning adequate and appropriate roles to the public and

private sectors and among various government departments is also necessary in carrying out policies. In the currently diffused system of policy management, it is difficult to achieve intended goals, due to the fragmentation of policy enforcement and a lack of coordination mechanisms. Thus, central government is expected to undertake the tasks of program planning, budgeting, fundraising, and development, while local governments play a key role in program delivery. Between the public and private sectors, it is recommended that the public sector concentrate on the provision of services in poorer target areas and financially support the private sector that provides services to immigrant brides.

Adequate performance evaluation and feedback should be conducted with regard to policies or programs that are developed for immigrant brides. Like many policies and programs, these lack target aims and definitive plans to attain them. Consequently, performance evaluations that measure the degree of goal attainment for these policies have been neglected, and the problems inherent in the implementation process have not been seriously considered.

Lastly, while almost all policies on international marriage target immigrant brides, the problems arising from international marriages cannot be solved solely by educating the brides and forcing them to adapt to Korean society. Their husbands and other family members should also understand and respect the culture and customs of immigrant brides (Kang, 2006). In this respect, current educational programs that focus on teaching the Korean language and traditional culture should be supplemented with education for Korean husbands, by which they can learn the culture and language of their brides' home countries. Unlike unilateral assimilation, the integration would be based on a mutual understanding between immigrant brides and their Korean family members.



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