The House and the Classroom: Vietnamese Immigrant Spouses in South Korea and Taiwan

Danièle Bélanger

The University of Western Ontario

INSTITUTE OF POPULATION AND AGING RESEARCH

HIT Bldg. #323, Hanyang University
17 Haengdang-dong, Seongdong-gu, Seoul, 133-791 KOREA
This paper explores the lives of Vietnamese women who migrated to South Korea and Taiwan through international marriage. Based on narratives collected from immigrant women in 2006 about the process of marrying men from South Korea or Taiwan, the paper discusses how women who migrate through marriage experience vulnerabilities and exert agency. The paper also focuses on the lives of women in the two most important spaces they occupy following migration: the home and the classroom. Women’s experiences in their new families and in government-run language classes shed light on how these women are constructed by their families and by the Taiwanese and South Korean states. Immigrant women are generally located in the domestic sphere as wives, daughters-in-law and mothers, and in the classroom, where they learn the Korean or Chinese language and other skills, women tend to be infantilized, reflecting the states’ construction of these women as being inferior. The paper concludes that Taiwan and South Korea would benefit from acknowledging their increasing ethnic diversity, rather than trying to assimilate the immigrant women and erase differences. The rapidly increasing ethnic composition of Taiwan and South Korea, resulting mostly from marriage migration, is unique in current migration trends.

Key words: gender, international marriage, foreign brides, Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan

I. Introduction

In February 2007, the rapidly increasing marriage-based international migration flow taking place between Vietnam and South Korea made the front page of The New York Times (Norimitsu, 2007). The article reported...
stories of several brides and grooms and described the transnational marriage industry. Next to the phenomenon of sex-selective abortions and high sex ratios in parts of Asia, the booming Asian international matchmaking industry is drawing the world’s attention.

Why would a few ordinary Vietnamese-South Korean, newly married couples make the front page of *The New York Times*? Because commercialized international marriages are often depicted in a sensationalist and shocking fashion. For most readers, the ‘purchase’ of wives through expensive matchmaking tours is just as scandalous as the elimination of girls through abortion. Although not the conscious intent of journalists who report on current social trends, the coverage of international marriages tends to reinforce the victimization of female marriage-migrants and, at the international level, may even fuel prejudices and misunderstandings. In addition, United Nations agencies’ publications often associate discussions of female migration with the problem of human trafficking (United Nations Population Fund, 2006). Female migrants are referred to, and rightly so, as being more vulnerable than male migrants are in many respects. Well-intended NGOs who work with migrants facing difficulties tend to associate all marriage-migration with trafficking, abuse and unhappiness (Wang and Bélanger, forthcoming). In this perspective, women are positioned as victims of an international capitalist and patriarchal order in which they have limited power and rights.

At the other end of the spectrum of victimizing discourses are the depictions of ‘foreign brides’ as heartless opportunists who ‘sell sex for visas’ and run away as soon as they obtain their citizenship. Taiwanese and South Korean media have played an important role in diffusing the image of runaway brides who betray the family that has invested substantial money in a transnational marriage (see Hsia, 2007 on Taiwan and Freeman, 2005 and Lee, 2006 on South Korea). The reports on some immigrant spouses who apparently married only for convenience and escaped after obtaining their citizenship had a strong impact on South
Korean and Taiwanese society in general, and on families with foreign brides. In some families, parents-in-law and husbands tend to be paranoid about the potential escape of the immigrant women and are suspicious of their motives. While these two contradictory representations—the victim and the opportunist—certainly describe some real life cases, I would argue that most cases lie somewhere between.

To move away from the victim-opportunist dichotomy and sensationalized representations of immigrant spouses in some countries of Asia, I intend, in this article, to bring forward women’s perspectives and experiences. Based on women’s accounts, I wish to document how women are active agents in their own lives and attempt to ‘move ahead’ through international marriage, a process called transnational gendered hypergamy by Constable (2005). I aim to document how women negotiate the objectives of their marriage-migration project, despite families and states that attempt to transform them into subject-citizens who should act and think in a particular way.

I structure this short paper around the analysis of women’s accounts and my observations of their lives in two settings: their new families following marriage and the classrooms in which they receive weekly government-funded language lessons. These two spaces are particularly relevant since, following an international marriage, immigrant women’s lives revolve around their husbands’ place of residence and the classroom. I gathered material on Vietnamese women’s lives through visits to Taiwan and South Korea during the fall of 2006.

1) The fieldwork was facilitated by my colleagues Wang Hongzen and Chang Shu-Ming in Taiwan and Doo-Sub Kim in South Korea. I also benefited in South Korea from discussions with Hye-Kyung Lee. In Taiwan, I also thank Hsia Hsiao-Chuan. Nguyen Thi Van contributed to the fieldwork in Taiwan. A grant from the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office in Toronto funded my travel to Taiwan and the Canada Research Chair in Population, Gender and Development funded my travel to South Korea. Le Bach Duong from the Institute for Social Development Studies in Hanoi took part in the field visit in South Korea. In South Korea, I also thank Yoo-Jean Song, Seung-Eun Cha, Yeon-Wha Kim, Cheong-Hee Cheong and Ji-Sun Lee.
in local offices of NGOs and women’s groups, at work and in the classroom. The women interviewed belonged to several cohorts in terms of their arrival in Taiwan, with some having recently arrived and some having been there for a decade or more. In South Korea, I interviewed fewer women, all of them in classrooms and most of them living in South Korea for less than a year. I found the commonalities in women’s accounts particularly interesting in my fieldwork in the two countries. Despite important differences between Taiwan and South Korea with respect to the marriage migration phenomenon, I will write in general terms given the similarities of experiences, frustrations, challenges and rewards that women talked about during interviews.

In this collection of my thoughts, I argue that family life and experiences with government-funded programs tend to essentialize Vietnamese immigrant women as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law by locating them primarily in the domestic sphere. In addition, I briefly discuss how women are infantilized through language teaching programs originally designed for young children. This perspective emerges powerfully from the narratives of recent immigrant women describing their lives in Taiwan and South Korea. Within this context, I also show how women maneuver to negotiate their desires and objectives. For the most part, the women I interacted with were neither victims nor ruthless opportunists. Instead, they were simply immigrants trying to negotiate their stability and happiness in a foreign environment where they had to build a new support network for themselves, while maintaining close ties with their natal families and communities in Vietnam.

II. Constrained Citizenship and Agency

My analysis of women’s accounts and observations about their lives is inspired, in part, by Aihwa Ong’s work (2003, 2006), on the Americanization and the Whitening process of immigrants from Southeast Asia in the
United States through various institutional processes. Ong discusses how institutions whose aim it is to ‘format’ immigrants into good, self-disciplined, neo-liberal subjects construct people from various groups, races and genders differently. In her book, *Buddha is Hiding*, Ong (2003) documents the gap between migrants’ worldviews and those of institutions they encounter during their settlement process. In the case of Asia, Ong (2006: 500) observes that the ‘embrace of self-enterprising values has made citizenship rights and benefits contingent upon individual market performance’. Here, Ong refers to differential immigrant policies that treat highly-skilled individuals (with high market performance) very differently than unskilled migrant workers. While this observation would apply to most receiving countries in the world, the materialization of this differential treatment is more acute in Asian nations where the pursuit of wealth and international recognition takes priority over a human rights agenda. In their pursuit of neo-liberal success, Asian nations thus tend to consider ‘foreign brides’ as having extremely low individual market performance, since they are female and come from ‘inferior’ or poor nations. Assimilation policies and programs generally situate them in the ‘family’ first and aim at enhancing their ‘quality’ through government-funded language classes. In other words, immigrant spouses in South Korea and Taiwan are constructed by the state as ‘female family members’ and not as ‘immigrants’. This distinction is extremely important in understanding women’s locations and experiences. Together, ideologies of patriarchy, neo-liberalism and nationalism tend to construct the ‘foreign bride’ into an inferior female, mostly valued for her reproductive capacity. While foreign women may solve the problem of frustrated bachelors and low fertility, the fact that lower quality women are literally ‘birthing’ the nation also creates anxieties and uncertainties. This demographic ambiguity, vis-à-vis immigrant women who marry national men, captures the contradiction faced by East Asian nations. On the one hand, anxious to address their inevitable demographic decline due to their very low fertility, these countries are importing workers to fill jobs and
brides to birth babies. On the other hand, the promotion of a nationalist ideology, partly build on their imagined ethnic homogeneity and ideas of high population quality, makes the presence of foreigners from developing Asia difficult to incorporate to the current nation-building project.

The fact that social constructions of immigrant women offer constrained routes to citizenship should not overshadow women’s agency in the making of their own lives. In English language literature on Asian cross-border marriages, Piper (2003) and Constable (2005) have both argued that women’s agency should be central to any study of the phenomenon. Piper argued for a more comprehensive approach to the study of women migrants in Asia, whether they originally immigrated as wives (foreign brides) or workers (migrant workers). In fact, marriage-migration and work-migration are entangled phenomena that require us to conceptualize all women migrants as both workers and members of families. Constable focuses more on marriage migrants and situates her work in a global perspective of transnational marriage gendered mobility. She argues that the study of marriage-migration must also deconstruct the image of immigrant female spouses as being victims of trafficking, while acknowledging the limitations of women’s agency due to unequal power dynamics.

For Taiwan, Wang (forthcoming) documented Vietnamese women’s agency in the context of intense surveillance by in-laws who feared that their new daughters-in-law would escape. The use of cell phones and interactions with other migrant-brides during language lessons offer small escapes from the constant scrutiny of worried husbands and mothers-in-law. Hsia (2006) discusses the role of feminist NGOs that aim to empower women by training immigrant leaders who then train other women. Agency is conveyed through the realization of projects that give women a way of expressing their sentiments towards their lives and position in Taiwanese society. Concerning Vietnamese immigrant spouses in South Korea, there has been less research published in English, given that the migration flow began very recently. Some researchers have examined the situations of
ethnic Korean-Chinese immigrant women (Freeman, 2005); some have focused on the policy environment and the politicization of the phenomenon (Lee, 2006); others have focused on the demographic landscape produced by marriage-migration (Kim, 2006); and others have examined the match making industry (Seol, 2006).

### III. International Marriage-Migration as a Project

Agency begins with the decision to marry internationally. In most cases, Vietnamese families are opposed to their daughters’ desire to marry foreigners. In rural Vietnam, marriages generally took place—and continue to do so—within the same village. Parents generally maintain a close relationship with their daughters after marriage and tend to be involved in the care of grandchildren. In research on unmarried daughters who left their rural villages to move to cities or industrialized zones to work in factories, I obtained very similar stories as those of Vietnamese women in Taiwan and South Korea (Bélanger and Pendakis, forthcoming). In both cases, women explained how their parents were opposed to their daughters moving away and tried to convince them to stay home and marry someone in the village. Women’s determination had to be strong to overcome parental opposition and disapproval. Some parents, however, felt sorry for their daughters’ limited professional or marital prospects and were sympathetic towards those who went abroad to marry.

During interviews, the discussion about how and why one enters an international marriage with a Korean or a Taiwanese man initially seemed to be a touchy subject. I then discovered that what was really sensitive was the process by which one enters these marriages: the commercialized tours that East Asian men take to find a wife. Women feel both shame and anger at how they were ‘picked, tried and then married’ and generally avoided discussing it. In fact, this uncomfortable, somewhat shameful process is a means to an end: to marry a foreigner and then migrate
internationally. Economic motives were very important in women’s accounts.

Why are you asking us this question? (Why they married a South Korean man.) Isn’t the answer obvious? We come from a poor country and we need to get ahead in life. We want to get out of poverty; we want to work and earn money; we want to help our parents; and we want to have a life. Of course, we would have preferred to marry in Vietnam and to stay close to our parents and friends. This is an extremely difficult thing to do.

In some cases, women explained that they had initially tried to become labor migrants, but the down payments and fees were so high that they could not borrow enough money to enroll (for research on work migration from Vietnam to Taiwan, see Wang and Bélanger, 2005). They then turned to the option of international marriage. In these cases, international marriage is an economic strategy—a substitution for work-migration.

I tried to go to Taiwan to work as a domestic worker or as a factory worker. My family had no borrowing capacity, so I had to abandon my project. I then began to ask around about international marriages, since I had heard that some women nearby my house had married a South Korean man and that they were sending money home.

Based on my knowledge of rural Vietnam and on my encounters with Vietnamese women in Taiwan and South Korea, I would argue that many of the young women who enter international marriages are among the most resourceful, daring and adventurous ones in their communities. They are also the ones that are the most determined to move ahead in their lives, to help their parents or simply to know more about the world. Freeman (2005: 85) made the same observation about Chosonjok women marrying in South Korea.

Individual motivation and determination, however, does not arise in a vacuum. Networks (friends or relatives already married abroad), the aggressive recruitment strategies of international marriage brokers in Vietnam and popular culture glamorizing successful East Asian countries
together create an environment in which international marriage becomes within the realm of life possibilities for many young women. As Hsia (2004) argues, these marriages need to be located within regional and world inequalities, as well as the business relations that together created conditions for the marriage industry to flourish. What emerges from the ethnographic fieldwork with Vietnamese women, however, is that international marriage is not a household strategy, as it was in the case of factory daughters in Taiwan, as argued by past anthropological research.

International marriage could be another way through which daughters are fulfilling their duty to help their parents. The reasons for women’s strong desire to help their parents by sending remittances home is well captured in Lainez’s work (2006) on Vietnamese women who go to Cambodia to work as sex workers. Lainez argues that the desire to return something to their parents, their strong sense of having a *filial debt*, expressed by a desire to help parents get out of a *financial debt*, led women to resort to migration and sex work. In previous research on factory daughters, the same sense of owing their lives to their parents led many women to migrate and become factory workers. Even with very meager earnings, these women felt they were fulfilling their duty as daughters by sending remittances home.

In her book, *Endangered Daughters*, Elizabeth Croll (2000) discusses this sense of indebtedness as the outcome of girls’ socialization in families from an early age. Rydstrom (2003), in her work on children’s socialization in Vietnam, eloquently illustrates how parents raise their daughters intensively so they become valuable to their parents and kin. Boys, she argues, have an intrinsic value as males, while girls are like blank slates that need inscribing through socialization. It is through this intensive process of socialization, self-discipline and self-control that daughters develop the idea of having to return something to their parents instilled in them. Contrary to their brothers who have many years ahead to pay off their parents, girls have internalized the idea of having to pay parents back
as soon as possible (Salaff, 1981). While my fieldwork did not examine whether parents’ financial debt was an incentive to marry internationally, many women mentioned their strong desire to send money home as soon as possible.

In addition to altruistic and economic motives, imaginings of more modern societies and families powerfully contribute to women’s desire to marry abroad. Women who enter international marriages have ideas about Taiwan and South Korea that come mostly from popular culture and the media. South Korean soap operas, which have gained popularity in Vietnam since the mid 1990s, are women’s main source of information on South Korea. The handsome and sentimental young men portrayed in these television shows become the object of women’s aspirations. Similar to the selling of the American dream through films, the glamorizing of South Korea in its exported popular culture is the best advertisement for attracting potential international migrants. When asked about any other source of information women might have had, most responded that there was none. As argued by Constable (2005: 7), I see in young women’s accounts a desire to marry a foreign husband because they expect that he will have ‘embraced more modern and open-minded ideas’.

While it is generally difficult to identify most women’s primary motive for engaging in an international marriage because such motives are fluid and tend to change over the process, some women clearly wanted to find a spouse, particularly those who got married after 25 or 30 years of age and were considered too old for marriage in Vietnam. In previous research on female singlehood in Vietnam, done with Khuat Thu Hong, we examined the struggles that women faced after they had passed the age for marriage and had to claim their legitimacy as single women (Bélanger and Khuat, 2002). Some of these women resort to international marriage to deal with this socially difficult situation, particularly in rural areas of Vietnam where single women are considered to be anomalies in the kinship system. Previously married women, such as divorced women or widows, have
difficulties marrying East Asian men because marriage brokers prefer to match very young women who are supposedly virgins and thus have a higher ‘value’ (for a description of the matchmaking industry between Vietnam and South Korea see Seol, 2006, and Wang and Chang, 2002, for Taiwan).

IV. Locating the New Subject-Citizen in the House

For Taiwanese and South Korean grooms and their families, brides from Mainland China are the closest to native-born women because the country offers a reservoir of Chinese and Korean ethnic women. The second most attractive group consists of Vietnamese women. Network theories of migration partly explain this trend. Taiwan and South Korea are important investors in Vietnam, and business ties have preceded international marriage-migration flows. However, I argue that the perception of Vietnam as an East Asian (poor) nation also makes Vietnamese women particularly attractive on the marriage market, and marriage brokers are strengthening and perpetuating this idea in their marketing.

First, because Vietnamese women (of kinh or viet ethnicity, the dominant ethnic group in Vietnam) have the East Asian physical appearance—they are the most invisible, non-ethnic, non-Chinese women. As opposed to the more ‘visible’ women from the Philippines and Thailand, women from Vietnam can eventually become unnoticeable and, more importantly, bear children that will not ‘look foreign’. Their relative invisibility makes Vietnamese women particularly attractive on the East Asian international marriage market. Women who excel at speaking Taiwanese or South Korean proudly say that many people do not really know that they are foreign, and this ability to fit in is a family’s source of pride and the ultimate success.

In addition to their physical appearance, Vietnamese women tend to be constructed as ‘traditional’ Confucian women. Taiwanese and South Korean
families imagine in Vietnamese women the docile and submissive wife and
daughter-in-law they can no longer find in their own country. Vietnamese
women are thus East-Asianized and constructed as the next closest thing to
a traditional Chinese or Korean daughter-in-law. Both Vietnam’s gender
history and its decades of socialism tend to be silenced. For instance, the
fact that Vietnam had a higher female labor force participation rate than
South Korea for many years is largely unknown in South Korea, and
Vietnam’s significantly high rates of school completion at the primary and
secondary school levels are rarely mentioned. In addition, women in
Vietnam historically have had the right to inherit and own property. Since
Vietnam’s transition to a market economy, women have been at the center
of small trade, and many of them, including married women with children,
travel frequently for business and trade. In Vietnam, women hold important,
powerful positions in society. In contrast, South Korean and Taiwanese
families construct the immigrant women who enter their families through
marriage-migration very differently.

Evidence of this clash is seen in the immigrant women’s desire to work
and earn income as soon as possible and their new families’ desire to have
a grandchild immediately. South Korean and Taiwanese families want
daughters-in-law who will provide grandchildren quickly and take care of
the household, so they are reluctant to let them work outside the home.
Government policies and programs reinforce this. In South Korea, the
centers that offer training programs organized for immigrant women are
called Transnational Marriage and Family Support Centers. Since the name
does not even contain the word ‘immigrant’, it is evident that the State’s
primary constructions for these women are as wives, daughters-in-law and,
eventually, mothers.

In most cases, women expressed impatience about their desire to work,
but many agreed to have a child first in order to please their husband and
parents-in-law. In Vietnam, it is expected that a woman will become
pregnant soon after marriage, but some women had hoped that, in a more
modern society, they would be allowed to ‘plan’ (ke hoach in Vietnamese, meaning to use contraception) before having a first child. Most did not realize that the family’s primary objective was the production of grandchildren. Some women, however, secretly revealed how they tried not to get pregnant because the prospect was so frightening.

I spend my entire days in my room watching TV waiting for my husband to come home late at night. I see him about one hour per day and on Sundays. My mother-in-law is in the room next door, but we have limited interactions. I feel so lonely and isolated that I could not imagine having a child soon. I rarely go out, since my family fears that I will run away. My family is so controlling, I do not know what to do. My objective is to study the language as much as possible, but unfortunately I am slow at it and I find it difficult. The language lessons are the happiest days of my week because I get to see other Vietnamese women and exchange with them. We understand each other.

Other women we met were pregnant with their first child and expressed having good relations with their husbands and in-laws. Most women were impressed with their husbands’ sense of economic responsibility towards them. Some women were able to send monthly allowances home to their families in Vietnam, while others lamented not having been able to send anything since their arrival.

V. Making the Subordinated Citizen in the Classroom

Among the technologies used by governments to teach newcomers how to behave and act socially are the language lessons for newly arrived immigrants. A primary site of citizenship-making in Taiwan and South Korea are classrooms where immigrant spouses are taught life skills and language in order to become good wives, daughters-in-law and citizens. I attended lessons provided by the Taiwanese and South Korean governments. Since immigrant women from China generally know the language (Mandarin in the case of Taiwan and Korean in the case of Korean ethnic Chinese), Vietnamese women form the majority of the students attending
these programs.

These classes provide women with an important place to meet among themselves and exchange experiences and information. Since most husbands and parents-in-law constrain the women’s mobility and activities, for many immigrant women it is their only opportunity to meet other women from their country of origin. Because of our visit to the centers, women stayed longer than usual, and, in both South Korea and Taiwan, worried husbands called their wives on their cell phones inquiring about their later-than-usual return home. In some cases, the women’s justification did not satisfy the husband who insisted on talking directly with the program supervisor or teacher.

In both countries, families fear that their newly acquired bride will escape and disappear. Loss of a foreign bride signifies a substantial financial loss, but it also harms one’s reputation and future. In some cases, families returned to Vietnam a second time to find another bride following the loss of the first one. Fear of women’s escape leads families to confiscate IDs and other personal documents. Many families also carefully monitor the foreign brides’ whereabouts and discourage them from socializing with other immigrant spouses who might instill feelings of dissatisfaction in them or assist in their escape.

Ha tells the story of how one of her friends escaped from her family. For months, the family came to harass her and her family because they thought she had helped her friend escape. This created a great deal of tension and even harmed Ha’s relationship with her husband and in-laws who became suspicious of her. She suffered for a year. Eventually, the other family decided to find their son a new wife in Vietnam and the story was forgotten.

In both countries, organizing language lessons for newly arrived immigrants posed challenges. Currently, a language test is part of the requirements for obtaining citizenship. In South Korea, two years of residence and a passing grade on the test are necessary, and in Taiwan, the same requirements apply except that the minimum residence period is four
years (and eight years for women from Mainland China). In both countries, school teachers utilize kindergarten and elementary school teaching materials and techniques in classrooms filled with immigrant women. In Taiwan, students receive instruction using the early school grade curriculum (grades 1 to 3). In one class that I attended, basic math was taught that evening. For Vietnamese women who had completed at least grade 8 or 9 and often grade 12, these lessons seemed ridiculous. Some only came to class to meet their Vietnamese friends. When asked about the inadequacy of the curriculum in meeting the immigrants’ needs, the teachers said that the curriculum is the one prescribed by the government and that there is no other option. In addition, they thought that, even if the lessons were too easy for some women, at least they were receiving instruction in the Chinese language, which is good for them. Women that we interviewed during the visit to the classrooms complained about the curriculum, which did not teach them the necessary skills for living in Taiwan. Language training treated them as illiterate individuals failing to realize that they could use their knowledge of one language to help learn a new one.

In South Korea, women also took cooking lessons and eventually graduated from a course called ‘I can cook Korean!’ . Making the famous ‘kimchi’ was a priority in teaching women how to please their husbands and in-laws. Overall, courses were aimed at making these women fit into their families and become good Korean-like wives and daughters-in-law. During one visit, women were invited to sing a song in the Korean language for the guests. Linh stepped away from the group and discretely talked to me.

*I will never sing that song. This is a kindergarten song. Why are they treating us like young, little, cute girls? We are adults and I have a grade 12 education. I thought that people here were educated and advanced, but they do not understand us. They treat us like children and want us to behave like children. This is insulting for me; I am only interested in making progress in my language and meeting my friends here. I hate when they make us draw birthday cards with flowers and sing toddlers’ songs. I wish I could tell them*
The teachers and trainers that work in these centers have an interesting perspective. On the one hand, they are the primary carrier of the State’s vision for the immigrant women as a child or an inferior ‘Other’. On the other hand, they are the ones who understand the reality and lives of these women the most. In some cases, they could become powerful political agents of change to improve the teaching curriculum and approaches to empower women. We met wonderfully dedicated teachers who, with additional resources, could substantially improve teaching curricula and, hence, positively affect the integration of women. Some teachers literally became social workers and did not only provide language or cooking lessons to women, but also counseling and help in case of family conflict. Immigrant women were deeply attached to some of their teachers who offered them support, respect and a place to express themselves. In South Korea, interpreters and teachers were working as volunteers, while the coordinators were regular staff of local cultural and community centers. In Taiwan, primary school teachers hired to teach evening classes to immigrant women used the same lessons that were used to teach children during the day. As expressed by Hien, her teacher has been a key person in her life:

*I appreciate my teacher and program leader so much. She explained to me many things that are very useful for me in my family life. When I have problems with my husband or mother-in-law, I can share with her and she gives me tips on how to handle conflict. I love her so much and I will always be grateful to her.*

VI. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to contribute to an existing body of research that puts women’s lives at the center of the discussion on international marriage migration. Conceptually, I am interested in
understanding how states and institutions construct immigrant women from poorer countries. One section of this paper contrasts constructions of ‘foreign brides’ in Taiwan and South Korea with women’s own rationales for engaging in cross-border marriages that lead to international migration. In addition, I have begun to examine dynamics within families and during language lessons in order to shed light on some tensions arising between immigrant spouses and their new families and also between women’s dreams of a democratic, modern, wealthy nation and this new nation’s constructions of who migrant-brides are and where they should be socially located in terms of gender, class and ethnicity. The domestic space – or the household – and government-funded language lessons – or the classroom – are primary sites where citizenship-making takes place. In these spaces, immigrant women are constrained in many ways, while they experience empowerment in others.

Taiwan and South Korea will undergo the transformations that all receiving nations of immigrants experience. What differs is that permanent immigration in other countries, such as Canada, is not achieved primarily through family reunification, but rather through permanent settlement migration programs that select immigrants based on personal characteristics and the country’s labor needs in particular sectors. In addition, refugees account for over 10 percent of permanent immigrants in a country like Canada, and many end up filling low-skilled jobs, at least in the initial years of their settlement. To some extent, the current transformation (see Burgess, 2005 on Japan) experienced by countries in East Asia through marriage-based migration is a unique case in the history of recent international migration flows.

For this experience to succeed, immigrant women need to be viewed as, not only spouses, wives and mothers but also citizens who have the potential and desire to contribute to their host society. To avoid increasing discrimination and intolerance, a political recognition of the ethnic and linguistic diversity that the countries are undergoing must accompany
assimilation policies. At best, assimilation discourses could be replaced with integration and incorporation strategies that recognize and value differences, while giving the necessary tools for a successful integration. Discourses about multiculturalism exist, but they fail to adequately recognize the benefits of diversity in today’s world. Rather nativist fears attempt to erase differences or to constrain immigrants’ access to cultural and social citizenship. As prominent migration scholar Stephen Castles (2004) argues, the idea that state migration policies can control differences is a myth.

References


Croll, Elizabeth. 2000. Endangered Daughters: Gender and Discrimination in


**Danièle Bélanger**는 캐나다 온타리오 대학교 사회학과 교수로 재직하고 있다. 인구와 정책 연구방법론에 관한 경력을 갖고 있으며, 2004년 7월부터 인구, 성, 발전 연구의 Canada Research Chair를 맡고 있다. 최근에는 베트남, 대만, 한국을 비롯한 아시아 국가에서 주로 현장방문을 통해 국제이주, 가정, 성, 혼인에 관한 연구를 진행하고 있다. Email: dbelang@uwo.ca
가정과 교실: 한국과 대만의 베트남 이민배우자

다니엘 벤하계
웨스턴 온타리오 대학교 사회학과

이 연구는 2006년 이주여성들로부터 수집한 구술자료에 기초하여 국적결혼을 통해 한국과 대만으로 이주한 베트남 여성들의 생활을 살펴보기 위한 것이다. 이 논문은 흔한 이주가 여성의 취약성에 미치는 기교적 작용하고 있음을 강조한다. 이 논문은 이주 이후 여성의 삶이 이루어지는 가장 중요한 공간이라 할 수 있는 가정과 교실의 조건을 막추고 있다. 이주 여성들이 새로운 가정과 정부 지원의 언어교육교실에서 겪게 되는 경험은 이들이 가족과 이들 국가에 의한 어려움에 대응하기가 잘 보여준다. 이주여성들은 가정에서는 야내 마니아와 어머니의 역할을 부여받는다. 교실에서는 한국어 또는 중국어와 다른 기술을 배우는 과정에서 어린이처럼 다루어지고, 열등한 존재로 형성되어 간다. 이 논문은 대만과 한국이 이 여성들을 동화시키고 차이점을 없애려고 노력하기보다는 민족적 다양성을 인정하는 것이 바람직하다고 결론 지른다. 대만과 한국에서 혼인여성을 통해 인종구성이 급격하게 다양해지는 근근의 양상은 매우 독특한 이민이동의 파급효과라고 할 수 있다.

주제어: 성, 국적결혼, 외국인 신부, 베트남, 한국, 대만