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**VIETNAMESE WOMEN IN KOREAN FAMILIES**  
**The clash between two Confucian - dominated cultures**

**Bachelor Thesis**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this Bachelor thesis was produced independently under supervision of the supervisor of the Bachelor thesis and that all the used sources and bibliography were properly referenced.

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## ANNOTATION

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In 2014, Tuoitrenews published a documentary series including 30 episodes titled "Vietnamese Brides in South Korea". This series portrays the genuine, intimate stories of lives of Vietnamese women in South Korea after getting married to Korean men. The lives of these women in the series are filled with sorrow. They were tortured, beaten and treated like servants by their mothers-in-law and husbands. There are suicide cases recorded. The major reason for this problem is that those marriages are a type of business that men paid money to an agency to buy a wife. However, as some Vietnamese women in the documentary declare, the difference of cultures is also a reason making them unable to integrate in their husbands' families. From this light, the thesis aims to analyze the differences between Vietnamese and Korean understanding of marriage and the involvement of husband and wife in household.

The empirical data will be collected from the documentary "Vietnamese Brides in South Korea". For understanding of marriage in South Korea and Vietnam, I will work with Korean and Vietnamese studies about family and kinship.

Key words:

Transnational marriage, domestic violence, Vietnamese international marriage immigration women, Confucianism, marital paradox.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Multicultural marriage is a context in which transcultural communication is essential. To have a healthy marriage, the couple needs to have a good understanding of cultural differences and the ability to step out of their cultural perspective to harmonize with their spouses. Related to the subject of transcultural communication, the topic of transcultural marriage between Vietnamese wives and Korean husbands is a good illustration of transcultural communication study. Cultural differences, the misunderstandings and assumptions from the involved lead to many negative outcomes that can be avoided if closer attention is paid to the issue.

In recent decades, marriages involving couples of different race/ethnic or national backgrounds have been increasing globally. “Transnational marriage” or “cross-border marriage” means marriages involving couples from two societies within the same region such as Asia or Europe.<sup>1</sup> These ethnic intermarriages typically involve migrant wives and native husbands from two societies within the same region that share similar but still different norms of gender ideologies.<sup>2</sup> These transnational marriages, which take place across ethnic and national boundaries, acquire changes in one spouse’s legal status and physical movement.<sup>3</sup>

The growing “intra-Asia marriage migration” is a phenomenon that female migrants are moving from poorer to wealthier countries in Asia via commercially arranged contacts and other marriage channels.<sup>4</sup> Because commercial marriages are often considered as phenomenon falling between human trafficking and arranged marriage, public discourse and prior research often focus on the negative aspects of these marriages with outcomes such as social isolation, domestic violence, and suicide attempts.

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<sup>1</sup> HEIKKILÄ, Elli K. and YEOH, Saw Ai Brenda, *International marriages in the time of globalization*, New York, Nova Science, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> SOIN, K., “Challenges for women and men in a changing environment,” In: D. Colomé, Y. Meguro, and T. Yamamoto (ed.), *A Gender Agenda: AsiaEurope Dialogue: New Visions and Perspectives for Women and Men*, Japan Center for International Exchange, Asia-Europe Foundation, Singapore, 2001, pp. 3-29.

<sup>3</sup> KIM, Minjeong, “Gender and international marriage migration,” *Sociology Compass* 4(9), 2010: 718-731.

<sup>4</sup> CONSTABLE, Nicole, “Introduction: Cross-border marriages, gendered mobility, and global hypergamy,” In: Constable, Nicole (Ed.), *Cross-border marriages: Gender and mobility in transnational Asia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 1-16.

South Korea is a new destination for Asian marriage migrants, who numbered 20,835 cases in 2017 (National Statistical Office).<sup>5</sup> Most marriage migrants to Korea are from Vietnam, followed by China, Japan, the Philippines, and Cambodia. Korea is well known as one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world and has a rigidly patriarchal culture and significant gender.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, the visibility of migrant brides and their children has triggered policy debates under the discourse of “Korean multiculturalism.” The imbalanced sex ratios at birth that peaked between 1990 and 1994 produced proportionally more bachelors in the domestic marriage market. Thus, there is an increasing number of bachelors who are squeezed on the marriage market and get involved in multicultural marriages. Globalization fuels the increase of transnational marriage because it makes interaction across borders much easier. Transnational marriages often are placed on the spectrum between romantic relations and international transactions.<sup>7</sup> The “mail-order bride” phenomenon that emerged in the early 1980s caused negative stereotypes of these marriages, which dominated the popular discourse on international marriages.<sup>8</sup> In reality, most brides and grooms who involve in these marriages met through commercial agencies.

Transnational marriage between South Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives has become a heated debate in the two countries. In most of the cases, Vietnamese immigrant wives met their husbands via matching agencies. There are many adverse outcomes from these marriages such as domestic violence and murders. There are many cases that Vietnamese-Korean wives, who cannot put up with acts of violence from husbands and mothers-in-law, run away and seek help from humanitarian organizations. In 2014, Tuoi Tre news published a documentary series, including 30 episodes titled “Vietnamese Brides in South Korea.” This series portrays the genuine, intimate stories of the lives of Vietnamese women in South Korea after being chosen marry Korean men. The lives of these women in the series are filled with sorrow. They were tortured, beaten and treated

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<sup>5</sup> National Statistical Office, Korea Statistics Information Service, Vital Statistics, <http://kosis.kr/> (accessed 29th May 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Chun, H., & Das Gupta, M., “Gender discrimination in sex selective abortions and its transition in South Korea,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 32(2), 2009: 89-97.

<sup>7</sup> CHANG, Hsin-Chieh, “Marital Power Dynamics and Well-Being of Marriage Migrants,” *Journal of Family Issues* 37 (14), 2015: 1-27.

<sup>8</sup> CONSTABLE, Nicole, *Cross-border marriages: Gender and mobility in transnational Asia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

like servants by their mothers-in-law and husbands. There are suicide cases recorded. In the interviews with Vietnamese immigrant wives recorded in the series, they said that the reason causing the conflicts between them and their marital families is cultural difference. Apart from languages, traditional customs, differences in gender system are the main factors causing the mismatching expectation between the brides and members of their marital families leading to unhealthy marriage. Vietnam and Korea are countries influenced by Confucius. It was an assumption that Vietnamese women were aware and could fulfill very well what they are expected to do as a wife and daughter-in-law when living within a Korean family. However, reality proves otherwise. According to some statistics, 46 percent of emergency calls to Korea Women Migrants' Human Rights Center are made by Vietnamese brides.<sup>9</sup> This thesis provides a comparative study of the traditional gender systems in Korean and Vietnamese society to identify differences leading to conflict. By comparing and contrasting them, similarities and differences will be clear.

This thesis used the interviews recorded in the series “Vietnamese Brides in South Korea” as primary ethnographic data to depict the situation of Vietnamese immigrant wives in South Korea. Chapter 2 presents the historical background of international marriages in South Korea. Chapter 3 describes the current situation of Vietnamese Korean wives in South Korea and the driving forces making them get involved in transnational marriages with Korean men. Chapter 4 is a comparative study of traditional gender ideology in Korean and Vietnamese families. Finally, chapter 5 presents the marital paradox which Vietnamese immigrant wives encounter when they enter in these marriages. By understanding gender disparities between the two countries and marital paradox caused by the illusion of most Vietnamese women entering in transnational marriage, we can understand the reason leading to marital violence. As a result, methods preventing them can be provided and implemented.

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<sup>9</sup> The Soul Times, Find Opportunities on Rough Road Ahead, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=11094> (accessed 21st November 2019).



## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGES IN KOREA**

South Korean society is traditionally regarded as homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity. Until the early 1990s when industrialization took place, social issues that stem from urbanization challenge the homogenous image of South Korea society. The rapid industrialization leads to a massive internal migration to urban areas in South Korea from the 1960s. For instance, between 1945 and 1985 the urban population in Korea increased from 14.5 percent to 65.4 percent of the total population. Today, Korea's urban population stands at 81.90 percent of the total population, with the Seoul area alone home to around 20 percent.<sup>10</sup> Many rural young women left their homes in rural areas to large cities to have further education and well-paid jobs. In the 1980s service sector expanded and caused sex-selective rural-urban migration. A low rate of fertility with son-preference tradition along with consequences of industrialization leads to numerical imbalances between men and women in rural areas. The growth in urban areas made it very difficult for men remaining in rural areas to find suitable partners. By the late 1980s, because the rural bachelors were struggling extremely to get married, matchmaking programs were created, and some were state-led. After diplomatic and trade relations were established with China in 1992, the South Korean government saw ethnic Koreans in China (Chosunjeokin) as a solution to the rural bachelor issue. These arrangements are composed of overseas tours for prospective grooms, recruitment and training of potential brides, matching activities and group weddings, and subsequent services to complete the bride's paperwork for emigration.<sup>11</sup> In the early 2000s, the commercial agencies expanded to Vietnam and Cambodia, where Korea has a promising image as a destination for migration. Since then the number of international marriages, especially between Korean men and Asian women from China, Vietnam, and the Philippines has increased rapidly.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Diplomat, Migrant Brides in South Korea, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/07/migrant-brides-in-south-korea/> (accessed 21st November 2019).

<sup>11</sup> FREEMAN, Caren, "Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea," In: Nicole Constable (ed.), *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 86-88.

<sup>12</sup> LEE, Yean-Ju, SEO Dong-Hoon, CHO Sung-Nam, "International Marriages In South Korea: The Significance of Nationality and Ethnicity," *Journal of Population Research* 23(2), 2006: 166-182.

In a very short period of time, the number of international marriages rocketed from 11,605 cases in 2000 to 42,356 in 2005 and slightly decreased to 20,835 cases in 2017 due to the change of government policies regarding marriage with foreign spouse (see Table 1a, 1b). Marriages between Korean men with foreign women account for three-quarters of all cases. Recent data indicates that men who marry migrant women likely work in agriculture or fisheries sectors of the economy. In 2006, 42.5 percent of all marriages to men who worked in these sectors were foreign women.<sup>13</sup> According to marriage registration and census records, Korean men who involve in transnational marriages are rural never-married men, divorced men of low socioeconomic status in urban areas, and more recently, urban never-married men.<sup>14</sup>

In Confucian societies such as Korea, the traditional gender roles of husbands and wives persist. For example, Korean society expects daughters-in-law to conduct filial piety to parents-in-law. Due to the economic growth and social development in Korea over recent decades, women freely get access to education and have more career opportunities. As a result, educated Korean women require more autonomy in making marriage decisions, including delaying the timing of marriage, demanding a fair division of household labor, choosing to remain single or not to have children after getting married.<sup>15</sup> Many women were opting out of marriage. In one survey of college women, a third said they did not want to get married. For men, the issue was not enough women available. This was due to Korean preferences for sons. Consequently, there was an imbalance in sex ratio with more boys than girls.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, women from less-developed countries with similar cultural backgrounds become ideal candidates to marry into families who seek wives and daughters-in-law who possess similar “traditional virtues”: a woman who is submissive, obedient, and follows the practice of filial piety.

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<sup>13</sup> LEE, Hyunok, WILLIAMS Lindy, ARGUILLAS Florio, “Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 47(2), 2006: 268.

<sup>14</sup> LEE, Yean-Ju, SEO Dong-Hoon, CHO Sung-Nam, “International Marriages In South Korea: The Significance of Nationality and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Population Research* 23 (2), 2006: 166.

<sup>15</sup> JONES, G. & SHEN, H, “International marriage in East and Southeast Asia: Trends and research emphases,” *Citizenship Studies* 12(1), 2008: 9-25.

<sup>16</sup> SETH, Michael J, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, pp. 486.

### 3. STATUS OF VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGE IMMIGRANT WOMEN (IMIW) IN KOREA

#### 3.1. Consensus Data

The number of international marriages between Korean men and foreign women accounted for 71.36 percent of all international marriages, according to Statistics Korea for 2017 (See Table 1.b). In rural areas, international marriages accounted for approximately a fifth of all marriages (18.4%) in 2017. Immigrant women who get married to Korean men are mostly from Asian countries. The largest group is Vietnamese IMIW who in the last two years has passed Chinese to make up 36.1% of women coming to Korea. The following group is the Chinese IMIW (26.1%).

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Number of international marriages</b>	11,605	14,523	15,202	24,776	34,640	42,356	38,759	37,560	36,204	33,300
<b>Korean man + foreign girl</b>	6,945	9,684	10,698	18,751	25,105	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163	25,142
<b>China</b>	3,566	6,977	7,023	13,347	18,489	20,582	14,566	14,484	13,203	11,364
<b>Vietnam</b>	77	134	474	1,402	2,461	5,822	10,128	6,610	8,282	7,249
<b>Philippines</b>	1,174	502	838	928	947	980	1,117	1,497	1,857	1,643
<b>Japan</b>	819	701	690	844	809	883	1,045	1,206	1,162	1,140
<b>Cambodia</b>	One	2	2	19	72	157	394	1,804	659	851
<b>Thailand</b>	240	182	327	345	324	266	271	524	633	496
<b>United States of America</b>	231	262	267	322	341	285	331	376	344	416
<b>Other</b>	773	806	883	1,224	1,158	1,183	1,219	1,334	1,502	1,597
<b>Korean woman + foreign man</b>	4,660	4,839	4,504	6,025	9,535	11,637	9,094	8,980	8,041	8,158
<b>Japan</b>	2,630	2,664	2,032	2,250	3,118	3,423	3,412	3,349	2,743	2,422
<b>China</b>	210	222	263	1,190	3,618	5,037	2,589	2,486	2,101	2,617
<b>United States of America</b>	1,084	1,113	1,204	1,222	1,332	1,392	1,443	1,334	1,347	1,312
<b>Canada</b>	150	164	172	219	227	283	307	374	371	332
<b>Australia</b>	78	78	90	109	132	101	137	158	164	159
<b>Other</b>	326	372	450	723	779	993	794	922	939	936

Source : National Statistic Office

Table 1.b : Number of International Marriages by Country [Unit: case] (2010 - 2017)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of international marriages</b>	34,235	29,762	28,325	25,963	23,316	21,274	20,591	20,835
<b>Korean man + foreign girl</b>	26,274	22,265	20,637	18,307	16,152	14,677	14,822	14,869
<b>China</b>	9,623	7,549	7,036	6,058	5,485	4,545	4,198	3,880
<b>Vietnam</b>	9,623	7,636	6,586	5,770	4,743	4,651	5,377	5,364
<b>Philippine</b>	1,906	2,072	2,216	1,692	1,130	1,006	864	842
<b>Japan</b>	1,193	1,124	1,309	1,218	1,345	1,030	838	843
<b>Cambodia</b>	1,205	961	525	735	564	524	466	480
<b>Thailand</b>	438	354	323	291	439	543	720	1,017
<b>United States of America</b>	428	507	526	637	636	577	570	541
<b>Other</b>	1,532	1,796	1,899	1,640	1,810	1,801	1,789	1,902
<b>Korean woman + foreign man</b>	7,961	7,497	7,688	7,656	7,164	6,597	5,769	5,966
<b>Japan</b>	2,090	1,709	1,582	1,366	1,176	808	381	311
<b>China</b>	2,293	1,869	1,997	1,727	1,579	1,434	1,463	1,523
<b>United States of America</b>	1,516	1,632	1,593	1,755	1,748	1,612	1,377	1,392
<b>Canada</b>	403	448	505	475	481	465	398	436
<b>Australia</b>	194	216	220	308	249	254	197	203
<b>Other</b>	1,050	1,188	1,331	1,572	1,931	2,024	1,953	2,101
Source : National Statistic Office								

### 3.2. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a heated debate for public discourses in both countries regarding transnational marriages. In interviews with Tuoi Tre News, many Vietnamese immigrant wives encounter domestic violence. For example, Mrs. Q.T.K, born in 1986, married her husband via a matching agency. Her husband, according to her, looked nicest among a group of Korean men in the meeting that day. After 4 years of marriage, she was beaten many times by her husband. Lately, her husband beat her so severely that she broke three rib bones. She reported:

*“I cried and begged him to stop beating me, but he did not listen. I hugged my son in front to stop him but he still beat me. After that, he wanted to have sex when I was in pain. I told him to take me to the hospital but he rejected it.<sup>17</sup> [...] After he slept, I went to the police to report and was told to go to the hospital.”<sup>18</sup>*

There are many refugee shelter units in Korea to help foreign wives who run away from marital families. Living in a refugee shelter unit running by a priest, Mrs. T.T.T (1990) who ran away from her husband family after four months told that:

*“My husband wanted to have sex with me when I was pregnant. Because I rejected his request, he told his mother and uncle. They got angry, stripped me and kicked me out of the house.”<sup>19</sup>*

There have been many cases that Vietnamese immigrant women were killed. For example, in 2010, Mrs. Thach Thi Hong Ngoc, 21 years old, was killed by her Korean husband Jang Do Hyo just one week after she arrived in his home country. This incident caused the amending in the Korean policy relating to Korean men who enter in transnational marriage with foreign wives. They need to have a short course to learn their wives' language and tradition on the basics. However, because of the short length of the course and motivation of the husbands, those courses were not sufficient. Domestic violence is still continuing. National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) in June 2018 showed that 387

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<sup>17</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 1, 02:30 – 02:57.

<sup>18</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 1, 03:51 – 04:02.

<sup>19</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 1, 07:43 – 07:56.

out of 920 female marriage migrants surveyed, or 42.1%, report experience with domestic abuse. Among the different forms of abuse, 81.1% of respondents who reported abuse (314 individuals) said they had been subjected to psychological and verbal abuse such as severe insults at home, while 67.9% (263) said they have been forced to engage in sexual intercourse or subjected to sexual abuse. Almost 20% (77) reported having been threatened with a weapon.

According to Ms Wak My Suk, director of a refugee center for Korean Wives:

*"[...] the cause for domestic violence is the difference in the motivation of spouses. Korean men want sex, and foreign wives need money. When the needs are unmet, conflicts will happen."*<sup>20</sup>

### **3.3. Drivers Promoting Involvement in Transnational Marriages**

Several drivers have promoted the international marriage market between South Korea and Vietnam, namely 1) Demographic driver, 2) Cultural driver, 3) Economic driver, 4) Institutional driver and the growing role of interpersonal networks.<sup>21</sup>

#### **3.3.1. Demographic Driver**

According to national statistics, men who are living in rural areas are marginalized in their marriage market. The data from the Korean census in 2005 illustrates that the imbalance between men and women is significant in rural areas. As Table 2a illustrates, from the age between 15 and 44 years, the sex ratio in rural areas exceeded 110. Especially, among the never-married residents (Table 2b), compared to the total and urban populations, the sex ratios of the rural population are significantly higher. It ranged from 112 among 15-19 years old to 468 among 35 to 39 years old, whereas at the national level, it varied from 111 to 244 and from 104 to 224 among never-married urban residents. It can be concluded that marriage squeeze on men who were living in rural areas at the time of the 2005 census.

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<sup>20</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 1, 09:38 – 10:47.

<sup>21</sup> LEE, Hyunok, WILLIAMS Lindy, ARGUILLAS Florio, "Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 47(2), 2006: 267-288.

The imbalance in number between men and women is one of the drivers which make Korean rural men seek spouse from foreign countries. Korean men who participated in international marriages mostly belong to three groups of men: never-married men in rural areas and previously married men of low socioeconomic status in urban areas and more recently, urban never-married men.

Age	National	Urban	Intermediate	Rural
15-19	110.3	110.1	111.5	111.2
20-24	109.7	105.0	130.1	157.4
25-29	102.5	100.3	101.9	136.1
30-34	101.2	99.6	100.5	124.2
35-39	100.9	98.7	110.1	118.3
40-44	102.0	99.9	114.8	114.0

Table 2b. Sex Ratios among the Never-married Population by Age and Urban/Rural Residence

Age	National	Urban	Intermediate	Rural
15-19	111	110	112	112
20-24	115	109	143	172
25-29	142	135	180	224
30-34	219	205	318	404
35-39	244	224	360	468
40-44	239	216	329	441
45-49	189	169	252	336
50-54	141	124	181	247
55 - 59	121	104	159	205

Source: 2005 Census, National Statistical Office

### 3.3.2. Cultural Driver

The increase in the number of international marriages with Vietnamese women can be explained by the continuing importance of marital hypergamy and homogamy.

Transnational unions have identified hypergamy (i.e. “marrying up”) as a central mechanism driving global marriage migration.<sup>22</sup> Hypergamy refers to the practice of entering a marital union “with someone of higher social status” and is consequential for social mobility within marriage.<sup>23</sup> Homogamy suggests that people are more likely to marry

<sup>22</sup> CONSTABLE, Nicole, “Introduction: Cross-border marriages, gendered mobility, and global hypergamy,” In: Constable, Nicole (Ed.), *Cross-border marriages: Gender and mobility in transnational Asia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 1-16.

<sup>23</sup> LEE, Hyunok, WILLIAMS Lindy, ARGUILLAS Florio, “Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 47(2), 2006: 269.



those who are similar to them on key dimensions (e.g. education, religion, income, culture).<sup>24</sup>

In the context of Korean society, the rapid relative improvements in women's educational attainment make men who have less education and those with lower earnings disadvantaged in the marriage market. In South Korea, where women are expected to "marry up", men in rural areas and men having low socio-economic status have difficulties to find a suitable spouse. According to the 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families, most of the Korean grooms married to Vietnamese women had high school/secondary school qualifications or less. With Vietnamese brides, although these rural Korean men have a low stand in their society, in comparison to the living standard of two countries, their husbands appear wealthier. Therefore, hypergamy can be employed as a driver for the Vietnamese-Korean union.

Homogamy is also an explanation of why Vietnamese in particular and women having Asian heritage in general are chosen as potential spouses. Homogamy refers to a practice that people enter a marital union with someone having similar crucial factors such as culture, education, income or religion. Korean and Vietnamese cultures are greatly influenced by Confucianism, therefore it seems that grooms and brides have the same expectations from their partners.

### **3.3.3 Economic Driver**

The economic driver plays an essential role for Vietnamese marriage migrants. Vietnamese immigrant women who enter transnational marriage with Korean men are not squeezed in their local marriage market.<sup>25</sup> The first reason why they seek spouses in more developed countries is to help their natal families economically. Some migrants reported they are experiencing extreme poverty or urgent financial pressure. Getting money from their foreign spouses and working in more developed countries helps to pay all the debt. If they are not experiencing significant economic difficulty, marrying Korean men enables them

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<sup>24</sup> BURGESS, Ernest W. and WALLIN, Paul, "Homogamy in Social Characteristics," *American Journal of Sociology* 49(2), 1943: 109-124.

<sup>25</sup> LEE, Hyunok, WILLIAMS Lindy, ARGUILLAS Florio, "Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 47(2), 2006: 278.

to move socially upward, thus change their lives. The interview data confirms that changing lives and helping families back home are the will of most Vietnamese immigrant wives.

Another reason is that those women do not want to marry men in their villages. Women described local men as immature and irresponsible. They are inclined to drink too much, to abuse their wives. Because those women witnessed these negative pictures in their families, they do not want to follow their mothers' or sisters' footprints. By marrying Korean husbands who are depicted as gentlemen in Korean dramas, those women hope to have better marriage lives.

### **3.3.4 Institutional Driver: Commercial Matching Agencies and Interpersonal Networks**

The interviews in the documentary “Vietnamese Brides in South Korea” made by Tuoitrenews confirm the importance of international brokerages in linking partners. Most of the women met their Korean husbands through matching agencies. Most of the Vietnamese women interviewed for this research had gone through a so-called “brides contest”. Prospective bridegrooms from Korea take part in a “marriage tour”, travel to Vietnam to meet their prospective wives, often seeing them for the first time during a “brides parade”. Through this process, each prospective bridegroom would eventually choose a woman and the couple would meet. They would spend a day together and if all went well, they would get married on the following day. Mrs. L.T.M.T who met her husband via such agency said that:

*“I met my husband in the morning. After the marital agreement from both sides, my mother met him in the afternoon. My marriage took place the following day. There are some other cases that marriage took place within the day.”<sup>26</sup>*

The process happened very quickly. That means that women cannot know their husbands very well, and neither do their husbands. Most of the time, the full information about Korean men was not revealed to Vietnamese women. Therefore, a lot of Vietnamese were shocked by their husbands' jobs and living conditions after their arrival in Korea. For instance, Mrs. Kim is one of the victims of the matching agencies. She said the agency

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<sup>26</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 2, 07:13 – 07:32.

informed her that her husband was about 40 years old and a director in Korea. After arrival, she was shocked when knowing that her husband was a farmer, a widower who has two children, and is 52 years old which is twice her age.

The interpersonal network is also crucial in linking partners. Many interviewees reported that experiences of women who had previously gone abroad helped shape local perceptions about marriage migration and encouraged many other women to consider it as an option.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> LEE, Hyunok, WILLIAMS Lindy, ARGUILLAS Florio, "Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 47(2), 2006: 281.

#### 4. INFLUENCES OF CONFUCIAN ON GENDER RELATION IN SOUTH KOREAN AND VIETNAMESE TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

In the interview recorded in the series Vietnamese Brides in South Korea, the brides said that they met many difficulties to integrate into their marital family, harmonize with their husbands, and the in-laws due to the cultural differences. Regarding culture, gender ideologies are a central factor for well-being in marriage. Mrs. Han Kuk Yom, who is the head of the Korean Women Migrant Human Right Center, explained:

*“In my opinion, the reason for domestic violence is due to differences in culture. In Korea, husbands decide everything within the family, and wives are submissive to their husbands. The male-dominant perspective in gender relations still persists in the Korean family. It causes depression for foreign wives when they get married to Korean men.”<sup>28</sup> [...] Furthermore, as I see, the spousal age gap between foreign wives and their Korean husbands are large. Acknowledgment of gender equality among middle-aged or older men is lower than among young men.”<sup>29</sup>*

Most of the men entering transnational marriage obtain high school/secondary school qualifications or less. In the study of contemporary rural life, after identifying the characteristics of the daily social order in a typical country village, Kim Jin-Myung concluded that there was a strong influence of traditional culture leading to the tendency towards gender differentiation and the sexual division of labor in such a society.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, to identify which differences in cultural factors were mentioned by Vietnamese wives, it is fundamental to investigate traditional perspectives in gender relations in Korea and Vietnam.

Korea and Vietnam are the two countries where Confucian philosophy strongly influences traditional cultures. In collective thinking, the two countries would share the same gender construction. However, the reality that Vietnamese brides met in Korea proves otherwise. This chapter is demonstrating the traditional perspectives on gender roles and status of women in Korean and Vietnamese traditional families, which originated in the teachings

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<sup>28</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 2, 01:53 – 02:17.

<sup>29</sup> Tuoi Tre News, Vietnamese Brides in South Korea documentary, 2014, episode 2, 05:53 – 06:06.

<sup>30</sup> KIM Jin Myung, “Patriarchal Discourse and Female Oppression - An Analytic Approach to Naehun and Saryepyollam,” in Asian Women 1(1), 1995: 163-181.

of Confucius's philosophy. By comparing and contrasting the two gender ideologies, we can identify the discrepancies and misunderstandings.

#### **4.1. Confucius Teachings on Gender Roles**

Classical Confucian ideas are the products of a group of early Confucians principally represented by Confucius, Mencius, and Hsün Tzu. Confucianism is not a religion but a philosophy that sets the parameters of social structures and relations.<sup>31</sup> The legacy of Confucian ethics is the Three Bonds and Five Relationships, which teach people moral conduct. Chronologically, the virtues of Five Relationship were advocated by Mencius almost four centuries before the idea of Three Bonds emerged. Five Relationships, which are Father-Son, Ruler-Minister, Husband-Wife, Old-Young and Friend-Friend, are moral conduct based on mutual relation.

*“This gave the sage King further cause for concern, and so he appointed Hsieh as the Minister of Education whose duty was to teach the people human relationships: love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends.”<sup>32</sup>*

Five Relationships aim at self-cultivation, essential for personal growth. In the gender relationship characterized by the relation between husband and wife, the fundamental is the division of labor, “distinction.” The husband and wife collaborate to build up their family and are equal in status.

In 206-220 BC, Han dynasty scholars put effort to make Confucius philosophy political, making the Three Bonds? be an integral part of moral education. The first textual evidence of the idea occurs in the Han Fei Tzu (Han Fei Zi), the Legalistic classic:

*“The minister serves the king, the son serves the father, and the wife serves the husband. If the three are followed, the world will be in peace; if the three are violated, the world will be in chaos.”<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> TAYLOR, Rodney L, Confucianism, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Mencius, Mencius, The Chinese University Press, 2003, pp. 115.

<sup>33</sup> ZHOU, Zhongling, Hanfeizi soyin (Concordance to the Hanfeizi), Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1982, pp. 863.

The Three Bonds give the authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife. The primary concern is keeping social stability by maintaining the social order. Therefore, the Three Bonds underline the hierarchical relationship between dominant and subservience. This politicization of Confucian ethics restructured the Five Relationships. Whereas Five Relationships built community based on mutual behavioral conduct, the Three Bonds are based on the mechanism of symbolic control. The Three Bonds is the ideology of control, while Five Relationships is the ideological background of it.

The idea of the “submissive” status of women excluding the spirit of mutuality of Five Relationships is the product of political Confucius philosophy. In hierarchical and patriarchal societies like the Han dynasty, with support of the idea of the Three Bonds, women became entirely inferior to men. The political authority was given to man as the ruler. Women, because they were not given the dominating role, must practice the moral conduct of the follower. As a daughter, she follows her father, as a wife, she follows her husband, and as a mother, she follows her son.

The psycho-cultural dynamics of the Confucian family lies on the spectrum of authoritarianism of the Three Bonds and the benevolence of the Five Relationships.<sup>34</sup> While Confucianism has been a significant characteristic feature of Vietnam and South Korea, the traditional cultures of Korea and Vietnam derive from various sources, which are traditionalism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.<sup>35</sup> Due to diverse cultural configurations in each society, the extent of influence of Confucius’s teachings on the traditional families of the two countries is expected to have differences. The next chapter is demonstrating the performance of Confucius’s values on the traditional families in South Korea and Vietnam.

## **4.2. Gender Ideologies in Korean Traditional Families**

### **4.2.1. Historical Background**

Traditional Confucianism was first introduced to Korea during the Three Kingdoms era (BC 57–AD 668), when leaders inculcated the Confucian ethic, along with Taoism and

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<sup>34</sup> TU, Wei-Ming, “Probing the “Three Bonds” and “Five Relationships” in Confucian Humanism,” In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 133.

<sup>35</sup> COMPTON, Robert W Jr., *East Asian Democratization: Impact of Globalization, Culture, and Economy*, Praeger Publishers, London, 2000, pp. 33.

Buddhism, as a means of maintaining their aristocratic social order and socio-political order. There was a transformation in Korean history under the Yi dynasty (1392–1910) when Neo-Confucianism radicalized the Chosŏn society (Korea under Yi dynasty). Buddhism, which was state religion during the Koryŏ times (918–1392), was entirely replaced by Neo-Confucianism, which is known as the Neo-Confucianism of Chu His, by Yi dynasty founders.<sup>36</sup> Buddhist elites were expelled and Confucian teachings monopolized political power.<sup>37</sup> Neo-Confucianism was adopted not merely as a philosophy of reform, but as the basis for completely rebuilding the polity.<sup>38</sup> *“It provided a key to a new understanding of the classical Confucian literature that in turn furnished the details for sociopolitical order and stability.”*<sup>39</sup> This neo-Confucianism enabled the new ruling elites, who were mostly young, reform-minded Confucian scholars, to consolidate the power and helped them establish a highly centralized, authoritarian form of government which was mobilized to bring the underlying civic structure and social mores into line with the political philosophy of the ruling class. In the Yi dynasty, in an attempt to mold Korean society into a Confucian state, Confucian-influenced institutions and patriarchal values were introduced and integrated. Because the Neo-Confucianism, which was internalized into the society, was used with the purpose of controlling society, the philosophy of the teaching underlines the hierarchy of the dominant and subservience. It inclined to authoritarianism on the spectrum. Moreover, rejecting Buddhism made the Confucius teachings under the Yi dynasty more oppressive. Deuchler suggests that there is much more involved in the history of Confucianism and society in Korea than the revolutionary reorganization of society according to an imported ideal. It is more seemly Koreanization of Neo-Confucianism than the Confucianization of Korea. In the mid sixteenth century, there was an emergence of a “coherent and well-integrated system” that combined Chinese

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<sup>36</sup> CHUNG, Edward Y. J, *The Understanding Korea Series (UKS): Korean Confucianism: Tradition and Modernity*, Korea, The Academy of Korean Studies Press, 2015, pp. 33-39.

<sup>37</sup> KIM, Mikyung, “Transformation of Korean Women: From Tradition to Modernity,” In: Salman Akhtar (ed.), *Freud and the Far East: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the People and Culture of China, Japan, and Korea*, Jason Aronson, 2009, pp. 139.

<sup>38</sup> DEUCLER, Martina, “Neo-Confucianism: The Impulse for Social Action in Early Yi Dynasty Korea,” *The Journal of Korean studies* 2, 1980: 71.

<sup>39</sup> DEUCLER, Martina, “Neo-Confucianism: The Impulse for Social Action in Early Yi Dynasty Korea,” *The Journal of Korean studies* 2, 1980: 75.

values and native Korean social customs. This combination suggests that Korean society did not follow the classic Chinese model but compromised it with its social interests.

#### **4.2.2. Status of Women in Chosŏn Society**

Women under the Yi Dynasty were particularly oppressed by harsh restrictions that were regulated by the Koreanized Neo-Confucianism. There were significant attempts and resources to indoctrinate women to conform to the Confucian? model society. According to Deuchler, the inequalities imposed on women and their offspring by Confucian ideology were much more pronounced than in China.<sup>40</sup>

The Koreanized Neo-Confucianism under the Yi dynasty was fundamentally patriarchal in its construction of women's roles and status and enhancement of male authority. Their application of Neo-Confucian teachings stresses directly on the position of subordination of women to men. In Korean Confucius teachings, social relationships are guided by The Three Bonds (*samgang*) and The Five Relationships (*oryun*). According to *Samgang*, men and women must remain *yoŭl*, distinct.<sup>41</sup> Different from the original "distinction" of mutual relationship proposed by Mencius, distinction in Koreanized Confucian teachings underlines the hierarchy between men and women. The two important principles which governed gender relation are Namnyo-yubyol (sex-difference) and Namjon-yobi (honored men, abased women). Namnyo-yubyol regulates the gender roles in the family, assigning public space to men and inner space to women. Namjon-yobi indicated the inferior status of women to men. In the analysis of Confucian texts (the Five Classics) such as Shu-ching, Shih-shing, Lun-yu, Meng-tzu, I-Ching, and Li-chi, Yong-Ok Park illustrates the superior status of men and its restrictions on women written in Confucian texts. For example, I-Ching describes men as "heaven" who destined to be leaders and women as the earth who must follow men. Whereas heaven is strong with the principle of "one", the earth is low and soft with the principle of "many".<sup>42</sup> Women were obliged to obey their fathers in youth,

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<sup>40</sup> DEUHLER, Martina, "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea," In: Dorothy Ko, JaHyun K. Haboush and Joan R. Piggott (eds.) *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodem China, Korea, and Japan*, London, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 144.

<sup>41</sup> SETH, Michael J., *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, pp. 158-161.

<sup>42</sup> CHO, Haejoang, "Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 192.



their husbands in marriage, and their sons in old age (Samjong-jido). Books written for women under the Yi dynasty emphasized women virtues, which are chastity, faithfulness, obedience to husbands, obedience to in-laws, frugality, and filial piety. To promote these values, the state in 1434 awarded honors to women for virtue. Filial piety was reinforced in Chosŏn society which was controlled by Confucius ideology and patriarchal lineage.

An individual's conduct was evaluated based on behavioral conduct to exercise filial piety. Regarding women, they would get the state as *hyoyo* (filial daughter) or *yolyo* (faithful wife) as a reward for virtuous daughter and wife. It must be noticed that in Chosŏn society, women were considered outsiders (*chulga-woein*) from their natal family after marriage. Therefore, women's accomplishments served only their husband's family.<sup>43</sup> The "virtuous conduct" was prescribed by the Confucians for women was well illustrated in Naehun ("Instructions for Women"), which is considered to be the most important and influential textbook for women during this period. Naehun taught girls the four basic rules of womanly conduct: moral conduct – women need not have great talents, but must be quiet and serene, chaste and disciplined; proper speech – women need not have rhetorical talents, but must avoid bad and offensive language and speak with restraint; proper appearance – women need not be beautiful, but must be clean in dress and appearance; and follow womanly tasks – women need not be clever, but must pay attention to such duties as weaving and entertaining guests.<sup>44</sup>

Women in previous dynasties had not overcome such norms and ideology, which were oppressive or discriminating towards them as in the Yi dynasty. In the Silla dynasty (57 BC–AD 935) the right of a female to head the family was acknowledged. Women had exertive enormous political influence and power. For instance, there were three women rulers, and mothers of young kings acted as regents. During the Koryŏ period (918–1392), when Buddhism was a predominant religion, men and women interacted relatively freely outside the home. During this time, marriage involved the bridegroom living in his wife's

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<sup>43</sup> CHO, Haejoang, "Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 196.

<sup>44</sup> DEUHLER, Martina, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 257.

parents' home until children were born and raised. Women were allowed to remarry. Rules of property inheritance did not discriminate between the sexes. Due to the transformation of Confucius state under the Yi dynasty and the significant influence of Koreanized Neo-Confucianism, the social and economic status of Korean women gradually declined. Women were no longer head of the household. Remarriage of widows was prohibited because wives were supposed to be loyal to their husbands even after their death. Marriage customs were also changed. From earlier practice, newlywed resided at the wife's family until their children were born and raised. However, in Chosŏn society, brides usually left their families after marriage. A married daughter became a *ch'ulga oein* (one who left the household and became a stranger) and a *todungnyŏ* ("robber woman") because she took away the family wealth (dowry) when she married. It is also the reason why daughters were no longer receiving inheritances from their families. They were considered strangers after marriage. Women were not allowed to get divorced, but men were. The man could divorce from his wife if she committed one of seven reasons to divorce (*ch'ilgŏ jia*) such as disobedience to parents-in-law, failure to bear a son, adultery, jealousy, hereditary disease, talkativeness, and larceny. Men and women were segregated. Women could no longer freely interact with men outside, and their lives were restricted in many ways. The Confucian code, laws and customs strictly placed women inside the house and public spheres belonged to the domain of men. Women in the late Yi dynasty society had, except occasional royal figures, lost freedom of movement and were excluded altogether from public affairs.<sup>45</sup> Women needed to have the permission of husbands or family heads if they wanted to participate in social activities. Segregation between men and women was also prescribed in house architecture and worship rituals. Inside the house, the space was divided between the *sarang ch'ae*, the outer section for men, and the *anch'ae*, the inner section of the house for women, which was also known as the *anbang* (inner room). Husbands and wives often lived separately in their own homes. Women could not participate in the rites to ancestors. By late Chosŏn, women became "nameless entities,"

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<sup>45</sup> DEUHLER, Martina, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 261.

being referred to as “the wife of” or as the “mother of (son’s name).” They had neither rights to divorce, to inherit, to participate in public life or any identity of their own.<sup>46</sup>

Ideologically Confucianism postulated a clear distinction of the male and female spheres of influence, with the public domain dominating the domestic. As the backbone of the patrilineal, this social division was highlighted by the emphasis Confucianism laid on kinship organization.<sup>47</sup> Korean society has been described as an extreme form of patriarchy;<sup>48</sup> therefore this segregation was greatly reinforced. By the influence of Neo-Confucianism, along with the purpose of politicizing its teachings from above, Korean women under the Yi dynasty were entirely dominated by men. The idea of the superiority of men over women, while at the same time constantly stressing their obedience and chastity, became a fundamental concern that dominated the lives of Korean women.

### **4.3. Gender Ideologies in Vietnamese Traditional Families**

#### **4.3.1. Historical Background**

The Viet people were under Chinese authority from 180/179 BC until 938 AD. Consequently, Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam during this millenary Chinese domination. In the beginning, the Chinese rulers did not enforce Viet people to follow their customs. Therefore, during the first centuries of Chinese domination, the Viet people still practiced their original customs and way of life. As a result, Confucianism was not spread to Vietnam by suppression but was followed only by the Chinese living in Vietnam as officials, exiled people, or settlers and their descendants.

However, at the beginning of the Christian era, the Chinese started to put attempt to assimilate Vietnamese into their traditional customs and Confucianism was also one of the major principles.

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<sup>46</sup> SETH, Michael J., *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, pp. 161-165.

<sup>47</sup> DEUCHLER, Martina, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 259.

<sup>48</sup> CHO, Haejoang, “Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea,” In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 187.

Due to this attempt, Confucianism, and especially its rules concerning families, continued to spread in Viet society. It is noted that primary Vietnamese society followed the matriarchal system. There were revolts led by women against the Chinese government. For example, in 40 AD, the Trung Sisters led a revolt against the Han governor Su Ting and established the first period of independence for Vietnam (40–43 AD). In 248, Lady Trieu led another uprising against the Chinese government. However, from the beginning of the sixth century, there were no more revolts against the Chinese led by women. It can be concluded that Viet society by that time had been totally transformed into patriarchy. Consequently, it indicated that Viet people integrated Confucian morality, and its standards governing family conduct and interpersonal relationships before the end of the Chinese domination in the tenth century.

By the end of Chinese domination in Vietnam in the tenth century, Confucianism was well rooted in society and transformed Vietnamese society into a patriarchal system. Therefore, the Vietnamese pattern of culture has been molded upon patriarchal principles since then. However, Confucianism was not the most powerful system of thought because Kings of Vietnamese dynasties did not uphold it much. Buddhism was the most essential religion, which had the biggest impact in Vietnamese life. Not until the nineteenth century when the Nguyen (1802–1945) reunified the country and governed, Confucianism reached its strongest influence. The rulers of this dynasty followed much more the Chinese model than their predecessors. However, whereas the sovereigns of this dynasty tried to follow the Chinese model strictly, the Vietnamese people still maintained much of their uniqueness and significant differences. For instance, while in the Chinese traditional family, several generations were living under one roof to preserve family's large size, the Vietnamese families would rather live in smaller families and had separate homes and properties.

Despite a millennium of Chinese cultural influence, Confucianism did not entirely transform Vietnamese society. There are original customs and practices that persist.<sup>49</sup> In brief, although there was a significant influence of the Chinese Confucian principles on Vietnam, Confucian teachings have never employed for a radical reform. Different from

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<sup>49</sup> NGUYEN, Ngoc Huy, "The Confucian Incursion into Vietnam," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 91-99.

Korean history, even in the peak time of Confucianism, Vietnamese society has never been a Confucian state. In other words, along with Confucianism, the Vietnamese configuration of culture was molded upon its original tradition as a matriarchal society, and Buddhism.

#### **4.3.2. Traditional Vietnamese Ideologies**

Regarding gender ideologies, although Confucianism did not transform the whole gender system, it affects significantly upon it. The first impact is that Vietnamese gender ideology has been built upon patriarchal society. Secondly, because Buddhism and Taoism had no unique teachings regarding the organization of the family, Confucianism had a primary role in this field. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Tran rulers had already put efforts to employ the Confucian teaching on familiar morality. According to gender roles, men were placed in the public sphere and women belonged to the private sphere, the households. The man was the leader of the family; his wife and son had to follow his guidance. The responsibility of a man was to bring honor and status to the family by his achievement he got outside of the house. Women were placed within the household. Her roles were taking care of the family and supporting her husband. The four virtues for women are *dung, cong, ngon, and hanh*. *Dung* is about appearance, which should be neat and attractive and modest in clothes. *Cong* is industry, which should be precise and careful. *Ngan* is speech, which should be submissive and respectful. *Hanh* is characteristics, which should be upright, filial, devoted, and trustworthy. According to the *Gia huan ca*, and as preached for centuries in every Vietnamese home, the first responsibility of a woman was maintaining the husband's lineage by giving birth to an heir (son). The second responsibility was taking care of the household and supporting her husband. She needed to conserve and increase her family's wealth by mobilizing the family's resources.<sup>50</sup>

Whereas most of the gender roles, especially the virtues for women followed the model of Chinese patterns, the Vietnamese gender system kept differences. The Vietnamese made adjustments to the institution of patrilineal marriage which the Chinese imposed on them. As opposed to Chinese women who did not share the same rights as men, Vietnamese women and men had almost the same rights. In China, daughters could not inherit from

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<sup>50</sup> YOUNG, Stephen, "The Orthodox Chinese Confucian Social Paradigm versus Vietnamese Individualism," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 154-155.

their parents as their brothers. On the contrary, except for some restrictions concerning properties reserved for ancestor worship, daughters have shared the same inherent properties as her brothers. In China, divorced women and widows who remarried could not take any properties from their former husband's family, even if they were from her natal family or acquired during the marriage. Moreover, they also had to return gifts received from their former husband's family during the ceremonies of engagement. In contrast, in Vietnam, divorced women and widows who remarried after their husband's death remained the owners of properties given to them by natal family and were also entitled to behold half of the properties acquired during their marriage.<sup>51</sup>

Vietnamese traditional norms gave the woman in her role as wife and mother considerable control over the family. Wives and mothers are called *noi tuong* (generals of the within) and *tay hom chia khoa* (key-locking).<sup>52</sup> Her responsibility is managing all aspects of family affairs. While a man's roles are outside the family, a woman's place is very much within it. The overt, external social power of the man was offset by a covert, internal, emotional dynamic which gave the woman influence in the home that was rarely questioned. Therefore, it can be concluded that in Vietnam men and women are different in the power sphere but equal in status. It is entirely different from the typical Confucian patriarchal society. The reason proposed to explain this paradox is because the Vietnamese have insisted upon a compromise on power within the family, blending patrilineal authority with matriarchy.<sup>53</sup>

#### **4.4. Clashes between Gender Ideologies of Traditional Vietnamese and Korean Families**

Korea and Vietnam are well-known as societies influenced by Confucius. Although the diffusion of Confucianism is significant, it is flexibly adapting to indigenous traditionalism precisely because it is primarily a moral philosophy rather than a religion. This makes

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<sup>51</sup> NGUYEN, Ngoc Huy, "The Confucian Incursion into Vietnam," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 99.

<sup>52</sup> DUONG, Wendy N, "Gender Equality And Women's Issues, In Vietnam: The Vietnamese Woman-Warrior And Poet," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal Association* 10(2), 2001: 228.

<sup>53</sup> YOUNG, Stephen B, "The Orthodox Chinese Confucian Social Paradigm versus Vietnamese Individualism," In: Walter H. Slote, George A. De Vos (ed.), *Confucianism and the Family*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1988, pp. 154-155.

Confucianism adaptable to existing indigenous religions and traditional values without directly confronting them.<sup>54</sup> Due to the diverse traditional cultures in each society, the extent of influence of Confucius on the traditional family of the two countries is variable. By studying traditional Korean and Vietnamese gender ideologies before the influence of modernization, we can estimate the status of women in each society nowadays. It is obvious that there are changes in the laws as well as social construction via education to adapt to the new lifestyles of the new era. For example, in Korea, the legal codes had been amended to allow women to head households, inherit property, and initiate divorce, and the early 1990s legally prohibited gender discrimination. In Vietnam, gender equality is stated in the Constitution and laws grant their rights. Moreover, it would be a cliché when traditional gender ideologies should be imposed on modern families and to whom are well-educated. However, based on the National Statistics in 2006, most of the Korean men who seek foreign wives are from rural areas and not educated. Therefore, the traditional male-centered mindset of those husbands persists significantly. In the study, Kim showed that the social status of women in the village did not correspond with an increase in their participation in economic activities. According to Kim Jin-Myung,<sup>55</sup> women's status could be better decided by cultural factors than by economic ones. These cultural factors were the social structure of the patriarchal family, the system of inheritance, and marital patrilocality, all reinforced by traditional concepts of, for example, the predominance of men over women, preference for male children, and acceptance of women as "inside persons" and men as "outside persons". These traditional perspectives seemed to persist in spite of increased economic activities. Despite changes in the social system, such as an increase in the number of women engaged in waged work, the cultural system had not changed. The perception of "female is inferior" was still visible in the village. Based on this study, it can be concluded that although there has been a rapid change in the economy and modernization requiring equality between men and women had a certain influence, traditional perspective on gender relationships in the rural South Korean areas persists.

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<sup>54</sup> COMPTON, Robert W Jr., *East Asian Democratization: Impact of Globalization, Culture, and Economy*, Praeger Publishers, London, 2000, pp. 37-38.

<sup>55</sup> KIM Jin Myung, "Patriarchal Discourse and Female Oppression - An Analytic Approach to Naehun and Saryepyollam," in *Asian Women* 1 (1), 1995, pp. 163-181.

There are similarities between Korean and Vietnamese traditional gender ideologies. Due to the influence of Confucianism, the roles of husband and wife are quite similar. Gender ideology is built upon a patriarchal society. Men are the breadwinner of the family and placed in public spheres. Women are placed within households. Her responsibilities are maintaining her husband's lineage and taking care of her family. Virtues of women are also similar. Basic moral women conducts are chastity, faithfulness, obedience to husbands, obedience to in-laws, frugality, and filiality. To be a good daughter and wife, they need to have a proper speech which is soft and restrained, a proper appearance which is neat and modest and to be dutiful within her households.

There are inconsistencies between traditional Korean and Vietnamese gender system. By comparative study between gender ideologies of the two countries, it is concluded that in traditional Korean family comparing to a Vietnamese one, women were placed in a lower status. In Vietnam, although women were also placed in the private sphere, they were given a title *noi tuong* (generals of the within) and *tay hom chia khoa* (key-locking). It means that relating to men, their statuses were equal. Their powers were inside of the family whereas their husband's powers were outside. This non-conformism towards Confucius's patriarchal society is because Vietnamese society is blending patrilineal authority with the matriarchy. While in Vietnam, women's status traditionally is equal to men, Korean women, especially in Chosŏn, were completely inferior to men. This inequality was even more extreme than in China. Korean society was considered an extreme form of patriarchal society. Under the Yi dynasty, the ruling elites wanted to politicize Neo-Confucianism. They transformed the whole social construction into Confucius's state while Vietnam has never had this radical transformation. Stressing on the submissive status of women was part of the political philosophy underlying hierarchical order to maintain social order. Women in Chosŏn society were entirely under men. They had no power in the family. When a woman got married, she was considered an outsider from her natal family and served the marital family. She was expected to be obedient, faithful to her husbands and the in-law.

It is thus concluded in traditional gender relations that Vietnamese women are placed higher than women in South Korea. Both countries are being influenced significantly by



the gender equality movement of the modern era. Laws and educations are promoting the rights of women. However, the entire modernization process itself, in all its accompanying forms—political, social, and economic—became embodied in a traditional and Confucian core. Traditionalism and modernization are blending and complementing each other.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it is believed that the traditional perspectives cannot be erased, and they especially persist strongly within men squeezed on marriage, having to seek Asian foreign spouses.

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<sup>56</sup> COMPTON, Robert W. Jr., *East Asian Democratization: Impact of Globalization, Culture, and Economy*, Praeger Publishers, London, 2000, pp. 5.

## **5. THE PARADOX OF MARITAL MOBILITY**

The primary purpose of Vietnamese women seeking a husband in more developed countries is for social mobility upward. Coming to South Korea, most of them have the dream of moving to upward society, earning money, changing their lives as well as their natal families back home. However, what immigrant Vietnamese wives have been encountering is different from their expectations. Vietnamese foreign wives who have entered transnational marriage in South Korea have to face the paradox of marital mobility.<sup>57</sup>

### **5.1. The paradox in Ethnicity/Nationality**

Korean society is well-known as a homogenous society. The reason why Korean men who seek foreign wives choose Asian countries as ideal places is due to the assumption that cultures of those countries are mostly shared. In light of this, Vietnamese women who involve in transnational marriage with Korean men have the same thinking. Shared Asian cultures presumably enable them to get easily integrated into the hosting family. However, when they arrive, they immediately realize that they cannot interact easily with the local population. Unfamiliar with the language, traditional customs, behavior conducts make them feel isolated from the marital family and society. Moreover, coming from a poorer country, Vietnamese immigrant wives have to face discrimination and stereotypes from marital society. As a highly gendered migrant group coming from a relatively poor country, the social pressure put on Vietnamese wives does not come only from gendered expectations in the marital families but also from pervasive stereotypes in the host societies. Some Vietnamese expressed that they were shocked and sometimes angry when they first learned about their neighbours' gendered stereotypes towards them and outdated images about Vietnam. Therefore, although they are married into a Korean family, even getting citizenship, it is difficult for them to be fully integrated into Korean society and considered as Korean.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> FREEMAN, Caren, "Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea," In: Nicole Constable (ed.), *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 80-100.

<sup>58</sup> CHANG, Hsin-Chieh, "A two-step social integration model for transnational marriage migrants in Taiwan and South Korea: "Marital family first, host society second," In: Fresnoza-Flot, Asuncion, *International*

## **5.2. The Paradox in Gender**

Vietnamese immigrant women, who leave their villages and marry into South Korea, are heading to modern life in developed countries. If cross-border marriage appeals to women who possess strength and are tempted to change their lives and help their natal families, their dream will be immediately fettered by Korean kinship norms that physically bind them to the house and morally to the demands of the in-laws. As the discussion in the previous chapter suggests, according to the Korean traditional gender perspective, the place of the wife is inside the household. She has to be submissive to her husband and exercise filial piety to the in-laws. Most of Vietnamese foreign wives want to have a job, earn money and send them back to their natal families. This is opposed to what is expected from them as a wife and daughter-in-law. In the traditional Korean kinship system, the position of women is lower than it is in Vietnam. It contradicts the will of Vietnamese women to mobilize upwards. They get involved in marriage with a person from a more developed country because they partly do not want to get married to Vietnamese husbands in their villages. Marrying Korean men is a way of enabling them to move to higher social status. Paradoxically, the status of women in Vietnam is higher than in Korea in gender construction. Therefore, they have to encounter a downward in gender position.

## **5.3. The Paradox in Geographic Position**

Marrying Korean men likely helps Vietnamese women get mobilize upwards in the geoeconomic hierarchy. However, in reality, power disparities between nations persist also in the marriage. Vietnamese immigrant women are still considered as foreign wives who are from Vietnam. On the other hand, following the husbands, Vietnamese women who leave their village at home have to locate in villages in rural areas of South Korea. They basically move from one disadvantaged area to another. Moreover, their status is even lower than back home. They are considered as “the others” coming from less developed countries.

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Marriages and Marital Citizenship: Southeast Asian Women on the Move, Milton, Routledge, 2017, pp. 184-185.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Transnational marriage involving Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives is a heated topic in public discourse. Coming from a state that is also influenced by Confucianism, Vietnamese women are expected to fulfill very well the duties of wives and daughters-in-law in South Korea. However, reality proves otherwise. There are negative outcomes such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and murder. Many wives unable to put off with domestic violence from marital families have run away, even left their sons. Why does it happen?

The answer is first coming from drivers promoting transnational marriage involving Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives. On the side, a typical Korean husband, according to National Statistics, is a rural never-married man, a divorced man of low socioeconomic status in urban areas, and more recently, an urban never-married man who is squeezed on the local marriage market. Seeking wives from foreign countries in which women share the same traditional virtues is a solution for these men to have a wife who can maintain their lineage and carry filial piety to the in-laws. On the side of Vietnamese women, most of them are girls who want to marry up to men from more developed countries, to socially mobilize upwards and to help their family back home economically. Because of differences in expectations from both sides, conflicts in marriage happen.

Women who were interviewed said the cultural differences are the reasons that hinder them to integrate into their marital family. Apart from languages and traditional customs, differences in gender systems are the crucial factors leading to unhealthy marriage. Because Korean men in our study are not educated, the traditional gender perspective in them strongly persists. Although Koreans and Vietnamese are Confucius-influenced nations, the gender system which identifies gender roles in the family is different. In the traditional gender perspective, Vietnamese women have a higher position than Korean women although they share many similar moral virtues and duties instruction within the household. Whereas in traditional Korean gender perspectives, women are entirely submissive to men who are the head of the household, Vietnamese women' position is equal to men. While a man's roles are outside the family, a woman's place is very much within it. The reason for this difference is because of the variables of cultural tradition.

Korean society is originally a patriarchal system. Due to the reform under Yi dynasty by means of Neo-Confucius's philosophy, Korea transformed into a Confucian state. Under that period of time, women were entirely submissive and inferior to men. The perspective of men who is superior to women persists in Korean family, especially in rural areas. In contrast, although the teachings of Confucius had a strong influence in Vietnam, it had never become dominant in Vietnamese society. Moreover, Vietnam was originally a matriarchal society, before the Chinese influence transformed Vietnam into a patriarchal society. Therefore, the Vietnamese gender system is blending between patriarchy and matriarchy.

Because of the illusion caused by the lack of information about prospective husbands and marital society, Vietnamese foreign wives are facing many paradoxes in marital mobility. Instead of marrying up, they marry down in ethnic, gender and geographic positions when entering marriage with Korean husbands.

Multicultural marriage is the context in which transcultural communication study is essential. Couples in such marriages are facing conflicts of which cultural differences are the main factors. In order to have a healthy marriage in this model, the couples must put efforts to blur the barriers between two cultures at which transcultural study aims. This thesis is an attempt to provide a clear picture of transnational marriage between Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives. By analyzing the background from both sides, this thesis tries to clarify problems that are manifested by many negative outcomes. Further research on how to have a well-functioning marriage of this model will be very important in the years ahead. Consequently, there will be more healthy marriages that are composed of Vietnamese and Korean spouses.

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