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Female Immigrants by Cross-Border Marriage: A New Political Issue in South Korean Society

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INTRODUCTION

From the early 1990s until 2005, the number of “international marriages” (*kukche kyōrhōn*)¹ in South Korea has been on the rise from 4,710 in 1990 to a peak of 42,356 in 2005.² Although the numbers began to decline slightly in 2006, dropping to 23,316 in 2014,³ the phenomenon can be considered “new” because its characteristics differ from those that existed before that time. First, this new phenomenon is quantitatively significant: approximately one in eight weddings is now a cross-border marriage (see table 1). Notably, the phenomenon is structural due to the change in the socio-economic conditions and even in the demographic pattern. In contrast, the phenomenon of cross-border marriage that appeared before this period (that is from 1945 to 1989) was contextual because the progressive installation of U.S. military bases in South Korea promoted unions between American men and Korean women. Finally, while cross-border marriage in the past tended to affect Korean women, this new phenomenon affects Korean men. It should also be noted that the Korean women’s cross-border marriage from 1945 to 1989 can be characterised as hypergamic marriage (*anghon*), to use Lee K.-K.’s term,⁴ as they mostly married American men, citizens of a country more developed than Korea at the time and whose social status was often higher than their Korean spouse’s. Since the lifting of existing limitations on travel abroad in 1989, although the nationality of the foreign husband of Korean women who entered into a cross-border marriage varies (Canadian, Australian, English, German),⁵ this hypergamic nature remains dominant with the exception of cross-border marriages Korean women and foreign workers – a type which only appeared in small numbers starting in the late 1990s (see table 2). Hypergamic cross-border marriage has mostly led Korean women to emigrate to the country of their spouse. In contrast, Korean men’s cross-border marriage is characterized by hypogamic marriage (*nakhon*)⁶ because their marriage with women from economically underdeveloped countries induces migration of their foreign wives into South Korean society.

The phenomenon of South Korean men’s cross-border marriage developed from the early 1990s, has raised questions about the immigrant women concerned,⁷ leading to public debate mobilising various social actors such as the press, civil associations, and the scientific community. This debate challenged the dominant identity rhetoric that was previously based on the homogeneity of the “Korean nation”, suggesting an opening to “multiculturalism” in

the Korean family institution. Moreover, female immigration has increasingly occupied political space, leading to the term “multicultural family” (*tamunhwa kajok*) – a new legal and administrative category that came to being with the implementation of the 2006 and 2008 immigration policies, the Multicultural Family Support Act in 2008, and the establishment of Multicultural Family Support Centres.

All these social and political processes that created the category of “multicultural family” suggest that the Korean family institution is being redefined through a situation of contact with foreigners. This redefinition seems to be based on the concept of multiculturalism. Is South Korean society – long defined by an ideology of “ethnic unity” (*tanil minjok*) becoming multicultural?

From the appearance of a new social issue to the resulting policies, this paper examines how an immigration policy in South Korean society has developed involving various social actors, and highlights the emergence of a new national political issue through a discourse analysis of the social actors and political actions taken by the South Korean government. After describing the socio-economic contexts of the 1990s in order to understand the development of Korean men’s cross-border marriage, the paper focuses on analysing the discourse of various social actors to show how this phenomenon has become a political issue. Finally, the immigration policy of the South Korean government will be analysed in the third part of this paper.

KOREAN MEN’S CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE: A STRUCTURAL PHENOMENON

During the last sixty years, the phenomenon of cross-border marriage in South Korean society has undergone two major phases of evolution: its gradual emergence starting in 1945, and its massive expansion starting in the mid-1990s. The emergence of cross-border marriage in 1945 relates more to the country’s recent history⁸ with the installation of U.S. military bases. These fostered the matrimonial union between Korean women and American men. In contrast, cross-border marriage, which emerged in the early 1990s and grew massively from the middle of the decade is of a socio-economic, or even demographic nature, and mainly concerns Korean men. To understand the development of this latter phenomenon, it is necessary to look at the current socio-economic context.

Socio-economic contexts

The economic development of South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s began to be noticeable in 1991. Before then, South Korea was one of the nations receiving international assistance.⁹ In contrast, through KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency), established in 1991, South Korea is now among those countries managing international aid funds for developing countries. This shift can be illustrated by the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from \$8.1 billion in 1970, to \$63.8 billion in 1980, to \$263.7 billion in 1990, and finally to \$511.8 billion in 2000. This fast economic growth enabled South Korea to become a member of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1996, but also brought about other effects on its socio-economic structure.

The imbalance in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of manufacturing generated by this fast growth brought about changes in the employment ratio between different sectors: the employment rate in the primary sector gradually declined from 51.5 percent in 1970 to only 5.5 percent in 2002. Meanwhile, the tertiary sector continuously increased from 35.3 percent in 1970 to 71.2 percent in 2002.¹⁰ This change, due to automation in manufacturing and the

development of technology/capital-intensive industries, produced a labour shortage, especially in difficult and poorly paid areas such as textiles and ready-to-wear, where Koreans less readily accept '3D' work (Difficult, Dangerous, Dirty). This labour shortage in difficult sectors may also be explained by the improvement of South Korean living standards through economic growth and increased access to higher education.¹¹

Fast economic growth has also been accompanied by a movement of people from rural areas to cities, producing a concentration effect in Seoul.¹² This rural exodus particularly affects women in agricultural and rural areas. According to the Korea National Statistical Office, the provinces of Kyönsangnam, Kyönsangbuk, and Chöllanam were particularly affected by female migration flows in the 1980s. For example, in 1980, 24,128 women left the province of Kyönsangnam compared to only 15,555 men.¹³ These female migration flows have produced an increase in the number of unmarried male farmers. According to a study conducted by the Rural Development Administration (RDA) in 2000, the aggregate number of single 30-year-old men is higher in farming villages than in cities.¹⁴ Another study points out that since the 1980s farmers are struggling to get married because of the decrease in the number of young women in farming villages, especially in the age group 25-34 years.¹⁵

For some Korean sociologists such as Kim D.-S., this imbalanced gender composition of the marriage-eligible population in the 1980s was one of the factors which led to the development of cross-border marriage in this society.¹⁶ Moreover, for him, value transformation in society has helped to change the demographic structure, with increasing declines in fertility rates, first marriages being increasingly delayed, and an increasing number of divorces.¹⁷ Indeed, rapid economic growth has not only changed the socio-economic structure but also changed the demographic structure.

Effects of political measures and social actions

Due to the labour shortage and unmarried farmers, Korean society is facing new problems in its socio-economic and even demographic contexts. On the one hand, this is because the labour shortage could be one factor contributing a slowdown in economic growth or restructuring of the economic model, and, on the other hand, because unmarried farmers could worsen the imbalance in the sex ratio of the marriage-eligible population.

Diversification of Korean women's cross-border marriage

In order to deal with these new social problems, several measures have been implemented. First, starting in the 1990s, working visa procedures were relaxed. Then, in 1991, the South Korean government created the Training Visa in Industrial Techniques (*Sanöp kisul yönsubija*) and expanded its application from 1993. It was a measure granting foreigners permission for a stay to learn industrial techniques and an opportunity to work in the country. Initially this type of visa was intended for foreigners working for Korean subsidiaries located abroad, but in view of the Korean home context, where small and medium companies were suffering from a lack of manpower, its application was extended to companies with no foreign subsidiaries. Now Korean companies could receive foreign labour, provided that numbers were limited, and that these companies were recommended by professional organisations recognised by the State. For the South Korean government, this visa was a way to fight against undocumented workers in the labour market and also a response to protests by unions who were against the unrestricted hiring of foreign workers. This visa was finally replaced by a system of free hiring of foreign workers in 2004, which was then abolished at the end of 2006 due to a significant increase in the number of foreign workers. According to a report released by the South Korean government,¹⁸ the total of foreign migrant workers (including

undeclared) rose from approximately 142,000 in 1995 to about 345,000 in 2005. Indeed, all these measures facilitated the introduction of foreign labour into South Korean society, allowing the economy to benefit from low-cost labour because foreign workers often come from economically underdeveloped countries, attracted by higher wages. The increased presence of foreign workers in Korea has fostered a new type of cross-border marriage, especially marriage between foreigners and Korean women. In fact, Korean women's cross-border marriage, which emerged from the mid-1940s following the installation of US military bases is now accompanied by marriages of Korean women with European men as well as foreign immigrants workers, especially Pakistanis. Although the number of intermarriages between Korean women and Pakistani men amounted to only 219 in 2005 and 81 in 2014 (see table 2), this figure highlights the existence of other types of cross-border marriages, in addition to marriage between Korean men and foreign women, which will be in the growth with social actions implemented during the same period.

Increase in Korean men's cross-border marriages

To solve the problem of unmarried farmers, many civil associations and public establishments organised marriage meetings for single farmers. According to Kendall, an American anthropologist, civilian social actions had already begun in the mid-1980s through the YMCA.¹⁹ One of the first promoters of these actions on the public side was the Rural Development Administration (RDA Nongch'on chinhŭngch'öng). Activity by the RDA mainly consisted of organising meetings by circulating an individual sheet of single farmers through its network of Technical Centres of Agriculture (Nongch'on kisul sent'ö) spread over 182 towns and villages. But marriage meetings organised by the RDA or the YMCA remained inside the country, limited to single farmers and Korean women. It was not until the early 1990s that foreign women were introduced to the South Korean marriage market.

It is the Korean Institute of Overseas Affairs (Haeoe hanminjok yön'guso) that initiated this new type of meeting. These were mainly meetings between Korean farmers and Chinese women of Korean origin, commonly called *Chosönjok*.²⁰ For Han G.-S., a Korean anthropologist, this new type of action marks the beginning of the movement called "Meetings between Chinese women settled in the region of Yanbian and single Korean farmers" (*Yönbayön ch'öyö nongch'on ch'onggak tchakchikki*).²¹ This movement gradually grew, especially when diplomatic relations between South Korea and China recovered in 1992. In 1993, the RDA also organised such meetings in collaboration with the Korean Association for Rural Welfare (Nong'öch'on pokchi yön'guhoe). From 1995, other public institutions, such as the National Agricultural Cooperatives Foundation (Nongyöp hyöpttong chohap) also participated in this movement. This movement, which was initiated by many public and private establishments, grew in size in the late 1990s when marriage agencies took over. Indeed, seizing the business opportunity, many marriage agencies began to specialise in cross-border marriage in the mid-1990s. Their number increased from the late 1990s following the amendment of the Code on the creation of a matrimonial agency in 1999. With this change, in order to create a marriage agency, a simple declaration was enough instead of procedures asking for permission. These marriage agencies not only organised matrimonial meetings with Chinese women, but also with women of other nationalities, including Vietnamese, Filipino, and Thai. These agencies did not limit themselves to farmers, but also targeted all single men wishing to marry a foreign woman. Nowadays, the phenomenon of cross-border marriage is spreading even to cities.

Thus, the number of cross-border marriages in this society has been constantly increasing and currently affects far more Korean men than before, and far more men than women. According to the Korea National Statistical Office, the number rose from at 4,710 in 1990 to 42,356 in

2005 (roughly 13.5 percent of all marriages in South). During the early 1990s the proportion of Korean men's cross-border marriages was about 13 percent of all cross-border marriages, while it had reached 79.3 percent in 1996 and 76.7 percent in 2010 (see table 1). From 2006, the number of cross-border marriages begins to decline following the tightening of immigration policies with 23,316 cross-border marriages out of a total of 305,507 marriages (7.6% of all marriages in 2014).²² But the proportion of Korean men's cross-border marriage remains dominant, with 16,152 out of a total of 23,316 cross-border marriages in 2014, about 69.3 percent.²³

Table 1 Number and percentage of cross-border marriages 1990-2014

Year	Number of marriages	Cross-border marriages		Korean men		Korean women	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1990	399,312	4,710	1.2	619	13.1	4,091	86.9
1991	416,872	5,012	1.2	663	13.2	4,349	86.8
1992	419,774	5,534	1.3	2,057	37.2	3,477	62.8
1993	402,593	6,545	1.6	3,109	47.5	3,436	52.5
1994	393,121	6,616	1.7	3,072	46.4	3,544	53.6
1995	398,484	13,494	3.4	10,365	76.8	3,129	23.2
1996	434,911	15,946	3.7	12,647	79.3	3,299	20.7
1997	388,591	12,448	3.2	9,266	74.4	3,182	25.6
1998	375,616	12,188	3.2	8,054	66.1	4,134	33.9
1999	362,673	10,570	2.9	5,775	54.6	4,795	45.4
2000	332,090	11,605	3.5	6,945	59.8	4,660	40.2
2001	318,407	14,523	4.6	9,684	66.7	4,839	33.3
2002	304,877	15,202	5.0	10,698	70.4	4,504	29.6
2003	302,503	24,776	8.2	18,751	75.7	6,025	24.3
2004	308,598	34,640	11.2	25,105	72.5	9,535	27.5
2005	314,304	42,356	13.5	30,719	72.5	11,637	27.5
2006	330,634	38,759	11.7	29,665	76.5	9,094	23.5
2007	343,559	37,560	10.9	28,580	76.1	8,980	23.9
2008	327,715	36,204	11.0	28,163	77.8	8,041	22.2
2009	309,759	33,300	10.8	25,142	75.5	8,158	24.5
2010	326,104	34,235	10.5	26,274	76.7	7,961	23.3
2011	329,087	29,762	9.0	22,265	74.8	7,497	25.2
2012	327,073	28,325	8.7	20,637	72.9	7,688	27.1
2013	322,807	25,963	8.0	18,307	70.5	7,656	29.5
2014	305,507	23,316	7.6	16,152	69.3	7,164	30.7

Source: *Korea National Statistical Office*, Demographic trends - marriage and divorce: cross-border marriages 1990-2006 and 2006-2014.

Table 2 Number of Koreans cross-border marriages according to the nationalities of their foreign spouses 2000-2014

	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Korean men	6,945	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163	25,142	26,274	22,265	20,637	18,307	16,152
China	3,566	20,582	14,566	14,484	13,203	11,364	9,623	7,549	7,036	6,058	5,485
Vietnam	77	5,822	10,128	6,610	8,282	7,249	9,623	7,636	6,586	5,770	4,743
Philippines	1,174	980	1,117	1,497	1,857	1,643	1,906	2,072	2,216	1,692	1,130
Japan	819	883	1,045	1,206	1,162	1,140	1,193	1,124	1,309	1,218	1,345
Cambodia	-	157	394	1,804	659	851	1,205	961	525	735	564
Thailand	240	266	271	524	633	496	438	354	323	291	439
USA	231	285	331	376	344	416	428	507	526	637	636
Mongolia	64	561	594	745	521	386	326	266	217	266	145
Various	774	1,183	1,219	1,334	1,502	1,597	1,532	1,796	1,899	1,640	1,665
Korean women	4,660	11,637	9,094	8,980	8,041	8,158	7,961	7,497	7,688	7,656	7,164
Japan	2,630	3,423	3,412	3,349	2,743	2,422	2,090	1,709	1,582	1,366	1,176
China	210	5,037	2,589	2,486	2,101	2,617	2,293	1,869	1,997	1,727	1,579
USA	1,084	1,392	1,443	1,334	1,347	1,312	1,516	1,632	1,593	1,755	1,748
Canada	150	283	307	374	371	332	403	448	505	475	481
Australia	78	101	137	158	164	159	194	216	220	308	249
England	64	104	136	125	144	166	178	195	196	197	207
Germany	82	85	126	98	115	110	135	114	134	157	148
Pakistan	36	219	150	134	117	104	102	126	130	99	81
Various	326	993	794	922	939	936	1,050	1,188	1,331	1,572	1,495

Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Demographic trends - marriage and divorce: Koreans cross-border marriages from 2000 to 2014 according to the nationalities of their foreign spouses

BUILDING OF A NATIONAL CAUSE

The significant development of cross-border marriage, particularly for Korean men, from the early 1990s until 2005, which encouraged the immigration of foreign women, raised the question of otherness in this society. Various institutional actors (scientific community, press, civil organisations) have played a role in raising this question.

Scientific discourse and the integration question of female immigrants by cross-border marriage in South Korean society

Members of the scientific community were the first to focus on this phenomenon. The production of scientific discourse, initiated in the mid-1990s by master students and Ph.D candidates in sociology and anthropology was followed in the 2000s by experienced

researchers in sociology, anthropology, and gender and educational studies. While for the period from 1945-1989, only 6 papers were devoted to the study of cross-border marriage, in the decade from 1990 to 2000 there were ten, and between 2001 and 2006 there were 58.²⁴ Most scientific studies focus on Korean men's cross-border marriage, due to the emergence of a new area of research, namely female immigrants by marriage. Unlike studies on Korean women's cross-border marriage, whose main line is based on the demonstration of conjugal intercultural conflict,²⁵ these studies on Korean men's cross-border marriage aim to understand this "new" reality and raise social issues related to the appearance of a foreign group. The first major trend is characterised by monographs on individual cases of Korean men's cross-border marriages, for example, with Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, or Uzbek women, to identify this new group of immigrant women. The second trend is to highlight problems related to the group of foreign women married to Koreans, such as rights of immigrants, welfare system, education of their children, or their adaptation to the Korean family and culture. The third trend focuses on the feminist analysis of this phenomenon in terms of the feminisation of migration.

Mainly dealing with Korean men's cross-border marriage in terms of women's immigration, research has emphasised the presence of foreigners in society by raising two main questions. First, regarding the difficulties of integrating immigrant wives into South Korean society, many studies focus on intercultural conflicts that extend into everyday life in terms of food, housing, family relationships or education of their mixed children – all because of the cultural differences or ignorance of the Korean language and culture of these women.²⁶ Second, the issue of national ideology based on "ethnic unity" (*tanil minjok*) is the main engine of social discrimination against immigrant women and their mixed children and one of the obstacles to integrating them into society.²⁷ It should also be noted that designations of these women in the scientific discourse, such as "foreign woman" (*oegugin yösöng*), "migrant women" (*iju yösöng*), "immigrants by marriage" (*kyörhon iminja*), "woman of intercultural family" (*Munhwa ijung kajöng yösöng*), follows this critical reflection on the existence of social discrimination against them, because the terms "woman married to a foreigner" (*kukche kyörhon yösöng*), most commonly used before this period to describe Korean women with a foreign spouse is not only inappropriate to this "new" reality, but also, the negative connotations associated with this term²⁸ do not favour the integration of immigrant women into society.

Although this scientific discourse has tried to raise "new" social questions, it is limited to the difficulties of integration of immigrant wives into society, stressing their differences from Korean culture and the social discrimination against them. In so doing, it has contributed to highlight the need for integration of these women in this society, all the more so because the scientific community is one of the producers of social norms and ideologies.

The press as a producer of social representations

The need for integration is promoted by the media. Indeed, the production of journalistic discourse on Korean men's cross-border marriage is growing. For example, during the period from 2000 to 2006, the newspaper *Chosun* – one of the most influential and oldest – published 148 articles on the subject, compared to only 76 between 1948 and 1989.²⁹ It should be noted here that, because of the quantitative dominance of Korean women's cross-border marriage during the period of 1948 to 1989, articles published at this time focus on Korean women with an American spouse. However, the media image-making of these women was based on three modes: stereotyping, marginalisation, and dramatisation. Stereotyping in the sense that they are presented as persons who at all costs seek to achieve the "American Dream" at the price of

“betraying even their country”, who are from disadvantaged social backgrounds, and low educational levels. Marginalisation of these women was expressed through their designation as “prostitute to a western man” (*yang kongju*) or “whore to the West” (*yang kalbo*) associating them with the prostitutes who work in districts around U.S. military bases. Finally, dramatisation, because their marriage is presented as a tragedy highlighting the frequency of divorces and suicides caused by cultural conflict or economic hardship.

In contrast to this negative media image-making of Korean women who entered into a cross-border marriage, the same newspaper articles published from 2000 to 2006 focusing on Korean men’s cross-border marriage tend to emphasise the perfect integration of foreign women into Korean family life and the success of public and private institutions that helped in this process.³⁰ Other articles aim to inform or to comment on the questions raised by this type of marriage, such as the law of naturalisation or immigration policies.

Journalistic discourse on Korean men’s cross-border marriage is in fact based on the inevitable acceptance of this type of marriage and the immigration of foreign wives, given the social, economic, and demographic circumstances of the country. Therefore, unlike the previous period, this discourse does not give way to the production of a negative social representation, rather, it attempts to demonstrate social inclusion. This acceptance is also reflected in the use of terms for foreign immigrant women by marriage. In comparison with the previous period, no negative term to designate them is used. Instead, repeating the words used in scientific studies, these discourses try to mitigate the social discrimination against women. By the abundant production of this type of rhetoric, the journalistic community contributes not only to believing in a new social reality, but it also helps to emphasise the importance of the integration of foreign migrant women through marriage by relaying scientific discourse and producing social representations of this group.

Civil associations, advocates of a national cause

In parallel with the production of discourse on the need for integration of foreign women married to Korean men in scientific and journalistic fields, activists defending this cause begin to appear from the early 2000s.

The first form of these activists’ investment is based on expanding their field of intervention. This form of investment affects particularly progressive associations, whether religious or female. For example, the Korean Women's Hot Line (KWHL, Han'guk yösöngüi chönhwa) is a women's organisation founded in 1984 with the aim of defending the rights of women against all forms of violence. Focusing on direct contact with women, this association uses a telephone call centre to document cases of discrimination against them. With the increase in the frequency of domestic violence against foreign women married to Korean men, its service works specifically to receive calls, with counsellors specifically trained for women who are not fluent in Korean.

The second form of investment is to create new associations devoted entirely to immigrant women by marriage. Two main associations can be mentioned: the Migrant Women, Korean Women (MWKW, Kyörhon imin kajok chiwön yöndaе) and the Women Migrants Human Rights Centre (WMHC, Iju yösöng in'gwön sent'ö). The first was created in 2005. As its name in Korean implies (“solidarity in support of immigrant families by marriage”), this association, aims to help these women integrate better into society. Consistent with this objective since its creation, the MWKW promotes Korean language courses, and even has a training programme for lecturers. Because these initiatives correspond to the goals of immigration policy, these actions are included in action programmes of the authorities. The association has been financially supported by the government since 2007.

Created in 2001, the WMHC aims both to defend the rights of migrant women and support their integration into society through the establishment of educational and cultural programmes. Originally, this association was devoted to migrant women workers, but by separating from its parent organisation in 2002, it began to advocate solely for the cause of foreign women married to Korean men, adopting its current name. Its main activities are not limited to the development of educational and cultural programmes; they also help with the organisation of conferences and publishing guides. Observing the strength of these activities for migrant women, in 2005, the Ministry of Gender Equality (now Ministry of Gender Equality & Family) used this association as a support to outsource to when setting up its action programmes dedicated to these women.

Indeed, the cause defended by some feminist and/or women's organisations for the rights of immigrant women, and the creation of new organisations to help their integration into South Korean society, has fostered the social visibility of this group, who are sometimes called "migrant women" (*iju yōsōng*) or "immigrants by marriage" (*kyōrhon iminja*). Through their actions, these associations have also contributed to the emergence of an immigration policy based on the principle of integration. This has brought a need for collaboration between public institutions and civil organisations to deploy integration strategies. Moreover, these associations promoted the creation of the National Federation of multiculturalism (Han'guk tamunhwa ch'ongyōnhaphoe) in March 2010, bringing together a hundred civil associations and public institutions that defend this group of women. Finally, with the scientific and journalistic discourses, the actions of these organisations have maintained a national atmosphere where the integration of female immigrants by marriage in South Korean society appears as the social issue of the moment. As a result, their integration has become a national cause to defend.

EMERGENCE OF INTEGRATION POLICY AND A NEW CATEGORY: "MULTICULTURAL FAMILY"

The proliferation of discourse on immigrant women in the scientific, journalistic, and activist fields has not only fostered the emergence of a new social issue, but also its translation into political measures, that is to say, the implementation of a corresponding integration policy and legal framework.

Scientific expertise

From the mid-2000s, some politicians began to organise public debates on this issue in order to strengthen their political capital. Furthermore, many ministries and ad hoc committees of the South Korean government used scientific expertise to understand this new social reality. This request of scientific expertise is sent either to public institutions or specialists in the field. The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), established in 1983, and attached to the Ministry of Social Health (now Ministry of Health and Welfare), is one of the most involved public institutions in this field because of its mission to conduct research devoted entirely to the women's question to help guide political institutions decision making. The research published by the KWDI in the early 2000s focused on the rights of foreign workers.³¹ From the mid-2000s, it began to focus on "immigrants by marriage" (*kyōrhon iminja*), raising questions such as the legal status and social support system of this group.³² These studies have contributed to highlighting the political stakes with respect to these women, especially given that the mission of KWDI is to promote the implementation of policies on women. For

example, starting in the mid-2000s, the Ministry of Gender Equality used the results of KWDI research when taking political action related to immigrant women by marriage.

Regarding the researchers involved in this field of expertise, there are three main figures: Lee H.-K., professor of sociology at Pai Chai University; Han G.-S., professor of anthropology at Kangwon National University; and Seol D.-H., professor of sociology at Chonbuk National University. Lee and Han examine the reality of Korean men's cross-border marriage to influence the implementation of policies, focusing either on foreign women married to Koreans, or on the problem of cross-border marriage procedures via a professional intermediary.³³ Seol is one of the most productive scholars in this field, leading research in collaboration with others, including the two mentioned above. In addition, his expertise is not limited to groups of foreign women married to Koreans, but extends to all minority groups in South Korea, including North Korean refugees and also immigrant women by marriage. Therefore several political institutions call upon him as the only *de facto* specialist with an overall vision of a complex reality that combines several minority groups.³⁴ Notably, he led a diverse research team on foreign immigrant women by marriage involving a total of 18 researchers from many different disciplines: mainly sociology and anthropology, but also social welfare, Japanese literature, and industrial medicine.³⁵ This study was requested by the Ministry of Health and Welfare so as to better understand the current situation of foreign women married to Korean men in order to propose political support in health and social welfare. Seol is one of the researchers who criticises the selective immigration policies of the South Korean government –the foundation for social discrimination against minority groups and non-acceptance of cultural diversity in South Korean society.³⁶ Seol's position led him to consciously use the term “multicultural family” (*tamunhwa kajok*) in his 2006 paper as part of the knowledge transfer.³⁷ This term was to gradually replace all pre-2006 designations and would become institutionalised with the implementation of the integration policy and the legal framework.

Political integration plans

In 2006, using this preliminary work, the South Korean government developed an initial integration policy entitled “Plan of Political Support for the Social Integration of Immigrant Women's Families by Marriage, Mixed Children and Migrants” (*Yōsōng kyōrhon iminja kajok mit' honhyōrin ijuja sahoe t'onghap chiwōn pangan*).³⁸ In fact, this policy was the summary of two political reports³⁹ ordered by President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) and written by the “Commission for the correction of discrimination” in collaboration with almost every ministry (Education, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Administration, Culture and Tourism, Agriculture, Information and Communication, Health and Welfare, Women, Labour). In this plan, the South Korean government points out that given that South Korean society is rapidly moving towards a “multicultural society” (*tamunhwa sahoe*) due to the increasing presence of foreigners, there is a strong need for integration. However, the government believed that social discrimination against foreign groups, especially immigrant women by marriage, prevents their integration. The programmes provided in this plan are therefore primarily aimed at this group of women. Seven major axes of action programmes are defined according to the objective to “integrate immigrant women into society by marriage and to develop a multicultural society.”⁴⁰ Of these, two underline the need to provide Korean language and culture training, and a health and welfare system. One axis consists of providing school education programmes so that mixed children are well integrated into school without being discriminated against. Another axis is based on the measure to be taken in order to improve social perception of this group. Two other axes consist of improving and/or changing the legal

provisions relating to this group: first, prohibiting illegal matrimonial meetings often held by marriage agencies, and second, ensuring the legal stay of these foreign women when they are victims of domestic violence. The last line of this plan focuses on the distribution of ministerial duties to properly conduct these action programmes. Although this plan demonstrates the commitment to improving the living conditions of women in order to build a “multicultural society”, the real action implemented by government infrastructure such as the network of Immigrants Family Supports Centres (*Kyōrhon iminja kajok chiwōn sent'ō*) mainly insists on integration but not on the acceptance of their different cultures. Indeed, the main activity of this infrastructure is centred on the formation of the Korean language and culture (51.04% of all action programmes).⁴¹

This first plan was used to develop a second one when President Lee Myung-bak came to power in 2008. The second plan, entitled “Plan to Strengthen Multicultural Family Support Adapted to Life Cycle” (*Tamunhwa kajok saeg'ae chugibyōl match'umhyōng chiwōn Kangwha taech'aek*)⁴² keeps the same political actions as the first but explicitly targets foreign women married to Korean men – a group that is now classified in this plan as the “multicultural family”. This classification is closely related to the political will to strengthen the integration policy, because unlike the previous designation of “immigrant women by marriage” (*kyōrhon iminja yōsōng*), which emphasises the legal and administrative status of these women, the new name refers to their status of integration while emphasising the cultural diversity within a family. Somehow, this change represents a break with the past because when it was Korean women who were marrying western men, the issue of cultural adjustment was not recognised by the state as needing to be addressed, partly because indeed many of these women left Korea to live in their husband’s country. Even now, the concerns of Korean women who marry foreigners take second place to those of foreign women who marry Korean men. Moreover, with the increasing presence of foreigners, diversification of the kinds of cross-border marriage is not just for intermarriage between foreign workers and Korean women, but also extends to marriages between foreign workers of different nationalities or between naturalized Korean individuals and immigrant workers. But Korean women married to foreigner and these married resident foreigners are implicitly excluded from political plans. The South Korean government justifies this choice by explaining that the phenomenon of Korean men’s cross-border marriage is quantitatively more important.⁴³ Thus this new category that designates the group of foreign women married to Korean men remains at the heart of the South Korean integration policy, and the “multicultural family” has become institutionalized as a legal and administrative category with the implementation of the Multicultural Family Support Act (*Tamunhwa kajok chiwōnpōp*) in 2008. Additionally, the network of Immigrant Family Support Centres (*Kyōrhon iminja kajok chiwōn sent'ō*) created in 2006, became, in 2008, that of Multicultural Family Supports Centres (*Tamunhwa kajok chiwōn sent'ō*). In 2009 there were a total of 119 centres across the country⁴⁴ rising to 214 in 2014.⁴⁵

AS A CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY?

The institutionalization of the legal and administrative category of “multicultural family” shows how the issue of otherness raised in the scientific, journalistic, and activist discourse was reflected in politics. Firstly, it is based on the social perception of the foreign group, and, secondly, on its classification. The discrimination suffered by immigrant marriage women, highlighted in the academic discourse, is also found in political discourse as a factor that

inhibits the flourishing of multiculturalism. The government thus emphasizes the integration of immigrant women into South Korean society, as seen in the first and second political integration plans in 2006 and 2008.

The acceptance of cultural diversity highlighted in the first plan has resulted in the new designation of this family. The “family of immigrant marriage women” (*yösöng kyörhon iminja*) used in the first plan⁴⁶ refers to the legal status of these women, highlighting a boundary between the Korean and the non-Korean family. The term “multicultural family” (*tamunhwa kajok*), appeared in the second political integration plan,⁴⁷ suggesting the acceptance of this type of family into the Korean family institution. In this sense, the designation of the mixed family by the term “multicultural family” symbolizes the opening of the Korean family institution to multiculturalism.

From the emergence of a new social issue involving various social actors to its translation into new social policies, the process of creating the new category of "multicultural family" reflects the evolution of the Korean family and society in the context of contact with foreigners. But is South Korean society really moving towards multiculturalism as the government claims? The widespread use of the term “multicultural family” and the increasing presence of foreigners in this society seem to support this political vision. However, the fact that these political measures focus on this specific category results in the exclusion of other foreign and social groups. The fact that these measures are based on an integration policy leaves very little space for different cultures to be practiced by foreign residents in South Korean society. Moreover, the restrictive policies on foreigners gradually implemented from 2000 – such as the tightening of entry, residence, and naturalisation requirements – seem to show that for the time being, the current integration policy remains incompatible with openness to multiculturalism. It is this broadening of multiculturalism beyond the mixed family with a male Korean head that is becoming a new political issue in South Korea.

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¹ Terms most commonly used in South Korea to designate the "mixed marriage". Because these terms focus on marriage between two persons of different nationalities and the terms "mixed marriage" may evoke other forms of diversity, they will be replaced in this article by those of "cross-border marriage" to facilitate reading and avoid the quotes. Moreover, the transcript of the Korean alphabet in Roman alphabet throughout this article follows the McCune-Reischauer system, except for personal names. For these, the transcription selected by the person is used.

² Korea National Statistical Office, 'Demographic trends - marriage and divorce: Koreans cross-border marriages 1990-2006 and 2006-2014'.

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⁴ Lee K.-K. (2006), 'The Role of Women Married to Foreigners in a Multiethnic Society', *proceedings from the Second National Convention For Interracial Marriage Women [Che 2 hoe sekye kukche kyŏrhon yŏsŏng taehoe]* (Korean-American Women's Associations of USA), p. 20.

⁵ Based on statistical analysis of 'Demographic trends - Marriage and Divorce: Koreans Cross-border Marriages From 2000 To 2008 According to the Nationalities of Their Foreign Spouses'.

⁶ Lee K.-K. (2006), *Ibid.*

⁷ Following the increase in the number of Korean men's cross-border marriages, the number of foreign immigrant women by or for marriage has never been so high in South Korean history: 128,826 women in 2013, according to the Korea National Statistical Office.

⁸ It should be recalled that after the liberation from Japanese occupation, the south of the Korean Peninsula was under the supervision of the U.S. military government from 1945 to 1948. Then, in 1948, pursuant to a resolution adopted by the United Nations (UN) on the initiative of the United States, the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, was proclaimed, resulting in the formal division of the country between the North and the South. Two years later, this division caused a civil war, the Korean War (1950-1953), where the South Korean military was supported by UN forces with a majority of Americans. These historical events have fostered the installation of U.S. military bases in South Korea.

⁹ According to the Ministry of Finance and the Export-Import Bank (Korea Exmibank), between 1945 and the early 1990s, Korea received a total assistance of 12.69 billion USD from the international community. For more details about the history of Korea as a recipient of international aid, see the site web "Economic Development Cooperation Fund". Cf. http://www.edcfkorea.go.kr/edcfeng/about/history/oda_recipient.jsp

¹⁰ Yoon I.-J. (2006), 'Solutions of the Labor Problem and Profit of Overseas Korean Compatriots Labor', in I.-J. Yoon (ed.), *Ch'uripkuk kawlliguk chŏngch'aek yŏn'gu pogosŏ [Report on the Policies of the Immigration Office]* (Seoul, Ministry of Justice), pp. 17-18.

¹¹ According to the Korea National Statistical Office, the rate of access to higher education has been changed as follows: 5.4% in 1970, 11.4% in 1980, 23.6% in 1990, 52.5% in 2000 and 68.2% in 2014.

¹² For more details on this exodus, see the book by Gelézeau V. (2003), *Séoul, ville géante, cités radieuses* (Paris, CNRS Éditions), pp. 5-10.

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¹⁷ Kim D.-S. (2010), *Idem*.

¹⁸ Commission for the correction of discrimination (eds.) (2006), *Honhyōrin ijuja sahoe t’onghap chiwōn pangan* [*Plan of Political Support for the Social Integration of Mixed Children and Migrants*] (report II filed on April 26, 2006 at the meeting of the National Board on current issues)

¹⁹ Kendall L. (1996), *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press), pp. 4-5.

²⁰ It designates women from the region of Yanbian, an administrative subdivision of the north-eastern Chinese province of Jilin, where Korean people massively immigrated in the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century and formed an autonomous prefecture.

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²² Korea National Statistical Office, ‘Demographic trends - marriage and divorce: Koreans cross-border marriages from 2006 to 2014’.

²³ Korea National Statistical Office, *Idem*.

²⁴ These figures were obtained from the research done by entering the keyword “international marriage” (*kukche kyōrhōn*) and specifying the period from 1945 to 2006 in various Korean science database archives, such as RISS4U, DBpia, Koreanstudies Information Service System (KISS), the Korean National Library and the Korean Parliamentary Library, websites consulted from March 1 to November 17, 2006. At the first stage of this research, a total of 517 documents were collected. To standardise the data, redundant documents, audiovisual documents and the documents in other languages, such as Japanese, were eliminated. After this first step, we looked at each document to verify if the subject really concerned “international marriage” in Korea. 74 books and papers were obtained.

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²⁷ Most scientific studies analysed mention this ideology at varying length.

²⁸ It should be noted that Korean women married to foreign men have long been marginalised in South Korean society. Before 1990, as the dominant model of cross-border marriage was the union between Korean women and American men, these women were often designated by the terms such as "prostitute to a western man"(*yang Kongju*), "whore for Occidental"(*yang kalbo*), associating their image with that prostitutes working around U.S. military bases in South Korean society.

²⁹ The corpus of newspaper articles was formed from the search keyword "international marriage" (*kukche kyö̃rhön*) in the daily newspaper Chosun archive. Because of its seniority and performance on the Korean press market, this paper seemed more suited to understand the evolution of journalistic discourses and their effects.

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³⁴ From 2002 to 2004, by the request of the National Commission of Human Rights (Kukka in'gwŏ wiwŏnhoe), he directed annual collaboration between other researchers and activists for research on the current situation of all foreigners. For example, see the paper by Seol D.-H. (ed.) (2004), *Oegugin kwallyŏn kukka in'gwŏn chŏngch'aek kibon kyehoek suripŭl wihan yŏn'gu* [Study for the Implementation of Political Plans about Foreigners' Rights in South Korea] (Seoul, National Commission of Human Rights).

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³⁷ Seol D.-H. (2006), 'The Social Perception of Multicultural Family', *Kukhoe tosŏgwanbo* [Review of the Parliamentary Library], 325, pp. 2-3

³⁸ Commission for the correction of discrimination (eds.) (2006), *Yŏsŏng kyŏrhon iminja kajok mit' honhyŏrin ijuja sahoe t'onghap chiwŏn pangan* [Plan of Political Support for the Social Integration of Immigrant Women's Family by Marriage, Mixed Children and Migrants] (summary report filed on 26 April 2006 at the meeting of the National Board on current issues).

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⁴⁰ Commission for the correction of discrimination (eds.) (2006) (summary report), *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁴¹ Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family (2008), *Tamunhwa kajok saeg'ae chugibyŏl match'umhyŏng chiwŏn kanghwa taech'aek* [Plan to Strengthen Multicultural Family Support Adapted to Life Cycle], p.11.

⁴² Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family (2008), *Idem.*

⁴³ Ministry of Gender Equality & Family (2006), *Tamunhwa kajok chiwŏnpŏp maryŏnŭl wihan yŏn'gu* [Study to establish Multicultural Family Support Act], p. 5-6.

⁴⁴ Central Office for Multicultural Family Supports Centers (tamunhwa kajok chiwŏn saŏptan), <http://www.mfsc.familynet.or.kr> (home page), date accessed 1st March 2010. Since 2008, this nonprofit foundation has been in charge of the management of all centres.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Gender Equality & Family (2014), *2014 Tamunhwa kajok chiwŏn sent'ŏ saŏp annae* [*The guide to the action programmes of Multicultural Family Support Centres 2014*], p. 13.

⁴⁶ Commission for the correction of discrimination (eds) (2006), *Op.cit.*

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⁴⁸ For Korean papers, if there is an English title, it is used. If not, the Korean title is translated by the author in English.