

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN WIVES UNDER THE KOREAN GAZE

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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นางสาวมิเชล คามิล ฮูบิลลา คอร์เรีย



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

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มิเชล คามิล ยูบิลลา คอรัเรีย :
ภาพตัวแทนของภรรยาชาวเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ในมุมมองของชาวเกาหลีโดยการรับรู้ผ่านสื่อ. (REPRESENTATIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN WIVES UNDER THE KOREAN GAZE) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: อ. ดร.จิริยทธ์ สิริพันธุ์, หน้า.

สังคมเกาหลีนั้นกำลังอยู่ในช่วงแห่งการเปลี่ยนแปลงจากประเทศสังคมวัฒนธรรมเดียวไปสู่สังคมพหุวัฒนธรรม ทั้งนี้เป็นผลมาจากการแต่งงานย้ายถิ่นฐานของเจ้าสาวข้ามชาติจากประเทศเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ เช่น เวียดนาม และฟิลิปปินส์ ที่มีจำนวนเพิ่มมากขึ้นทุกปี ภาพความเป็นจริงของการเปลี่ยนแปลงนี้ได้ถูกสะท้อนผ่านภาพยนตร์และละครโทรทัศน์ของเกาหลีหลายเรื่อง ภาพตัวแทนของเจ้าสาวจากเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ในสื่อเหล่านี้มีอิทธิพลต่อการรับรู้ของสังคมที่มีต่อเจ้าสาวข้ามชาติ และต่อสังคมพหุวัฒนธรรม งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ ใช้แนวคิดการ "การจ้องมอง" ตามแนวทางของจูดิธ บัตเลอร์ เพื่อศึกษาวิเคราะห์สายตาของสังคมเกาหลีที่จ้องมองเจ้าสาวข้ามชาติผ่านภาพยนตร์และโทรทัศน์ยอดนิยมของเกาหลีจำนวน 6 เรื่อง

ผลการวิจัยครั้งนี้ พบว่าภาพตัวแทนของเจ้าสาวชาวฟิลิปปินส์มักจะถูกนำเสนอออกมาในสามรูปแบบ กล่าวคือ เป็นผู้หญิงน่าสงสารที่แต่งงานเพื่อเงิน, เป็นวัตถุทางเพศ และเป็นแม่คหาทอลิกที่ห่วงใยบุตร ในขณะที่ภาพตัวแทนของเจ้าสาวชาวเวียดนามนั้นมักจะถูกนำเสนอว่าเป็นสินค้าที่สามารถซื้อขายได้ผ่านหน่วยงานจัดหาคู่, เป็นคนที่มีวัฒนธรรมที่ใกล้ชิดกับประเทศเกาหลี, เป็นภรรยาที่โศกดีกว่ารุ่นก่อน, เป็นผู้หญิงฉวยโอกาส, เป็นภรรยาที่อ่อนหวานและห่วงใยซึ่งแตกต่างจากภรรยาที่เป็นชาวเกาหลี

โดยรวมแล้ว ภาพตัวแทนของเจ้าสาวชาวเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ มักจะถูกนำเสนอให้เป็นภาพของภรรยาและแม่ที่ห่วงใยและทุ่มเท, เป็นลูกสาวและลูกสะใภ้ที่กตัญญู และถูกนำเสนอว่าเป็นผู้หญิงที่ปราศนามากกว่าผู้หญิงเกาหลี อย่างน้อยก็สำหรับผู้ชายเกาหลีที่มีฐานะทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมค่อนข้างต่ำ

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SINTHUPHAN, Ph.D., pp.

Korea's homogeneous society is changing. Through the influx of migrant wives, it is moving toward a multicultural society. Brides from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines comprise a significant number of migrant wives. This reality is reflected in Korean film and television. Their presence in media creates representations of Southeast Asian wives, which influence society's perceptions of what foreign presence entails and what multicultural society means. Using Judith Butler's theory of performative Gaze this research sought to find out how the representation of Southeast Asian wives is repeatedly "performed" and looked at through "the gaze" of 6 Korean film and television dramas. The research found out that Southeast Asian wives are stereotypically portrayed under Korean media gaze. Filipino wives are often depicted in three ways: educated but poor women marrying for money, sexual object of curiosity, and caring Catholic mother. Vietnamese wives are depicted in seven ways: as a commodity of matchmaking agencies, as having close connections with Korea, as luckier wives than their predecessors, as opportunistic women, as malleable wives, as panacea, and as a counterpoint to Korean wives. Southeast Asian wives, as a whole, are repeatedly depicted as caring wives, as devoted mothers, and as filial daughters-in-law. Thus, they are portrayed as more desirable women than Korean women—at least for Korean men who belong to a lower socioeconomic class.

Field of Study: Korean Studies

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Korean society prides itself for being ethnically homogeneous and racially pure. A person is accepted as a Korean citizen if he or she shares the same bloodline and common ancestry (C. S. Kim, 2011; S. Kim, 2009; Shin, 2003).

However, Korea's composition as a single ethnicity is steadily changing because of Korea's increasing popularity as a migration destination both for employment and for marriage. International marriages saw an increase starting from the 1990s when Korea emerged as one of the leading economies in the world. Brides from various countries such as China, Vietnam, Philippines, to name a few, began to arrive to Korea as part of a demand for more females to marry Korean men.

This reality then began to be reflected in the narratives, characters and their depictions in South Korean (to be referred to as Korea from hereon) films and television. Signs of Korea's steady movement toward a multicultural and multi-ethnic society is starting to be seen in its media products. Foreigners and foreign-born Koreans are increasingly being seen in Korean films, and this phenomenon reflects the ethnically and culturally diversifying Korean society. Films such as *You Are My Sunshine*, *Thirst*, *Punch*, and *A Wonderful Moment*, and television shows such as *Golden Bride* and *Hanoi Bride*, to name a few, reflect the changing demographic of Korean society. That is, Korea is a society that is steadily intermingling and co-existing with non-Koreans. This phenomenon is happening through the influx of migrant laborers, the settlement of foreign brides, the birth and growth of mixed-blood

children (in order to reverse a rapidly aging Korean society), and through other forms of people-to-people relations in tourism, business, and scholastic exchanges.

As a cultural product, films affect and influence perspectives and viewpoints about the self and others. As a society that is transforming to a multicultural one, Korea faces questions and challenges because of this transition. Film and television are media which provide ideas on how Koreans perceive and deal with the self and the other,

These films and television shows, in its portrayals of foreigners, create representations of them, which in turn influence viewers' perceptions of what foreign, migrant presence entails, and of what a multicultural society and family means. In visual media, representations concretize our conceptions of things through language, be it sounds, images, or letters. That is, representations connects concepts to language, which enables us to produce meanings (Hall, 2013).

This research project is particularly interested in how Southeast Asian women, specifically Southeast Asian wives who are married to Koreans, are represented in visual media such as Korean films and television in the context of a Korea that is steadily moving towards multiculturalism. Using the concept of "the gaze" and how this "gaze" is repeatedly "performed" according to Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1988), I intend, first and foremost, to find out how Koreans perceive foreigners, especially Southeast Asian wives, in Korean film and television. Second, I intend to find out how Koreans perceive the multicultural family in Korean film and TV. Third, in these representations, I intend to find out what the implications of this "gaze" are for the multicultural family in South Korea.

The central idea of this research project is that the Korean “gaze” toward Southeast Asian wives in film and television entails conceptions of racial difference. That is, the Korean “gaze” objectifies women’s bodies in a way that conforms with its utilitarian and Confucian view of women as mere bearers of children, that is, as conduits that will give birth to future Korean nationals in a rapidly aging society. Consequently, if this kind of “gaze” is repeatedly “performed” in visual media, it would structure migrant wives, specifically Southeast Asian women, as mere foreign bodies imported to fill in the role of keepers of the domestic sphere—a role that Korean mothers are supposed to fill but cannot, due to Korea’s modernization and women’s subsequent attainment of higher education and independence. In this way, marriage migrant women will be mere tools to Korea’s nationalistic goals, making multiculturalism an empty buzzword. This is contrary to the kind of Western- and white-centered “male gaze” that focuses on sexual objectification of women and their bodies (Mulvey, 1975).

1.2 Research Questions/Problem

- 1) How do Koreans perceive foreigners, specifically Southeast Asian wives, in Korean films?
- 2) How do Koreans perceive the multicultural family in Korean films?
- 3) What are the implications of this “gaze” for the multicultural family in South Korea?

1.3 Objectives

- 1) To examine how Koreans perceive foreigners, especially Southeast Asian wives, in Korean films
- 2) To examine Koreans' perception of the multicultural family
- 3) To examine the implications of Koreans' "gaze" towards multicultural families in South Korea

1.4 Significance of the Study

Film and television, as cultural products, influences our view of the world and consequently, how we act and interact with it. As Kellner (2011) puts it:

“The media are a profound and often misperceived source of cultural pedagogy: They contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire -- and what not to. The media are forms of pedagogy which teach us how to be men and women. They show us how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups; how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failure; and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions.”

Therefore, Southeast Asian wives' representations and depictions in Korean films, whether positive or negative, influences how Koreans view foreigners and interact with them. An examination of these depictions is thus a crucial factor in understanding how Koreans view and deal with multiculturalism, and consequently, the multicultural family.

Research works on representations of Southeast Asian women in Korean films is scarce. A greater understanding of how these representations potentially impact the status of foreign-born Koreans and their children is needed.

Although statistically, Southeast Asian women (from Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia) comprise a significant chunk of foreign wives in South Korea, their presence is scarcely seen in Korean films. Often seen are characters from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, etc), Central Asia (Uzbekistan, etc), and Africa, be they migrant laborers, foreign brides, or foreign friends of Korean protagonists. Why this under-representation of Southeast Asian characters in Korean films?

Korea is also a great case study on how a multicultural society is constructed, especially in the age of rapid globalization and massive migration. Much is known about how the United States, Australia, and European states such as the United Kingdom and France deal with the formation of a multicultural society. The case of Korea, however, is a new and emerging one—a phenomenon that merits further research.

1.5 Outline

This research project is divided into five chapters. Chapter One lays the background for this research. It sketches the current situation in a Korea that is becoming multicultural and Southeast Asian wives' role in it. It poses the observation that films depicting migrant wives and multicultural families are increasingly being seen in Korean films and television. It also poses the research questions that emerge from this phenomenon and the significance of examining this.

Chapter Two provides an overview of multiculturalism as a new trend in Korean films and how this trend reflects the current reality of a Korea that is steadily moving towards that kind of society. It describes Koreans' perception of foreigners then and now, as well as the current multicultural discourse in Korea. It also discusses the representations of women in visual media such as film and television, with special attention to key studies on representations of Southeast Asian wives in Korean films. It identifies trends in theories, lenses, and methodologies used, as well as general conclusions culled from previously conducted representation studies. It also identifies gaps and inconsistencies in research in order to arrive at a methodologically sound alternative.

Chapter Three delineates the methodology used to conduct this research project. In particular, this research uses the concept of "the gaze" combined with Butler's theory of performativity to describe and explain representations of Southeast Asian marriage migrant women in Korean film and television.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth discussion of the ways in which Southeast Asian wives are represented in Korean film and television. It shows how Filipino wives and Vietnamese wives are portrayed using the following format: First, the choices made in portraying the Filipino wife and the Vietnamese wife are identified. This includes physical attributes such as skin color, facial features, body structure, manner of dressing, age, work or profession, and language ability. Second, their relationship with the people they interact with in Korean society, as seen in the film, is identified and described. This is also called the intra-diegetic gaze between characters. Third, the characteristics and actual representations of Southeast Asian wives are identified and described. From the data culled from identifying and analyzing the physical

appearance, interactions, and actual representations of Filipino and Vietnamese wives separately, the commonalities of portrayals of Filipino and Vietnamese wives are identified and determined in order to see the overall representations of Southeast wives in Korean film and television. It also compares representations of Southeast Asian wives, representations of Korean women, and representations of Western women in film and television, in order to strengthen my argument that the Korean “gaze” is racialized and therefore different from representations of Korean women and Western women.

Chapter 5 concludes the research with the assertion that the Korean “gaze” is characterized by a view of Southeast Asian wives according to racial difference. That is, these women are imported by Korea in order to satisfy a national need for racial propagation. This is different from the sexualized view of women depicted in Hollywood movies. This chapter also outlines the implications of this kind of gaze to Korean society. Finally, it outlines possible avenues for future study.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

According to Siapno (2011), film is a medium that reaches a broader audience than a scholarly paper ever would. Thus, according to her, film is a critical medium for the production of knowledge as well as knowledge transfers. This is why she believes that representations should be more careful and nuanced, and that voices of subalterns should be heard. Cultural exchange, she said, must have equality instead of the intent to dominate as the starting point. In addition, cultural exchange should transcend economic development priorities as main motivation if it is truly based on equality.

This idea is the basis for this research project. Films and television dramas, as part of the Korean Wave, are widely popular within Korea and all over the world. Within Korea, Korean films' share in the market was at a stunning 52 percent in 2011. It was also the most productive year for filmmaking with the release of a whopping 216 movies. Export of Korean films was also at an all-time high, raking in \$15,830,000 in that year alone. In addition, Korean directors were lauded in international film festivals (K.-T. Kim, 2012). Some famous Korean films include *Christmas in August* (1998), *Shiri* (1998), *Joint Security Area* (2000), *My Sassy Girl* (2001), and *The Host* (2006).

Similarly, Korean television dramas, began to enjoy immense popularity with the airing of Korean TV dramas in China, specifically *What is Love?* in 1997. This was followed by the surprise popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan in 2003. From hereon, the popularity of Korean TV dramas began to spread from East Asia to Southeast Asia. It is also avidly watched in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, South America and

the United States (KOCIS, 2011). Some famous Korean TV dramas include *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Jewel in the Palace* (2003-2004), *All In* (2004), *Secret Garden* (2010), and *The Moon that Embraces the Sun* (2012), among others.

Because of the popularity of Korean film and television drama, therefore, they are important routes for knowledge transfers. In the context of this research project, they are important media in which Southeast Asian wives are shown, portrayed, and represented. Consequently, film and television drama, as media forms, are important routes by which people learn about them, by which people form ideas about them, and by which people figure out how to interact with them in real life.

2.1 The Appearance of Other Races and Ethnicities: A new trend in Korean film and television

According to a Choson Ilbo (2012) article, multiculturalism is a new and popular theme in Korean movies with the release of movies such as *Pacemaker* (2012), *Punch* (2011), *Bandhobi* (2009), and *Banga-Banga* (2010), to name a few. These films dealt with foreigners as migrant laborers and/or members of multicultural families in Korea. But before films latched on to this new trend, according to the article, it was television dramas which first explored the multicultural issue with the airing of two SBS dramas *Hanoi Bride* in 2005 and *Golden Bride* in 2007.

The year 2009 even saw the emergence of the Multicultural Film Festival, a 15-day festival dedicated to films highlighting themes of multiculturalism and diversity, which are currently hot issues in Korean society (Kwon, 2012).

Foreigners such as Caucasian English speakers and non-English speaking foreigners are also increasingly appearing in Korean film and television. Foreign presence in Korean media often can be either a major plot device that moves the story forward or as a simple background role. What is interesting to note, too, is that foreigners from Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, and African countries appear in Korean film and television often as fluent speakers of the Korean language, reflecting the state of migrant laborers in the country (Tully, 2013).

The storylines of films and television shows are also said to be evolving and improving. If early films and soaps explored the transnational love between a man and a woman, more recent productions are said to contain a more in-depth exploration of the ways in which multicultural families coming from different social and cultural backgrounds navigate life in Korea. Moreover, solutions are also suggested and the inclusion of migrants in Korean society is implied in more recent productions, instead of merely patronizing the plight of these migrants (Ilbo, 2012)

This new trend is actually a promising one, since the film *Punch* was a surprise box office hit garnering over 5 million views during its release in 2012. However, of the 100 or so films that are produced and released in Korea each year, films tackling multicultural issues are still few in number, but it is no doubt steadily growing (Oxenbridge, 2012).

2.2 Foreigners in Korea: Some facts and statistics about migrant wives and multicultural families

Korea is steadily moving toward a multicultural society. Of the 50 million population of Korea, there are around 150,000 foreign spouses and around 500,000

migrant workers in Korea today (Lim, 2011). As of 2013, foreigners, comprised of migrant laborers, white collar workers, English teachers and foreign wives, and who have been living in Korea for more than three months, number at around 1.4 million, a figure which is less than 3 percent of Korea's overall population (J. Kim, 2013). In the year 2010, one out of 10 families consisted of a foreign spouse (Ilbo, 2012).

The number of multiethnic families, a figure which includes immigrant spouses plus their children, saw a 60 percent increase from 340,000 in the year 2008 to 550,000 in the year 2011. As of 2013, international marriages comprise 14 percent of the total number of marriages (J. Kim, 2013). By the year 2020, this figure is expected to reach 1 million, or 1.9 percent (Cho, 2013). Thus, the myth of Korea as an ethnically homogeneous nation is being dispelled.

Of particular interest to this research project is the number of Southeast Asian wives who are married to Korean nationals. This figure has seen a dramatic rise since the 1990s. According to the 2012 Nationality Distribution of Multicultural Families from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, a huge chunk of foreign wives are ethnic Koreans from China (32.1 percent), followed by foreign wives from China (21.2 percent). Among foreign wives from Southeast Asia, Vietnamese lead the pack (18.3 percent), followed by women from the Philippines (5.3 percent), Cambodia (1.9 percent), and Thailand (1.2 percent). Other nationalities include Japanese (5.8 percent), Mongolians (1.2 percent), Pakistani (0.4 percent), Uzbekistan (0.8 percent), Russia (0.7 percent), U.S. (2.9 percent), Canada (0.8 percent), South Asia (0.8 percent), and Western Europe/Oceania (0.8 percent). Other nationalities were either labeled "Other" or "Unidentified" in the data (Cho, 2013).

According to Jones and Shen (2008) international marriages have increased in East and Southeast Asia since the beginning of the year 2000. This can be seen especially among economically richer men from countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan with women from China as well as women from poorer Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia. This increase is attributed to a spike in people-to-people contacts via travel, work, study, and better communication technologies.

The aforementioned authors also said that in wealthy countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea, a common marriage pattern is of working-class men seeking wives from mainland China or from poorer Southeast Asian countries. This is because of the lack of Korean women who are willing to marry Korean men who have lower social status. Moreover, Korean men from a lower social status also find women who possess traditional feminine characteristics (i.e., submissiveness, prioritizing the domestic sphere, and the like) as more attractive. Korean women who are educated and who possess higher social status, however, do not possess this. Thus, Korean men from lower social status resort to finding foreign brides (G. Jones & Shen, 2008).

The influx of Southeast Asian wives to Korea beginning in the 1990s is caused by Korea's rapid urbanization, immigration, gender imbalance, and one of the world's lowest fertility rates.

According to D.-S. Kim (2010), the looming multi-ethnic boom through cross-border marriage, and consequently, to the formation of a multicultural society, is said to be caused by the "marriage squeeze" or the distortion of sex composition

among males and females who are eligible to marry. Moreover, Kim also said that low fertility rates, distorted sex ratio (distorted number of men and women in an area), and sex selective migration are also factors that contribute to an imbalanced sex-age composition. When coupled with value transformation through gender-equity and globalization, that is, the rise of more college-educated women who are more financially independent, and who consequently begin to view marriage as an “option” rather than the norm, then the need for migrant wives who will fill in the vacuum created by Korean women becomes more necessary.

China, Vietnam and the Philippines are considered “sending” countries of foreign wives. According to Jones (2012), characteristics of international marriages in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore are:

- 1) Males marry foreign brides
- 2) The husband is significantly older than the wife
- 3) Asian males tend to marry Asian females from Southeast Asia; whereas Asian females tend to marry a wider variety of nationalities from around Asia, Europe and the United States
- 4) Filipino women who marry internationally tend to be more educated (having at least reached college-level education) than their Chinese and Vietnamese counterparts. Moreover, Filipino women also tend to possess a higher educational level than their husbands.
- 5) International marriages in Japan and Korea poses little change in diversity to these countries’ ethnic composition. Cultural affinity plays a major role in

international marriages in these countries (i.e., ethnic Koreans from China migrating to Korea for marriage)

6) Match-making agencies and internet websites specializing in bride acquisition is an important route for international marriages in Korea and Japan (especially Korea).

Moreover, “never-married men” such as farmers and fishermen and used-to-be married urban men from the lower socio-economic strata are two primary groups of Korean men who have the greatest tendency to be part of international marriages. Foreign wives from Southeast Asia, who marry “never-married men”, usually reside in provincial areas (Y.-J. Lee, Seol, & Cho, 2006).

The marriage migration of Southeast Asian women elicits arguments from some scholars that gender serves as a path to citizenship as well as nation-building.

According to H.-J. Kim (2008), Korean society grapples with the need to continue its domestic reproductive duties despite the reality of an aging society and low fertility rates, against the need for cultural reproduction despite the perceived danger of the loss of national identity because of the influx of foreign wives who carry with them various cultures and beliefs. For Koreans, dealing with this tension entails efforts to assimilate foreign wives by making them more Korean, that is, by teaching them Korean customs and ways of life, which these women, in turn, can teach their own children in an attempt to make these so-called multicultural families more Korean. Kim thus asserts that this assimilation in the guise of multiculturalism is a “gendered nation-building process” that utilizes women, their images, and their ethnicity.

A similar argument can be found in (Cheng, 2011), who says that reproductive capacity, or the ability of foreign wives to give birth to Korean sons, serves as their ticket to acquiring Korean citizenship, a term which Cheng calls a “gendered construction of nationhood in South Korea.” Trained to become mothers as Korean as ethnic Korean mothers would be in areas such as language skills, cooking and household management, and cultural knowledge and behavior, foreign wives are assimilated into Korean society under the guise of a “multicultural Korea”. The multicultural quality of this arrangement is, however, nil, since foreign wives’ own cultures are silenced in favor of Korean culture. Cheng thus asserts that this multicultural program actually uses foreign wives’ bodies for the sole purpose of sexual reproduction in order to advance Korea’s global and national interests.

H.-R. Kim and Oh (2012), in a similar vein, conclude that multiculturalism and assimilation are, for Koreans, “two sides of the same coin”. That is, one cannot exist without the other. Cultural assimilation through mandatory study of Korean language, customs, and culture are deemed prerequisites for membership in this “multicultural” Korean society, and consequently, citizenship.

This massive marriage migration among Southeast Asian women and the attempts to assimilate them to Korean society in the guise of multicultural policies, necessitates the consideration of race and ethnicity and its consequent constructions by Koreans in examining how Koreans view foreigners. Knowledge of this, in turn, will help explain representations of Southeast Asian foreign wives in Korean film and television.

2.3 How Koreans View Foreigners: Then and now

Although a huge number of texts assert that Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country, Korea has been undertaking cultural exchanges and intermarriages since ancient times. This dispels the myth that Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country.

One such intermarriage is a surprising one between Korean Kim Suro, King of Kaya, and a princess of faraway Ayodhya, India in the year AD 48, according to the *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). Four kings during the Koryo Dynasty also married Yuan princesses. A Vietnamese nobleman from the Ly Kingdom also settled in Korea and was the ancestor of thousands of members of the Hwasan Yi clan (C. S. Kim, 2011).

Koreans are also no strangers to the idea of immigration. From the 1960s to the 1970s, Korean coal miners and nurses traveled to West Germany to work, and then some eventually married each other while some female nurses married Germans. Still earlier than that, Mongol invasion of the Koryo Kingdom in 1254 resulted in the 10 percent loss of the Koryo population, which necessitated the invitation of migrants to settle in Korea for labor purposes (Ibid).

Today, Koreans believe in its racial purity and homogeneity. A Korean citizen is determined according to race—something that can be traced through shared bloodline and common ancestry (C. S. Kim, 2011; S. Kim, 2009; Shin, 2003). For example, in a survey conducted in 2012 by the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Family, an overwhelming majority of adult Korean survey respondents agreed with

the statement that “Korean blood ancestry” is a vital pre-requisite in Korean society’s recognition as a Korean citizen (J. Kim, 2013).

The rise of Korea’s strong ethnic nationalism began during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945). The idea of *minjok* (ethnic nation) was a necessary form of resistance to Japanese domination, particularly the Japanese assertion of *naisen ittai*, or that “Korea and Japan are one and the same” (C. S. Kim, 2011; S. Kim, 2009).

According to S. Kim (2009), other factors that shaped Korea’s view of themselves as an ethnically pure and homogeneous people in order to re-build its nationalism include: separation of Korea into North and South (1945-present time) which sparked the need to counter communist influences coming from its neighbors China and Soviet Union as well as North Korea; and rapid economic development and modernization (1960s to 1980s) which spurred uneven growth within its societal segments (i.e., rural farmers being left behind, and women’s education enabling them to possess economic independence and social agency). These two aforementioned events have made Korea resistant and defensive against the potential entry of foreign cultures into its shores. Its changing demographics, meanwhile, necessitated the import of foreign brides, with priority given to ethnic Koreans in China to preserve ethnic purity, and Southeast Asian women. This was a government-supported initiative.

It is also important to note that international marriages have been frowned upon by Koreans due to images of invasion from foreign countries such as Japan and China that these international marriages connote. International marriages are

specially frowned upon with women, mainly because this type of union connoted the capture and abuse of “dirty bodies” (particularly of women) and the state’s failure to defend its people. Internationally married women and their children are thus treated with prejudice (H.-K. Lee, 2008).

Therefore, Korea’s long and deeply entrenched tradition and culture of nationalism and ethnic homogeneity increases the chances of Korean society committing discriminatory acts and cultural biases against foreign-born others. Another challenge to foreign wives’ successful adaption and integration into Korean society and their new families is the deeply entrenched patriarchal values common among families residing in agricultural and fishery areas (Nho, Park, Kim, Choi, & Ahn, 2008).

2.4 Korea’s View of Foreigners

South Korea is in the initial stages of moving toward a multicultural society. According to the study *South Koreans’ Attitudes toward Foreigners, Minorities and Multiculturalism* (Yoon, Song, & Bae, 2008), Koreans, in general, tend to pose an “open and tolerant” attitude toward foreigners living in South Korea. However, they also tend to be “defensive and protectionist” against cultures that are perceived to compete with Korean culture. The authors attribute these varying reactions to foreigners to the level at which Koreans see foreigners as “threats”. Koreans see the current small number of foreigners in Korea as insignificant. Therefore, they are unable to pose a threat. Moreover, the authors also said that depictions of these immigrants as “disadvantaged and mistreated” keeps the threatening feelings at bay. What they feel instead is sympathy for foreigners. Global competition, meanwhile,

tends to make Koreans feel defensive and protectionist because of the refusal to allow the entry of foreign competition to weaken Korea's own competitive advantage economically and culturally.

This attitude toward foreigners fits the study of S. Kim (2012) on how multiculturalism is understood in Korea. According to her study, multiculturalism is conventionally understood as a fact (various cultures co-existing in a single place), a policy (government programs), or a value (ideology) in the West, but is understood by Korean media as either of four things: 1) a fact, 2) "multicultural family" as a legal term which means a Korean national who is married to a foreign national, 3) any government policy that relates to migrants, 4) as an ideology that espouses the acceptance of cultural diversity in Korean society.

In terms of accepting Koreans of mixed blood, the success of football player Hines Ward, of Korean-American descent, was a crucial factor which started the positive change in how Koreans view children of mixed descent. Being named MVP in America's Super Bowl elevated the status of multicultural children in Korea's eyes. Through him, Koreans saw the possibility of a mixed-blood kid making it big in the world. His visit to Korea in 2006 sparked the discourse of multicultural education. It also became his mission to advance the acceptance of mixed-blood children in Korea (Mehlsen, 2011).

This is just one angle in how children from international marriages are treated in Korea, though. Others face discrimination and bullying. Hwang Min-U, also known as "Little Psy" from the Gangnam Style music video, experienced cyber-bullying by Korean netizens in 2013. The child of a Korean father and a Vietnamese mother,

netizens called him a “child of an inferior race” (Kang, 2013). Even migrant workers from developing countries, who take on blue-collar jobs, experience unfair treatment at the workplace. Often, they are accused of stealing jobs of Korean blue-collar workers, and are taken advantage of in the 3 D’s of the job: dirty, dangerous, and demeaning.

Migrants, especially foreign wives and multicultural families, were put on the spotlight in 2012 when Assemblywoman Jasmine Lee, born Jasmine Bacurnay in the Philippines, became the first foreign-born person to serve in the National Assembly of Korea. Her seat at the National Assembly did not come easy, though, as it was met with contempt by anti-immigration activists who believed that foreign presence is “corrupting Korean bloodline” and “exterminating the Korean nation” (Choe, 2012). Lee also played the role of a Filipina immigrant mother in the box office hit movie *Punch*. She was also a television host in the KBS show *Love in Asia* beginning in 2006 and on the education broadcasting network’s show called *Basic Korean for Foreigners*. As such, she is widely regarded as “the face of Filipinos and migrant wives in South Korea (Garcia, 2011).” At present, Lee is at the forefront of advancing the multicultural discourse in Korea, both in the National Assembly and through media.

2.5 Representations of Foreign Wives

Women have been the subject of many representation studies the world over. Often adopting a feminist lens, most representation studies conclude that women are still objectified and/or silenced in media.

In discussing representation, I use the definition of Hall (2013), which refers to “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language.” By

language, Hall refers not just to words themselves, but to other perceivable things such as images, sounds, objects, and the like. These, which carry meaning, are called signs. In other words, related things, concepts and signs form a system of representation that produces, carries, and expresses meaning.

Representations of people often take into account aspects such as age, gender, race and ethnicity, financial status, job, and culture/nationality. Also taken into account are factors such as the representation's target audience, whether character actions are typical or deviating from norms, their purpose in the text, and their location in the text (Wilson, 2012).

Key studies regarding the representation of foreign wives in Korean films and television shows also adopt a feminist orientation. These studies concluded that discrimination and bias are still prevalent in how Asian women are depicted in Korean films and television shows. In other words, while these women are portrayed to be part of a multicultural Korean society, they are still essentially "the other".

S. Kim (2009), for example, in studying the representations of foreign wives in two Korean films called *Failan* (2001) and *Wedding Campaign* (2005) found four dominant discourses in a Korea that sees foreign wives as vital components of globalization-gearred nation-building policies, vis-à-vis the need to keep conventional values of gender, ethnic and class relations alive. The four dominant discourses are: 1) foreign wives as keepers of traditional feminine and domestic-related values lost among present-day Korean women, 2) foreign wives as sexual objects, 3) foreign wives as vital labor providers, in both reproductive (mother of future Koreans) and economic labor (workers, and at times, breadwinners), and 4) cross-border marriage

as a process of national selection. These discourses, according to Kim, reveal how Korean society views marriage migrant women according to a patriarchal and Orientalist view.

Siapno (2011) echoes this kind of objectification of Southeast Asian women. She approaches Southeast Asian representations in Korean films as "labor" both in terms of the act of production, especially among migrant workers who are frequently depicted as "illegal aliens", as well as reproductive labor, particularly among foreign wives who are frequently depicted as mail-order brides or sexualized bodies. According to Siapno, both these kinds of "labor" depict Southeast Asians as "poor people to be saved and developed."

Siapno further asserts that representations of Southeast Asians in Korean films are unprocessed borrowings from American Hollywood and French cinema representations. By this, she means that Korean films adopt an Orientalist view of Southeast Asians even if Korea has no history of colonizing any Southeast Asian country. Moreover, she also argues that multiculturalism is likewise portrayed in Korean films in an unprocessed way and that this echoes arguments made by migration scholars, sociologists, and anthropologists that multiculturalism in the Korean context goes hand in hand with cultural assimilation. That is, multiculturalism in the Korean context means foreign wives who marry Korean men and eventually assimilate Korean culture, especially ways of motherhood and raising children. Assimilation is done without taking into account bilateral and matrilineal family systems that are at work in Southeast Asian families.

As a country that is steadily moving toward a multicultural society, the multiculturalism discourse also remains on the surface. The discourse therefore needs to go deeper than the current one. For example, S. Kim (2012) found out that although issues about migrants and multiculturalism have appeared in Korean media, specifically newspaper columns and editorials, for over two decades since the 1990s, discussions of these have been subtly negative although these appear positive. Through frame analysis and critical discourse analysis, she found out that migrants are actually "victimized" and "objectified" in these seemingly positive articles. Moreover, media coverage of migrants lacks specific solutions on how to empower migrants and what a multicultural society truly means. There is a gap between rhetoric and reality.

2.6 Representations of Korean Women

Representations of Korean women also remain patriarchal. The exponential growth of the Korean movie industry is not proportional to the quality of women's representations in Korean films. Images of strong women in films such as *My Sassy Girl* (2001) and *My Wife is a Gangster* (2001) still disguise patriarchy. M.-H. Kim (2002) argues that Korean women remain as spectacles. In examining the male gaze in the film *My Wife is a Gangster*, she found that women are still seen as mere beautiful bodies on display for the camera despite the seeming portrayal of a strong woman. That is, women are seen as "objects of desire", and consequently, of colonization in the sense that women begin to internalize and live out this desire to be desired through the male gaze. This is done through film devices such as editing, point-of-view, camera angles (in other words, camera work), to name a few, which disguise patriarchal conventions that are hidden in the images of strong women characters.

Gender representations thus remain male-oriented despite the portrayals of seemingly strong women (Ibid).

Interestingly, though, J. C. H. Park (2012) offers a different perspective on the same film. Her study focused on how strong female characters in the Korean movie *My Wife is a Gangster* and the Thai movie *Chocolate* (2008) are represented through Western eyes, especially how these characters add new perspective to “dominant masculine discourses of bodily and national authenticity”.

Park’s (2012) study lauds how Eun-jin, the female lead in *My Wife is a Gangster*, is put at the forefront of the film, which is a 180-degree turn from women’s usual peripheral position as a binder of male-centered relationships. She concludes that representations of strong female characters in *My Wife is a Gangster* and *Chocolate* deviate from the usual representations of women as “symbols of biological and cultural reproduction”, by mimicking the kind of masculinity depicted by male action heroes in traditional male-oriented action films. For the researcher then, these films successfully break stereotypes of masculinity (Ibid).

2.7 Diverging interpretations and the need for deep inquiry

This contradiction clues us in on how methodology may lead to inconsistent and conflicting results in examining representations of women. The first study approached the film from the perspective of “the gaze”, while the second study approached the same film from the “gender hybridity of the action heroine”—that is, the breaking down of gender boundaries as the heroine adopts both masculine and feminine qualities.

The first study critiques the female heroine according to how the camera sees her and how characters in the film see her (that is, as a sexualized female), whereas the second study subverts this method in order to celebrate the masculine heroine.

The first study, utilizing the concept of “the gaze”, is a methodologically concrete inquiry that digs deep into how women are represented in films through an examination of how the camera frames the characters and how characters see each other; whereas the second study relies more on the researcher’s subjective assessment and how the characters appear on the surface—as supposedly powerful, fighting women.

Studying representations requires a deep look at nuances of characters’ portrayals. Studies of multiculturalism in Korean context have already revealed that multiculturalism is actually assimilation of foreign wives in disguise (H.-J. Kim, 2008; H.-R. Kim & Oh, 2012; S. Kim, 2012). This implies that despite seemingly positive portrayals of foreign wives by virtue of their inclusion and appearance in Korean film and television, a deeper look via the ways in which the camera depicts them and the ways in which characters see them, has the powerful potential to reveal their true social position in Korean society.

2.8 Representation, realism, and the sense of the real

Often, according to Shohat and Stam (2012), when people from marginalized cultures watch media products, questions of realism in the representations of themselves that they see arise. This is because these representations, be they characters in the film or TV show, are borne out of real-life prototypes and consequently whether intentional or not, imply a certain degree of realism. This is

because although a film cannot possess 100 percent realism, viewers still possess what Shohat and Stam call a “sense of the real” which they cull from their day-to-day experience, and which equips and enables them to accept, negotiate, reject, or question the representations they see. Marginalized members of the community are thus careful and sensitive about their portrayals in media as these portrayals run the danger of being understood and accepted by the general population as typical behavior.

Television and film play a crucial role in how we see marginalized cultures or “the other”, places and events. According to Morley and Robins (2012), the more unfamiliar “the other” is to the audience, the more credible television and film images become. This especially becomes more alarming in the sense that media representations of marginalized cultures tend to be filtered, that is, some images and aspects of marginalized people are shown while others are not. Moreover, television and film are also sites wherein a dominant culture’s own fears and fantasies toward “the other” are projected (Shohat & Stam, 2012). This is the importance of conducting a nuanced representation study.

2.9 “The gaze” as a way of analyzing representation

The concept of “the gaze” in film theory posits that our ways of seeing in visual media such as film and television depends on three things: First is on the way the camera positions the lens and picks frames for what our eyes can see. Second is on the way one character views another. And third is on the way the audience sees the film, especially the characters (Chandler, 2011).

That women are often the object of this “gaze” is widely explored and researched in film and media studies (hooks, 2012; M.-H. Kim, 2002; Mulvey, 1975). Most studies, often by feminist-leaning researchers, assert that women are positioned as objects to be merely looked at, admired, and desired, especially by male eyes.

Other studies, meanwhile, try to subvert this assertion to allow us to consider how the concepts of race and racism leads us to widen our ways of seeing, away from a predominantly white-centered and phallogentric perspective of “the gaze”, to include the silence and/or absence of colored characters in visual media, and how we can develop an “oppositional gaze” in order to recognize racial difference (hooks, 2012).

To recognize racial difference, according to hooks (2012), frees women (especially women of color) from Mulvey’s (1975) limiting--and limited--binary of “active/male and passive/female” and enables us to become aware of conceptions of race in our ways of seeing. This awareness is especially useful and beneficial in our viewing of visual media products such as film and TV, wherein narratives, characters and their depictions are increasingly being influenced by a globalizing, multi-ethnic and multicultural world.

This research project, then, seeks to expand the concept of “the gaze” from a purely feminist psychoanalytic approach to one that includes conceptions of racial difference, which deviates from traditional conceptions of Western- and white-oriented “male gaze”, in order to analyze representations of foreign wives in Korean film and television.

This project seeks to dispel the notion that “the gaze” is limited to the eroticization of the female through the male, patriarchal gaze, but that “the gaze” has the potential to include another aspect to it. That is, as a kind of Korean “gaze” that is deeply rooted in the Confucian view of women as mere bearers of future Korean nationals; a kind of gaze that is utilitarian, moving toward nationalistic goals of keeping the nation on its upward trajectory in a globalizing, competitive world.



Chapter III

Methodology

Representation studies in film and television often use a variety of methods for determining, measuring, and analyzing how certain groups of people are portrayed. As such, it can be said that studying representation is a fluid and flexible endeavor for the media researcher.

In the context of this research project, methods that have been used by prior researchers to analyze representations of Asian women in Korean film and television include:

1. discourse (how a text tells a story) by examining the characters (constructions, relationships among characters, and narrative thread) (S. Kim, 2009);
2. textual analysis (examining narrative structures, characters, and camera work) combined with contextual analysis (examining media production and industry structures such as Hollywood (M.-H. Kim, 2002);
3. use of concepts such as imitation and “gender hybridity of action heroines” (J. C. H. Park, 2012) to describe and explain how Asian action heroines subvert traditional notions of femininity and masculinity; and
4. the use of concept of labor in the productive and reproductive sense (Siapno, 2011).

Thus, studies on Asian women’s representations in Korean visual media can be classified into two major qualitative methods.

The first method (M.-H. Kim, 2002; S. Kim, 2009) is primarily a structural examination of the text, focusing on technical aspects such as narrative thread,

character constructions, camera work (as in “the gaze”), and the like in order to describe and explain Asian women’s representations in Korean visual media. As such, it requires mastery and knowledge of technical aspects of visual media in order to objectively examine the representations that a text makes. Based on the previous studies, this type of method is anchored on a social concept that helps examine and determine a representation’s social implications and effects.

The second method (J. C. H. Park, 2012; Siapno, 2011) uses socio-cultural concepts as the central idea that fleshes out these representations. As such, it relies on the author’s subjective interpretation of a text. This is not flat-out wrong. However, because the interpretation is not anchored on a specific system of analysis such as analyzing camera work and the like, it only provides half of what potentially could be a comprehensive analysis of how Southeast Asian women are represented in Korean visual media.

This research project therefore follows the use of the first method. That is, a qualitative research project that utilizes a two-pronged approach. First, is the structural examination of the text, in this case film and television drama. Second is linking this structural examination to broader socio-cultural concepts. The structural examination therefore anchors the subsequent linking to broader socio-cultural concepts. In the context of this research, the structural examination will be linked to the concept of the multicultural family.

This is because compared to the second method, the first method is a more holistic approach to examining representations of Southeast Asian wives using the concept of “the gaze”. That is, the structural examination of the text provides an

analysis of the technical aspects of film and television dramas. The linking of this technical analysis to a social concept, meanwhile, helps determine a representation's social implications and effects.

However, this research seeks to go on further than the previous model studies by tweaking the method used in the research works that this study is patterned after. By using the concept of “the gaze” combined with the concept of the multicultural family, this research project seeks to find out how Koreans perceive Southeast Asian wives as well as the meaning of the multicultural family in Korean films and television dramas. From these, guided by Butler's theory of performativity, I then seek to draw out the implications of this “gaze” in Korea's formation of a multicultural family and society.

3.1 Examining representations through the “gaze” of the camera and the character

For this research project, I use the following definition of “the gaze”, which is “the ways in which viewers look at images of people in any visual medium and to the gaze of those depicted in visual texts” (Chandler, 2011). According to the same author, key forms of the gaze include:

- i. Spectator's gaze (how the viewer sees the film)
- ii. Intra-diegetic gaze (how a character sees another character)
- iii. Direct gaze (extra-diegetic) (how the camera sees the viewer)
- iv. The look of the camera (how the camera sees the character)

As such, the one being looked at, or the object of the gaze, is often unaware of being viewed. Thus, the one making “the gaze” is accorded a certain degree of superiority. “The gaze”, then, signifies power – the agency of seeing rather than being a passive decoration and/or object.

This research project will focus on the two forms of “the gaze”--intra-diegetic gaze (how a character sees another character) and the look of the camera (how the camera sees the character)--in order to examine the following:

1. How Koreans view “the other”, in this case, Southeast Asian wives (representation)
2. How Koreans view the multicultural family

These two forms of “the gaze” are the best forms of “the gaze” from which to analyze representations of migrant wives. The intra-diegetic gaze is the best way to analyze how Koreans view Southeast Asian wives in the context of Korean film and television because it reveals the nature of interactions, relationships, and perceptions between Koreans and the Southeast Asian women (“the other”). In a way, this reflects how Koreans interact with Southeast Asian wives. The look of the camera, meanwhile, adds another dimension to how Southeast Asian wives are portrayed and represented in film and television. The look of the camera shows how Korean society sees Southeast Asian wives according to how the camera, as an “eye”, chooses to see them. Long shots, medium shots, and close up shots all reflect how important or unimportant and engaged or unengaged Korean society is with Southeast Asian wives. Thus, the intra-diegetic gaze and the look of the camera aid us in gleaning insights on

how Koreans represent themselves and Southeast Asian wives, and consequently, the multicultural family.

The spectator's gaze (how the viewer sees the film) and the direct gaze (how the camera sees the viewer) are not used in the data-gathering and analysis because these do not provide insights on representation. Spectator's gaze, for example, would be more useful in analyzing audience reception and the meanings they construct from watching these representations. The direct gaze, meanwhile, relies more on how the camera looks at the audience, which does not reflect representations of foreign wives.

3.2 Performativity, Structuration, and "The Gaze"

If media teaches us "how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire -- and what not to" (Kellner, 2011), there must be an element of repetition in the way Korean and foreign characters are represented on the screen. That is, repetitions of representations that we see often enough to be worth remembering and doing.

Borrowing Butler's theory of performativity wherein gender is defined as a construct that is a product of repeated acts, which, in time, constitute what we construe as gender (Butler, 1988), this research project will examine the performativity that is present in the Korean "gaze". That is, this research project borrows the idea of performativity as a set of repeated acts that, over time, institutionalize that act and make it the norm. Thus, instead of gender, representations of Southeast Asian wives will be applied to the idea of performativity. This research project will examine the common repeated acts that are

performed by Korean and foreign characters in Korean films according to the “look of the camera” and the “the intra-diegetic gaze”. In this way, we can see the commonly repeated acts in film and television which can potentially be the norm of how Korean society sees Southeast Asian wives and the multicultural family.

3.3 Limitations of this research

This examination, however, is only according to what the text says. It does not take into account audience reception (or how the audience interprets and makes meanings from the text), which is the scope of the spectator’s gaze (how the viewer sees the film). As such, this is one limitation of this research.

This research also focuses on Southeast Asian wives. This research does not cover foreign wives from other races and ethnicities as their circumstances may be different from the subject under study.

Films and television dramas to be studied are confined to those produced from the 2000s, which is the time when consciousness of Southeast Asian wives saw a marked increase in Korea, up to the present time. These selected films and television dramas all feature Southeast Asian wives. Films and television dramas featuring only Southeast Asian women who are in Korea for labor and employment are excluded from this study.

3.4 The data gathering process and measurement criteria

To assess and analyze the representations of Southeast Asian migrant women in Korean film and television, the “look of the camera” and the intra-diegetic gaze are employed.

This research project borrows the method used by Wagner and fellow researchers (Wagner et al., 1999) in analyzing the representation of “madness” in British television.

Scenes involving depictions and appearances of Southeast Asian wives are examined. These scenes are transcribed using two columns, resembling an actual film/drama script. The first column describes the visuals, such as the scenery, characters present, character’s actions, and the camera angle. The second column contains the actual dialog in the text. The camera shot is the unit of analysis.

Data are collected and examined according to the camera angles using the following:

To assess “the look of the camera”, the following is utilized (Chandler, 2011):

1. Angle of view

1. Angle of view

Angle of View	Description / Criteria
Frontal angle	Connotes character involvement
Oblique angle	Connotes character detachment
High angle	Connotes inferiority and insignificance
Low angle	Connotes superiority and power
Rear view	Connotes exclusion and/or turning away

2. Apparent proximity

Physical distance	Description/ Criteria
Long shot	Connotes impersonal mode
Medium shot	Connotes social mode
Close up	Connotes intimate or personal mode

To assess intra-diegetic gaze, the following is utilized (ibid)

1. Direction of the gaze:

Direction of the gaze	Description/ Criteria
Reciprocal Attention	Characters pay attention to each other
Divergent Attention	Characters pay attention not to the person, but to another thing
Object-Oriented Attention	Both characters pay attention to the same thing
Semi-Reciprocal Attention	One character pays attention to the other, but this other character is paying attention to either another person or thing

2. Apparent proximity

Physical distance	Description/ Criteria
Intimate	Distance of up to 18 inches between characters
Personal	18 inches to 4 feet
Social	4 to 12 feet
Public	12 to 25 feet

The frequency of occurrences of these camera angles and other details within the texts will be taken note of. This data will then be examined against Butler's theory of performativity, which implies the structuration and institutionalization of how representations of Southeast Asian women are made.

Analyzing representations also include examining the choices made during the production process in portraying characters, particularly (Wilson, 2012):

- 1) Age
- 2) Gender
- 3) Race/Ethnicity
- 4) Financial Status
- 5) Job
- 6) Culture/ Nationality

Furthermore, representation analysis also asks the following (ibid):

- 1) Subject of representation + the target audience for this particular kind of representation
- 2) Activities and actions of the subject of representation – Are these actions typical or not?
- 3) Reasons why this subject of representation is present in the text – purpose
- 4) Location of subject of representation – Framing, Natural or artificial, Foreground and background

From this data, frequencies of depictions according to camera shots and other narrative devices, as well as common themes, are determined and analyzed.

3.5 List of films and television dramas to be analyzed

Guided by the previously outlined methodology, the following Korean films and television dramas are analyzed. The following criteria were used for selection:

1. Produced between the 2000s up to the present time.
2. Presence of Southeast Asian wives as characters in the film or television drama
3. Film or television drama (all or part of it) portrays life of foreign wives and multicultural families

Films and television dramas were gathered from articles on multicultural films and dramas from popular Korean film blogs and websites in English, which

contains lists of films and television dramas portraying multiculturalism in Korea. These websites include Word from the R.O.K. (<http://wftrok.com>), Hanguk Yeonghwa (<http://hangukyeonghwa.com/>), Hancinema.Net (<http://www.hancinema.net>), Dramabeans (<http://www.dramabeans.com>) and Korean Movie Database (<http://www.kmdb.or.kr>).

The films and television dramas to be examined are:

1. 너는 내 운명 / You Are My Sunshine (J.-P. Park, 2005)
2. 박쥐 / Thirst (C.-W. Park, 2009)
3. 완득이 / Punch (H. Lee, 2011)
4. 마이 리틀 히어로 / My Little Hero (S.-H. Kim, 2013)
5. 하노이 신부 / Hanoi Bride (G.-R. Park, 2005)
6. 황금신부 / Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

Summaries of the films and television dramas can be found at the Appendix.

Chapter IV

Results and Analysis

4.1 Filipino Wives in Korean Films

The films that were examined are:

너는 내 운명 / You are My Sunshine (J.-P. Park, 2005), a film about Seokjoong, a farmer who falls in love and eventually marries Eun-Ha, a tea shop delivery girl who also moonlights as a bar girl. Their love is put to the test when Eun-Ha is found to be HIV positive and media frenzy ensues. However, the analysis of this film focuses on two supporting characters – Seokjoong’s boss at the farm and his Filipino wife, specifically their daily life at the farm where the boss works and his wife helps him.

박쥐 / Thirst (C.-W. Park, 2009), a film about Sang-Hyun, a Catholic priest who is also a secret vampire. He eventually gets re-acquainted with his childhood friend Kang Woo, who brings him to the weekly mahjong gathering with other friends, including Young Doo and his Filipino wife Evelyn. There, Sang-Hyun falls in love with Tae-Ju, Kang Woo’s wife, and they begin an illicit affair which leads to death and destruction. The analysis of this film, however, focuses on the relationship between Yeoung Doo and Filipino wife Evelyn as they interact as husband and wife and as guests in the scenes depicting the weekly mah jong gatherings.

완득이 / Punch (H. Lee, 2011) is about a half-Korean, half-Filipino high school boy named Wandeuk, who discovers his half-Filipino heritage and meets his long-absent Filipino mother through his teacher Lee Dong Ju. The analysis of the film

focuses on the Filipino wife as mother to Wanduok and part of a multicultural family in Korea.

마이 리틀 히어로/ My Little Hero (S.-H. Kim, 2013) is a film about Glory, a half-Korean, half-Filipino boy who dreams of being a musical performer. Together with musical director Yoo Il-Han, they work toward this dream despite the challenges of Glory's acceptance by Korean society and discrimination. The analysis of this film focuses on Glory's relationship and interactions with his Filipino mother, as well as the Filipino mother's relationship with her absentee husband.

In the following sections, the Filipino wife is examined according to three factors. First, the Filipino wife is examined according to the choices made in portraying her in the production of the film. These choices include her physical attributes, age, occupation, education, etc. Second, she is examined according to the intra-diegetic gaze, that is, her interactions in terms of proximity and dialog with Korean characters in the film. Third, she is examined according to common characteristics and traits in her portrayal, specifically, her representations.

4.2 Looking at the Filipino Wife: Choices made in portraying her

In terms of appearance, the common depiction of the Filipino wife is a dark-skinned, big-eyed, and long-haired woman with a gentle demeanor. The Filipino wife wears old, shabby, and faded clothes which signal a poor, working class background (See Figure 1).

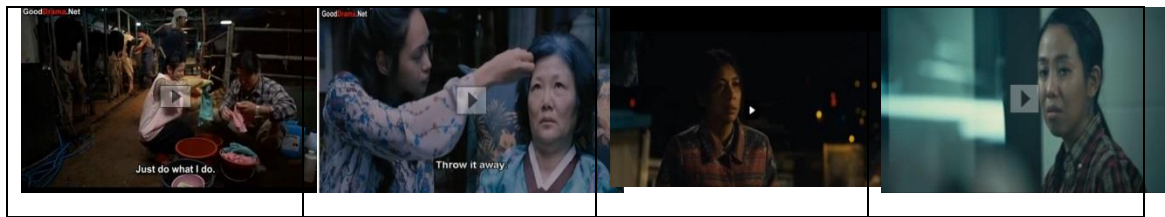


Figure 1. The Filipino wife's physical characteristics in Korean films: dark-skinned, big-eyed, and long-haired. She is shabbily dressed, which signals her working class background (S.-H. Kim, 2013 ; H. Lee, 2011 ; C.-W. Park, 2009; J.-P. Park, 2005)

Two films, *You Are My Sunshine* and *Thirst*, depict her as a young and newly married woman in her 20s. In these two films, the Filipino wife is a housewife who obediently follows her husband wherever he goes, be it assist her husband while working at the farm like in *You Are My Sunshine* or to accompany her husband in social events such as mah jong games like in *Thirst*. Because she is new to Korea, she cannot speak Korean yet and is thus highly dependent on her husband.

The films *Punch* and *My Little Hero*, meanwhile, depict the Filipino wife as a middle- aged woman. Her heart has been toughened by living in Korea for a long time. Korea is already familiar to her and she can hold conversations in Korean well. Thus, she is portrayed as quite cynical in terms of Koreans' level of acceptance toward foreigners and how abundant opportunities are in Korea. Moreover, she is usually separated from her Korean husband. She has one son and she works in working class jobs such as factory worker and restaurant server.

4.3 Intra-diegetic Gaze between the Filipino wife and Korean characters in the film

The relationship of the Filipino wife with Korean characters in the film depends on whether she is newly married or separated from her husband. If she is newly married, her primary relationship is with her husband. She is often shown happily and obediently following her husband while doing farm work (like in *You Are My Sunshine*) or accompanying him at social events such as mah jong games with her husband's friends (like in *Thirst*).

If she is separated from her husband, however, her primary relationship is with her son. She is often seen taking care of her son at the house, doing domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning, and ensuring that her son is protected from harm. Unlike the newly married Filipino wife, the separated Filipino wife possesses a certain degree of financial independence by working in low-skilled jobs such as factories (such as a garment factory in *My Little Hero*) or a restaurant (like being a waitress in *Punch*).

4.4 Intra-Diegetic Gaze between newly married Filipina wife and Korean husband

In the film *You Are My Sunshine* the newly married Filipino wife's close proximity with her husband often takes place while doing farm work. The Filipino wife is seen mostly following her husband around and helping him with farm tasks. She does simple tasks such as folding gloves. When her husband is tired, she devotedly wipes the sweat from her husband's forehead. Although she has no dialog while interacting with her husband because she has not learned to speak Korean yet, she uses body language such as nodding and obediently does what is told to her.



Figure 2. Filipina wife and her Korean husband while working at the farm.

Screenshot from the movie 너는 내 운명 / You are My Sunshine (J.-P. Park, 2005)

In Figure 2, the interaction between the Filipino wife and her Korean husband while doing farm work is seen. Here, she is like a wife imported from the Philippines mainly to help with farm chores. Even if the intra-diegetic gaze between husband and wife as characters in the film is reciprocal in that both characters communicate to each other, and intimate in that they are physically near each other, the context in which they are shown distorts this loving and caring husband-wife dynamic as Koreans know it. Instead, the dynamic between husband and wife is that of Korean husband as boss and Filipino wife as helper.

However, this boss-helper relationship between Filipino wife and Korean husband is portrayed as a stark contrast the lead male character Seok Joong's own marriage, which is full of complications. These complications include Eun-Ha's bad ex-husband, Eun-Ha's involvement in prostitution, her eventual HIV infection, and the shame this brings to Seok Joong's family. The international marriage is also portrayed as something better compared to a purely Korean marriage. Marriage to a Filipino wife is depicted as simple and smooth-sailing compared to being married to a Korean wife. In the film, Filipino wife is depicted as sweet, subservient, easy to get

along with. The Korean wife, in contrast, carries a lot of complications (ie, being previously married, taking part in prostitution, contacting a disease such as AIDS).

In the film *Thirst* the newly married Filipino wife Evelyn's social proximity with her husband Young Doo often takes place during the weekly mah jong games at Mrs. Ra's house. Although she is there as a guest and as Young Doo's wife, most of her exposure in the film consists of doing kitchen chores such as making kimbap and slicing fruit, washing the dishes, assisting the paralyzed Mrs. Ra, and bringing food and vodka for the mah jong group. Even in scenes where she is situated in social proximity to her husband, she is still doing household chores. Except for her husband, no one else pays much attention to her in mah jong games majority of the time. She is a quiet presence who does domestic chores while the men play and socialize with each other. Interestingly, the Korean women in this scene are also silent characters who quietly do the kitchen chores. The only time Evelyn is invited to play mah jong in the film is when she plays alongside Mrs. Ra, who is sick with stroke. Lady Ra's disability necessitates the assistance from Evelyn.

Young Doo is a dam manager who seems to have married late. Although he is not disabled, sick, or a member of the working class, his unappealing physical looks may have deterred Korean women from seeing him as a suitable marriage partner.



Figure 3. Filipina wife does domestic chores together with Korean women, while men get ready to play mah jong. Screenshot from *박주*/ Thirst (C.-W. Park, 2009)

In Figure 3, we see the typical interactions between the Filipino wife and other Korean characters during the weekly mah jong games. The long shot signals an impersonal look by the camera. Interactions between characters also differ. For the women, their gaze is object-oriented, that is, toward their chores. The men's gaze, meanwhile, are semi-reciprocal. Young Do and the Police Chief give due attention to Fr. Sang Hyun as a priest, whereas Fr. Sang Hyun's gaze is drawn toward Tae Ju, whom he finds oddly attractive. In this scene, no one is paying attention to the Filipina wife who quietly cuts fruit. Succeeding shots repeat this pattern, with the Filipina wife in a series of medium shots, which lend a social mode to the mah jong playing atmosphere, and which situate her in quiet domestic tasks at the background, while the other Korean male characters and Mrs. Rah play mah jong at the foreground.

Interestingly, Evelyn is frequently filmed at the background of gatherings at the house. She is a passive figure in the shots. However, when the killers/vampires are slowly being revealed and when she is about to be killed, she is not in the background anymore. She becomes an active character in the shots. That is, Evelyn's death scene is more elaborate than other Korean characters. This is inversely

proportional to her previous scenes of servitude which are quick and snappy on camera. There are a lot of frontal angles in Evelyn's death scene, which connotes huge character involvement. Perhaps this elaborate death scene can be interpreted as an unconscious "killing of the outsider".

4.5 Intra-diegetic gaze between separated Filipino wife and Korean husband

The marital relationship of Filipino wives who have been living in Korea for a long time is depicted as a marriage that has turned sour in *Punch and My Little Hero*. This is a stark contrast to the sweetness between newly married Filipino and Korean couples in *You Are My Sunshine* and *Thirst*. This seems to show that the seemingly stable and happy interaction at the start of a Filipino and Korean married couple's life eventually turns sour due to cultural misunderstandings. Separation is the end result.

This is particularly apparent in the relationship between Glory's mother and father in *My Little Hero*. They have been separated for many years already. In the film, the Filipino wife is preparing to return to the Philippines with her son Glory, in accordance to the Korean husband's wishes. She and her son Glory are unwanted by her Korean husband, who is portrayed as an unsuccessful man with a working class background. Thus, when Glory mentions his father's name in the television singing competition, the Korean husband angrily storms at his ex-wife's house demanding to know why they haven't left Korea yet and why his name had to be mentioned in Korean television. He clearly doesn't want any connection with his ex-wife and son, after claiming to have tried to be a good family man but failed.



Figure 4. Glory's mother in a heated conversation with her former Korean husband. Screenshot from *마이 리틀 히어로* / My Little Hero (S.-H. Kim, 2013)

In Figure 4, the camera sees the Filipina wife through a close up shot, which connotes an intimate or personal mode. As she talks, her facial expressions are fully seen – her hurt, her anger, and her pain. The camera shows an intimate view of the dynamic between the Filipina wife and her ex-husband, which is characterized by fighting, disagreement, and a desire to disconnect. Although the gaze between these characters is reciprocal and their physical distance with each other is personal, the context of their interaction is fiery, fierce, and full of hatred. In the film, there seems to be no hope of reconciliation with the Korean husband, unlike in the film *Punch*.

Like in *A Wonderful Moment*, the Filipino wife in *Punch* (known by her Korean name Lee Sook Hee—but no one calls her by this name in the film) has also been separated from her husband for several years already. Thus, in the beginning of the film when she meets her husband again after her long absence in his life, her interactions with her husband, a hunchbacked cabaret dancer, are filled with tension. Although not explicitly shown in the film, it is implied that they separated because other Koreans looked down on the Filipino wife and treated her like a maid from a poor country despite being an educated person. Later on, husband and wife decide

to reunite for the sake of their son Wandeuk. When they begin to settle their differences, their interaction becomes a loving relationship between husband and wife.



Figure 5. Tension-filled dialog between Filipina wife and Korean husband after not seeing each other in many years. Screenshot from *완득이* / Punch (H. Lee, 2011)

Figure 5 shows a tension-filled dialog between the Filipina wife and her Korean husband. This is the first time they see each other after separating a few years back. Unlike the Filipina wife's tenderness when interacting with Wandeuk, this scene shows the Filipina wife assertively telling her husband that Wandeuk is not being raised properly (he eats alone, does household chores alone, and is left at the house alone), and that something should be done to make life better for Wandeuk. The camera shows them in long shot, facing each other in personal proximity and reciprocal attention. This shot shows that they are willing to talk and settle their differences, and possibly, reunite, which they do at the end of the film. This is because the Filipino wife is also portrayed as someone who can look beyond physical attributes and material things. During a heart-to-heart talk with Wandeuk, the Filipino wife admitted that when she married her husband, she married him for his good heart and not because he came from a prosperous country like Korea.

4.6 Intradiegetic gaze between separated Filipino wife and her son

A close relationship between Filipino mother and son is apparent in both *My Little Hero* and *Punch*. More than the husband, a lot of the reciprocal attention and intimate proximity happens between mother and son.



Figure 6. Glory's mother hugs and comforts her son after being neglected by Glory's father. Screenshot from *마이 리틀 히어로* / *My Little Hero* (S.-H.

Kim, 2013)

Figure 6, for example, is one such scene. Glory's mother is shown hugging and comforting him. In this shot, Glory is crying because he saw his father leave without seeing him or saying anything to him. This is after the heated argument between the Filipina wife and her Korean ex-husband in Figure 4.

The camera shows the Filipina wife with her son closely and intimately, which gives a good perspective on how she is as a mother. The camera shows her face, which is full of concern. It also shows her very close proximity to her son. Throughout the whole movie, the only person with whom she is closely positioned with is her son. All the others are just either in personal or social proximity. Blurred at the background are musical director Il-Han and assistant director Sung Hee, who are standing a few meters away.

In *Punch*, meanwhile, when the Filipina wife meets her son, a lot of her scenes involve doing domestic chores for him such as cooking or serving food (see Figure 7). Even her job is related to service. This kind of portrayal relegates the Filipina wife in the domestic sphere, much like in how Confucian expectations of women are.



Figure 7. The Filipina wife visits Wandeuk at his house and cooks for him.

Screenshot from *완득이* / *Punch* (H. Lee, 2011)

In the whole film, all the camera shots and the dialog between characters reveal that the Filipino wife's reciprocal attention involves the following: 1. Wandeuk getting to know his mother; 2. The Filipina wife re-building her broken relationship with her husband; 3. The Filipina wife at her workplace; 4. The Filipina wife as a homemaker; 5. The Filipina wife as a multicultural advocate.

In terms of proximity, the following was observed: 1. Filipina wife always walks behind Wandeuk, 2. Personal and intimate spaces are mostly with Wandeuk first, and husband the next, 3. Reciprocal attention at the workplace shows Filipina wife's friendly relationship with people in the workplace, compared to the Filipina wife in the film *My Little Hero* who is seen alone and isolated at the factory. 4. As a homemaker, a lot of her interactions revolves around cooking and serving the family,

especially her son. It also involves knowing her husband's eating preferences, 5. As a multicultural advocate, which was seen at the end of the film, the Filipina wife served as a teacher of Korean cuisine to fellow migrants.

4.7 Characteristics and Representations of the Filipino Wife

Based from the representations gathered from the four Korean films featuring Filipino migrant wives, three common representations were identified. These representations form the images of Filipino migrant wives in Korean society as reflected in Korean films.

1. Filipino Migrant Wives as Educated but Poor Women Marrying for Money

The movies portray Filipino migrant wives as educated but poor women who marry Korean men for money. This is articulated most in the film **완득이** / Punch (H. Lee, 2011) when Wandeuk angrily assumed that his mother, whom he has never met yet, merely married for money and then abandoned him. But then his father Gak-Seol made an effort to correct this notion by emphasizing that she may have come from a poor country, but that she is an educated woman who should be treated well as a person.

Although this is not explicitly stated in **박쥐** / Thirst (C.-W. Park, 2009) and **너는 내 운명** / You are My Sunshine (J.-P. Park, 2005), the ability of the Filipino migrant wives in these films to speak in English hints at the education they received from their home country.

Poverty, however, forced these women to marry men from an affluent nation like Korea even if these men belong to the lower rung of society (farmers, disabled men, working class urban men)—or so the recurring narratives of these films go.

These women supposedly seek a better life by marrying these men. Wandeuk's mother married a hunchback cabaret dancer, the Filipina wife in *You are My Sunshine* married a farmer, and the Filipina wives in *Thirst* and *My Little Hero* married a working class urban man.

2. Filipina wife as sexual object and object of curiosity

This representation was evident in *You Are My Sunshine* (J.-P. Park, 2005), specifically in the scene where the farmers are taking a break in a vacant lot where dead pigs are being buried due to cholera. While talking to each other, the conversation shifts to the head farmer's married life. The subordinates are particularly curious about the head farmer's private life with his wife. This leads Chul Kyu, one of the subordinates, to shyly ask, "When you guys make love, does she moan in English?" This question immediately elicits an annoyed "You son of a....!!!!" as a response from the head farmer. Seok Joong chimes in to tell Chul Kyu "In Filipino, fool!"

Although the Filipina wife is not present in the scene, she is being talked about by the men out of curiosity. Because she is different, questions about her are asked. She is seen as a sexual object by the men, except for the husband who gets offended by the question.

3. Filipino Migrant Wives as Caring Catholic Mother

Filipino migrant wives' identities were tightly intertwined with Catholicism, the predominant religion in the Philippines. As such, portrayals of Filipino migrant wives in films such as *Thirst* and *Punch* show them either in church, praying, or with priests. The church, aside from their home, is their primary contact point with Korean society.

As a caring Catholic mother and wife, Wandeuik's mother is often shown doing household chores, especially cooking food for Wandeuik. This is how her devotion is shown to her son.

In the film *My Little Hero*, the mother's devotion to her son was her central role in the story. She was often seen taking care of her son at home and looking out for her son's welfare.

4. Filipino Migrant Wives as Having Ambiguous Relationship with Husband

In all four films featuring Filipino migrant wives, the relationship with the Korean husband is often ambiguous. There is no fixed representation. Half of the films examined—*You are My Sunshine* and *Thirst*—portray the relationship between a Korean husband and a Filipino migrant wife as a sweet relationship. As newly married couples, the international marriages in these films are depicted as something blossoming and full of promise. The wives are new to Korea, hence, they do not speak Korean fluently yet. However, despite the language barrier, their marriages are portrayed as loving marriages. The other half of the films examined, meanwhile, portray marriages between Korean husbands and Filipino migrant wives as a bittersweet family relationship. That is, the marriage turns bitter after some time in

terms of the wife's relationship with the husband, but remains sweet in terms of the wife's motherly relationship with her son.

This is clearly seen in *My Little Hero* wherein the Filipino wife is being forced to return to the Philippines, together with their son, by her Korean husband. The scene depicting their argument about this hints at the hopelessness of getting back together. However, because of the Filipino wife's love and devotion to her son, a sweet spot in her life remains.

In contrast, hopefulness about a possible reconciliation between estranged Korean husband and Filipino wife abounded in *Punch*. Although they have been separated for many years, they rekindled their relationship after Wandeuk's teacher, an advocate for multiculturalism, made an effort to introduce Wandeuk to his mother. The couple decided to live together again for the sake of Wandeuk.

It is interesting to note, though, that the portrayal of a multicultural family in these films did not include parents-in-law, unlike in Vietnamese migrant wives' media portrayals, which will be discussed in-depth in the succeeding pages of this research.

4.8 Multiculturality as a vague but slowly and steadily forming concept.

Prior to the emergence of the films *My Little Hero* and *Punch*, Filipino migrant wives were just present in films such as *You Are My Sunshine* and *Thirst* as background characters. Although there is foreign presence in *You Are My Sunshine* and *Thirst*, films produced in the early 2000s, there was no apparent attempt to elevate their presence to a multicultural discourse. In *Punch* and *My Little Hero*, films produced in the next decade (2011 and 2013, respectively), there is an apparent and conscious effort to inject a multicultural discourse in these films.

In *Punch*, the construction of a multicultural center at the end of the film was initiated by Wandeuk's teacher, who envisioned a center where migrant people can gather and help each other adapt to life in Korea. This multicultural center is initiated by the Korean character out of guilt for his father's abuse of migrant workers in his factory. Although the role of the Filipino wife in the center was implied, her quietness during the scene where this multicultural center was being planned and talked about between the Koreans at the dinner table hints at the birth of an effort to raise a multicultural society, and not exactly the birth of an actual multicultural one. Moreover, there is no direct input and involvement from the Filipino wife in the planning of a multicultural center.

In *My Little Hero*, meanwhile, the Filipino wife questioned the ability of Korea to accept someone like her, who is a migrant wife and looks starkly different from Koreans. She also questioned the notion of Korea as a land of opportunity. After living there for many years, she became disillusioned, which led to her preparations to come back to the Philippines with her son. The questions of acceptance and opportunity were answered through her son Glory, who was eventually recognized as Korean in the film by virtue of his ancestry and valuable artistic talent. The Filipina wife's own acceptance in Korean society, however, was not answered directly in the film. The mother gave birth to Glory, a child from an international marriage who is sometimes considered Korean, sometimes not. This seems to point out that although the acceptance of the mother (conduit for giving birth to Korean) may be questionable and uncertain, the acceptance of the child is possible, at least in the film.

In this case, the Filipino wife is used in terms of reproductive labor (Cheng, 2011; S. Kim, 2009; Siapno, 2011) but is later on brought at the brink of rejection in Korean society because of her racial difference. Moreover, because Korean society believes that a Korean is identified according to shared bloodline and common ancestry (C. S. Kim, 2011; S. Kim, 2009; Shin, 2003), only her son has the chance to be accepted within Korean society.

Filipino migrant wives' identities and representations aren't as tightly conceived compared to Vietnamese migrant wives. As will be seen in the succeeding parts of this research project, Vietnamese wives' representations and portrayals are more tightly conceived in Koreans' minds, as reflected in the television dramas *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride*.

4.9 Vietnamese Wives in Korean Television

The television series that were examined are:

하노이 신부 / *Hanoi Bride* (G.-R. Park, 2005) is the story between Eun Woo, a young Korean doctor who works in Hanoi, and Thi Vu, a young Vietnamese woman that Eun Woo falls in love with. It is the story of their journey toward marriage. It starts from Hanoi in Vietnam where they first meet and eventually separate. It then continues in Seoul, Korea where Thi Vu is about to marry Eun Woo's older brother Seok Woo. However, Eun Woo and Thi Vu eventually sort out their problems and misunderstandings, and they decide to be together again. The story comes full circle in Hanoi where they re-unite and rekindle their love.

황금신부/ Golden Bride (Woon, 2007) is the story of Jin Joo, a half-Vietnamese, half-Korean woman who moves to Korea to marry Jun Woo, a good-looking and well-educated Korean man who is sick with panic disorder. Jin Joo was chosen by Han Sook, Jun Woo's mother, to heal her son. The story revolves around Jin Joo's efforts to heal Jun Woo of his sickness, and Jun Woo's efforts to help Jin Joo find her Korean father.

In the following sections, the Vietnamese wife is examined according to three factors. First, the Vietnamese wife is examined according to the choices made in portraying her in the production of the television drama. This includes her physical attributes, age, occupation, education, etc. Second, she is examined according to the intra-diegetic gaze, that is, her interactions in terms of proximity and dialog with Korean characters in the television drama. Third, she is examined according to common characteristics and traits in her portrayal, specifically, her representations.

4.10 Looking at the Vietnamese Wife: Choices made in portraying her

Vietnamese wives in the two television series examined are often portrayed as young and beautiful women in their 20s. They are slim-bodied, long-haired, and fair-skinned, much like a Korean woman. That is why, unlike Filipino wives in Korean films which are portrayed by Filipino actresses, Vietnamese wives are portrayed by Korean actresses.

Thi Vu, the main character in *Hanoi Bride*, hails from Hanoi, Vietnam. She is a college student in her 20s, taking up Korean language studies. She works as a part-time translator for Eun Woo, who is a doctor in Vietnam. She also works as a translator for a matchmaking agency.

She resembles a Korean woman in looks, way of dressing, manner of speaking, and actions. This is the reason why, when she arrives in Korea to meet Seok Woo's family, the townspeople are surprised with how she is as pretty as a Korean woman. They are also surprised with the level of education she has, considering that she is Vietnamese and that she is about to marry an uneducated farmer like Seok Woo.

Jin Joo, in the television series *Golden Bride*, is a 21-year old half-Vietnamese, half-Korean woman. In contrast to Thi Vu in *Hanoi Bride*, Jin Joo is portrayed as a dark-skinned (although not as dark as Filipino wives' skin) and unsophisticated Vietnamese woman. Her Korean father abandoned her and her mother when she was 1 year old. As such, she was almost always bullied as a child for being of mixed heritage. Moreover, she was also forced to take on odd jobs to help her mother make ends meet. Aside from working as a translator at the matchmaking agency, she also sells various trinkets and other odd little things to Korean men getting the services of the matchmaking agency. She only received high school education because of poverty, and this becomes a point of insecurity when she moves to Korea and meets Korean women.

At first, her manner of dressing is tacky and her actions tend to be childish and impulsive. This old-fashioned and unsophisticated image does not last long, though. As time passes in the drama, Jin Joo begins to look more Korean in her manner of dressing, in her hairstyle and makeup, and in her Korean speech, which begins to sound more naturally Korean. This is a progression from her initial portrayal as a country bumpkin into a woman resembling a real Korean. What finally makes her decide to change her style is her insecurity and jealousy toward Jun Woo's

college friend In Kyung, who has harbored romantic feelings for Jun Woo through the years. Because Jin Joo does not have a college education, this becomes a point of insecurity for her when she meets a worldly and educated Korean woman like In Kyung. After a misunderstanding with Jun Woo, Jin Joo decides to change her style at the salon to a sophisticated and elegant image of a wife that she thinks will fit Jun Woo more. With this new image, Jin Joo is portrayed and seen as more beautiful because she looks more “Korean”, following Korean standards of beauty.

4.11 Vietnamese wives’ exotic portrayals through the *ao dai*

In both television series, Vietnamese wives are frequently shown wearing the *ao dai*, the traditional Vietnamese dress. As such, they are exoticized in Korean audiences’ eyes.

For example, when Thi Vu first appears in the television drama, she is shown wearing the *ao dai*. While other peripheral Vietnamese female characters are shown wearing regular contemporary clothes, Thi Vu is seen wearing the *ao dai* to provide a visual cue that she is, indeed, Vietnamese (although played by a Korean actress). It is worth noting that Eun Woo prefers to see Thi Vu in the traditional Vietnamese dress instead of regular, contemporary clothes.



Figure 8. Thi Vu wearing the *ao dai* (traditional Vietnamese dress) on the way to work, at the beginning of “Hanoi Bride”. Screenshot from the Korean television

drama *하노이 신부* / Hanoi Bride (G.-R. Park, 2005)

The end of the television series, which is set in Hanoi, also shows Thi Vu wearing an *ao dai* again. This time around, though, Thi Vu is shown working as a tourist guide for Koreans. Again, this seems to serve as a visual cue that the setting has been changed from Seoul to Hanoi, and to highlight Thi Vu's Vietnamese quality (including for Korean tourists in the TV show) despite resembling a Korean woman.

In the beginning of *Golden Bride*, meanwhile, Jin Joo is shown wearing an *ao dai*, much like Thi Vu's character in *Hanoi Bride*. As such, the Vietnamese woman is again exoticized in Korean viewers' eyes to provide a visual cue that the Korean actress playing Jin Joo's part is, indeed, a Vietnamese character.

When Jin Joo arrives in Korea, she is again shown wearing an *ao dai* and a Vietnamese hat. This becomes a source of embarrassment for her mother-in-law Han Sook. This leads Han Sook to drag Jin Joo to the restroom, and to rummage through her luggage to search for a more contemporary set of clothes.



Figure 9. Jin Joo arrives in Korea wearing traditional Vietnamese clothes, emphasizing her Vietnamese heritage. Screenshot from **황금신부**/Golden

Bride (Woon, 2007)



Figure 10. Han Sook order Jin Joo to change her clothes. Screenshot from

황금신부/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

Figures 9 and 10 are sample shots of this scene. The long, frontal shots emphasize Jin Joo's foreignness and cluelessness about the contemporary world, especially Korea. This elicits an embarrassed reaction from Han Sook and her sister-in-law Geum Ja, which makes them lead Jin Joo from a public space in the airport to the private space (the toilet) to make Jin Joo change her tacky appearance.

This tackiness in dressing goes on until about halfway through the 64-episode television drama. For example, while accompanying Jun Woo to go hiking, she comes out in her own version of “hiking clothes” – rubber slippers, baggy jogging pants, baggy t-shirt, and traditional Vietnamese straw hat (see Figure 11). Jin Joo is portrayed as a Vietnamese woman with a tacky and unsophisticated taste. She does not know about the finer things in life unlike Koreans.



Figure 11. Jin Joo goes hiking. Screenshot from 황금신부/Golden Bride (Woon,

2007)

As she adapts to the Korean way of life and as she becomes a successful rice cake chef later on, she transforms into a more Korean-looking woman in terms of style, way of acting, and speech towards the latter half of the television series (See Figure 12).



Figure 12. Jin Joo transforms from tacky Vietnamese woman to tasteful Korean woman. Screenshot from *황금신부*/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

The *ao dai* as a tool for highlighting Vietnamese wives' Vietnamese heritage is also applied to peripheral characters playing the role of potential Vietnamese wives in *Golden Bride*. The television drama begins with the scene of a matchmaking agency in Ho Chi Minh City pairing potential Korean husbands with potential Vietnamese wives. Vietnamese wives are exoticized by being shown wearing the *ao dai* instead of contemporary clothes. Moreover, they are marketed as beautiful young ladies who are amiable, easy-to-get-along-with and who love simple gifts, like in the following dialog (Woon, 2007):

At the matchmaking agency in Vietnam. The marriage broker/owner of the agency and Korean men looking for marriage partners are gathered inside.

Marriage Broker: It's really a great time for a young fellow to get married. In conclusion, we are living in a global period. Like how we have a global economy, global politics, global education. We even have global marriage now! When I was attending matchmaking sessions, Korea was too small. You need to look up to the

sky to pluck the stars, and dig the ground to plant seeds. You need to put in effort to gain beauty. Dislike, old single women. Dislike, mothers-in-law. Own a house and land. Have money and collections. Bragging about perfect faces, bodies and everything! Say no to Korea!

Prospective Korean groom: That's great!

Marriage Broker: The Vietnamese ladies, they're easy to deal with, as long as you guys don't flirt with other women. They'll adore you. I've lived like this myself. I got married to a Vietnamese woman 15 years ago. I have children of my own and take good care of my in-laws. And I've lived happily ever since---with this face of mine.

Prospective grooms clap. They begin cheering.

Marriage Broker: I can find my other half! I can get married!

Grooms: I can find my other half! I can get married!

Marriage Broker: Again! I can find my other half! I can get married!

Grooms: I can find my other half! I can get married!



Figure 13. Prospective Vietnamese brides at the Hanoi matchmaking agency.

Screenshot from **황금신부**/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

Figure 13 is a long shot of the prospective Vietnamese brides. Their attention is directed at Jin Joo as she teaches them a few Korean words and customs, so we can only see their rear. They are positioned on a line, which actually resembles an assembly line. This further emphasizes how they are indeed like a commodity.



Figure 14. Prospective Vietnamese brides being matched to prospective Korean husbands in Hanoi matchmaking agency. Screenshot from **황금신부**/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

Figure 14 is the actual gathering of prospective Korean husbands and prospective Korean wives. Again, it is a long shot and their faces cannot be clearly seen, as if they are just one among many. Their attention is directed at the owner of the matchmaking agency as he introduces them to each other. They are again positioned like an assembly line, which again tells of how Vietnamese brides are treated as a commodity.

4.12 Vietnamese wives with Korean language fluency

Both *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride* depict Vietnamese wives Thi Vu and Jin Joo as fluent in conversational Korean. They can speak with Koreans effortlessly. When they speak, Koreans cannot tell that they are foreign wives.

Thi Vu, for example, speaks Korean in near-native fluency because her older sister's husband was a Korean teacher who lived with them in Vietnam. She can also speak Korean well because she is a Korean language student.

Jin Joo in *Golden Bride* can speak basic conversational Korean because she learned the language from a Korean person at a church in Ho Chi Minh city. However, she is not as fluent as the character of Thi Vu in the television drama *Hanoi Bride*. Jin Joo becomes fluent in Korean once she moves to Korea as a Vietnamese wife.

4.13 Intra-diegetic Gaze between the Vietnamese wife and Korean characters

In both *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride*, the Vietnamese wife had the closest proximity to her husband, just like in depictions of Filipino wives. However, unlike Filipino wives, Vietnamese wives also interacted with other members of the Korean family, especially parents-in-law. Siblings-in-law as well as neighbors and other community members were also part of the Vietnamese wife's world. In the case of Jin Joo in *Golden Bride*, she also had close interactions with her son during the last couple of episodes of the TV series.

4.14 Vietnamese wife and her Korean husband

Golden Bride best illustrates the movement of the Vietnamese wife from stranger (social distance) to real wife (intimate distance). When Jun Woo begins to live with Jin Joo in Korea, at first, Jun Woo just sees Jin Joo as a poor bride that his mother bought from Vietnam. Jun Woo believes that a marriage partner must be someone he loves, respects, and wants. He simply did not see Jin Joo in that way in the beginning. Also, because Jun Woo is sick with panic disorder, his confidence level is low. He thus believes he is not qualified to marry even a Vietnamese girl like Jin Joo. It is important for him to marry someone whom he can provide for, care for, and protect.

But eventually, Jin Joo's presence in Jun Woo's life turns into love when he realizes how Jin Joo sincerely cares for him. The grandest gesture that Jin Joo made for Jun Woo was to heal him from his sickness. Jin Joo called Jun Woo's doctor every day to discuss treatment methods, even if the doctor found it a bit bothersome. She also faithfully wrote in the treatment journal daily. Whenever Jun Woo pushed her away, Jin Joo persisted in helping him overcome his panic disorder by accompanying him on mountain hiking trips and subway rides.



Figure 15. Jun Woo recognizes Jin Joo's role in his life as panacea. Screenshot from **황금신부**/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

The most defining scene of this movement from stranger to real wife was when Jun Woo acknowledges his wife Jin Joo's healing power through the metaphor of waterbirds. Figure 15 illustrates this scene. Here, Jun Woo tells Jin Joo about how he thinks of her as his healer. Husband and wife are positioned intimately as they reciprocally talk to each other through a medium shot. Their hands are linked together. This connotes their closeness to each other. He says:

“I once read a story about waterbirds. Those birds, they fly in pairs across the oceans until one of them is tired, and then the other one carries him on its back. Whenever I see you, I think about the waterbirds. At my most difficult

and most embarrassing moments, you carried me and made me fly again (Woon, 2007).”

4.15 Vietnamese wife and her parents-in-law

Vietnamese wives are seen interacting with their parents-in-law in *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride*. This is not the case in the films featuring Filipino wives, where no such interactions between Filipino wives and parents-in-law were seen.

Interactions between Vietnamese wife and mother-in-law in *Hanoi Bride* quickly moved from social mode to intimate mode. From the social mode of Thi Vu performing the big bow for her future mother-in-law when she first meets her in Korea to an intimate mode where mother-in-law gives Thi Vu her jade ring—a family heirloom—because she will occupy the position of first daughter-in-law as Seok Woo’s future bride, Thi Vu’s place in the Korean family is firm. This is despite her being Vietnamese (See Figure 16).



Figure 16. Sok Woo’s mother gives Thi Vu her precious jade ring. Screenshot from the Korean television drama *하노이 신부*/ *Hanoi Bride* (G.-R. Park, 2005).

Here, the medium shot connotes a social mode for the mother, who gladly gives the jade ring to her future daughter-in-law. As Thi Vu walks to her, the mother holds her hand. The distance between future mother-in-law and future daughter-in-law is intimate and the attention is reciprocal. Then the mother takes off the jade ring from her finger and gives it to Thi Vu. She says gently, “You don’t have to wear it. Just keep it as a token of my gratitude (G.-R. Park, 2005).” It can be thus deduced that the mother treats Thi Vu kindly because of her gratitude for agreeing to marry her son Seok Woo, an aging farmer who has zero chance of finding a Korean wife. She then goes on to say, “I was saving it to give to my daughter-in-law some day. I heard that you should wed in Vietnam before you do the wedding march in Korea. But can’t we do it the other way around? Since you are here, why don’t we have a wedding march, and then go back? (G.-R. Park, 2005)” which cements her acceptance of Thi Vu as Sok Woo’s future wife.

However, this treatment is shaken when Seok Woo (who used to be Thi Vu’s future bride) decides to be honest with his feelings and marry his childhood friend Il Han instead, while Eun Woo (Thi Vu’s first love while still in Vietnam) decides to be honest with his feelings as well and declares his plan to marry Thi Vu. The Korean mother refuses this plan because Thi Vu, a Vietnamese, is seen as someone who is fit only for a Korean farmer, as seen in the dialog below. Here, the mother objects to Eun Woo, a doctor, marrying a Vietnamese woman. Her mother sees Miri, another doctor, as a more suitable match for Eun Woo. For the mother, Sok Woo, who is a farmer past the age of marriage, is more suitable for Thi Vu, who is a young, beautiful, college-educated Vietnamese but is inferior to a Korean woman. In the

following dialog, Thi Vu is referred to as a “stone” while a Korean woman is referred to as a “diamond” (G.-R. Park, 2005):

At the hospital, in mom’s room. Seok Woo comes with Il Lan to talk about their marriage, and to cancel his marriage to Thi Vu.

Seok Woo: Mom, I thought about it, and I don’t think it will work.

Mom: What?

Seok Woo: I’m your eldest son. I don’t think a foreign wife would do.

Mom: What are you saying? Are you trying to turn down what’s best for you? At first I, too, was not sure. But she’s sweet and pretty. Where else can you get that kind of girl? You fool.

Seok Woo: Mom...

Il Lan: If it’s okay with you, I want to marry Sok Woo.

Mom: Huh?

Il Lan: If you allow us, I want to be your daughter-in-law.

Mom: You know, Seok Woo is just a farmer boy. You’re a college graduate. You cannot possibly want him.

Il Lan: I didn’t know it before. But when he decided to marry someone else, then I realized how special he is.

Mom: (to Seok Woo) Did you know that, too? How about Thi Vu? What’s to come of Thi Vu?

Eun Woo and Thi Vu enter the room.

Eun Woo: Thi Vu can be your daughter in law as well.

Sok Woo and Il Lan look surprised.

Mom: Well, that's all good, but your brother can't have two brides.

Eun Woo: Of course not. She will marry me.

Mom: Huh? Are you making fun of your old mother? (To Thi Vu) Tell me yourself?

What is this all about?

Thi Vu: I'm sorry....

Mom: Sorry? Are you saying that my son is not joking?

Eun Woo: As you all know, I've done so much bad things so...

Mom: I don't know what you did to pull off something like this but marriage is a serious business!

Eun Woo: I owe her my heart. And you like Thi Vu, so...

Mom throws a pillow at Eun Woo.

Mom: Not as your mate! For your brother! For your 40-year old brother who couldn't even get a date! Not you! How can you pick a worthless stone beside a diamond? Isn't Miri good enough for you? I can never allow it unless you drag me into the grave yourself. Never! So if you'll marry that girl, you just might as well die alone.

Thi Vu is accepted by her Korean mother-in-law as a wife to Seok Woo, who the mother thinks should be married as soon as possible because of Sok Woo's old age and hopeless status as a farmer. This view changes later on in the television series when roles are reversed and Il-Han's parents refuse to let Il-Han marry Seok Woo because he is a "stone" while their daughter Il-Han is a "diamond". The mother-in-law then realizes her bad treatment of Thi Vu when the same thing happens to her son. She then decides to accept Thi Vu as Eun Woo's bride.

In *Golden Bride*, meanwhile, although Jin Joo is half-Vietnamese, half-Korean, and practically a foreigner, she was treated like real daughter of the family by her parents-in-law. Jin Joo is treated the way a Korean Confucian family treats the eldest daughter-in-law.



Figure 17. Father-in-law cooks Vietnamese pho for Jin Joo. Screenshot from *황금신부*/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

Both father-in-law and mother-in-law develop deep fondness for Jin Joo. They are both grateful to her for healing Jun Woo's panic disorder. Jin Joo is treated as the eldest daughter-in-law in the Korean family regardless of her background. A particular scene that stands out is after Jun Woo and Jin Joo's honeymoon (Figure 17). When the newlywed couple arrives home, they are treated to special dinner.

The father-in-law also cooks pho, a Vietnamese noodle soup, because he thinks Jin Joo might be missing it. He also explains the importance of a daughter-in-law to Jin Joo in the Korean context, as in the following dialog (Woon, 2007):

Won Mi: Try this Vietnam salguksu. (pho)

Geum Ja: To get the dough done, father hurt his finger, see!

Father-in-Law: Hey, hey, nothing of that sort. I'm fine. (to Jin Joo): Maybe it's different from the real Vietnamese pho. Just think of it as the same as what you have back home and eat a lot.

Jin Joo is on the verge of tears.

Han Sook: Your father-in-law has never given such special treatment to anyone else.

Geum Ja: That's why they say that the one who loves the daughter-in-law is the father-in-law.

Laughter.

Han Soo: You love Jin Joo very much, don't you?

Father-in-Law: Does it need to be said out loud? Don't they say all daughters will be married out of the family? So Jin Joo is the only real "daughter" in this family. (To Jin Joo) Jin Joo, do you know what daughter-in-law means?

Jin Joo: No, father.

Father-in-Law: In our country, the wife of the eldest son is a very important person. Because she has the responsibility of extending the family line, so she is the pillar of

the family. So from now on, we will be handing over our family matters to you. That means, you are really important to us understand?

Han Sook: That's right. As your father mentioned, from now on, we're family. We'll help one another, love one another, and live our lives well. Thank you for agreeing to come to us. We're very grateful.

In this context, Jin Joo's parents-in-law are introducing her to Korea's Confucian values. In particular, Jin Joo is being introduced to the wife's main role of bearing a son. As the wife of the first son in the family, the son that she will give birth to is expected to continue the family line. Jin Joo's role in the family is deemed important.

The importance of the wife in terms of reproductive labor echoes assertions by scholars such as S. Kim (2009), Cheng (2011), and Siapno (2011) that importing foreign brides serves to use women's bodies as conduits for giving birth to Korean sons. Moreover, this importation, in the Southeast Asian case, also entails assimilation and adoption of Korean culture. Hence, they needed to indoctrinate Jin Joo as early as possible.

It is interesting to note, though, that within the family, they accept Jin Joo. But when it comes to how other people outside of the family might think of them, they are cautious and embarrassed to be associated with a half Vietnamese, half Korean family member. For example, in the scene where Jin Joo was supposed to appear on a television show which will help her find her Korean father, only her

husband Jun Woo had the courage to go with her. Her parents-in-law and siblings-in-law were rather worried about what other people will think about their family having a Southeast Asian family member. Also, their appearance on television will reveal their lie to friends that Jin Joo is Korean-American. In this sense, Jin Joo is still an outsider.

This embarrassment eventually fades away as time goes by. One day, out of the blue, Han Sook introduces Jin Joo to Sae Mi's boyfriend Young Soo, during dinner at their house, as her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. This pleases Jin Joo because she finally feels completely accepted by the family. The next day, Jin Joo thanks Han Sook for saying out in the open her Vietnamese heritage. "Now I really feel like I'm your daughter in law (Woon, 2007)," Jin Joo says. Han Sook acknowledges that she should not be embarrassed but instead must be grateful for all that Jin Joo has done for the family.

4.16 Vietnamese wife and her siblings-in-law

Relations between the Vietnamese wife and siblings-in-law, as portrayed in the two Vietnamese television series, are generally amicable. In *Hanoi Bride*, Seok Woo treats Thi Vu with care and sensitivity both when he considers Thi Vu to be his future bride, and also when things fall into place and Thi Vu becomes Eun Woo's bride.

In *Golden Bride*, meanwhile, sisters Won Mi and Sae Mi treat Jin Joo as a real sister-in-law. Won Mi, from the start, already accepted Jin Joo as part of the family. Between the two sisters, Sae Mi is the one who tends to be embarrassed about her Vietnamese sister-in-law. However, this does not make her cruel to Jin Joo. She is

just visibly uncomfortable whenever her sister-in-law is being talked about because of the bad connotations of having a sister-in-law from Southeast Asia, in particular, that the husband who marries a woman from Southeast Asia is not good enough for a Korean woman. An example of this is when she was showing her boyfriend Young Soo some family photos from her phone. Young Soo remarks how foreign-looking Sae Mi's sister-in-law is, after which Sae Mi snatches the phone away from him and insists that Jin Joo is Korean. For Sae Mi, having a Vietnamese sister-in-law is like settling for the second best option.

4.17 Vietnamese wife and Korean community

The Vietnamese wife is seen as part of the larger Korean community in both *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride*. The Vietnamese wife as part of Korean community life is particularly evident in *Hanoi Bride*. Residing in a small Korean town makes news about marrying a foreign bride travel fast among community members. They all know that Thi Vu is from Vietnam and so they are curious about her. They like her enough to even give her the nickname Wolnam, presumably because she hails from Vietnam.

A particular scene that stands out is when Thi Vu comes to meet her future mother-in-law for the first time as Seok Woo's future wife (See Figure 18). When it's time for Thi Vu to perform this ceremonial bow, neighbors gather around the house to observe how she will treat her future mother-in-law. Seok Woo's mother doesn't expect Thi Vu to perform it, since she's from a different country. But they become surprised with how beautiful she is and how well she can do this Korean custom, which leads one neighbor to exclaim, "At first I wondered how frustrated she must

be to find herself a bride from Vietnam. But what I see in front is more than I expected, a Miss Vietnam! (G.-R. Park, 2005)”



Figure 18. Neighbors flock outside the house to observe Thi Vu as she is introduced to Sok Woo’s mother. Screenshot from the Korean television drama

하노이 신부/ Hanoi Bride (G.-R. Park, 2005).

They are impressed that she went to college, like a well-raised Korean woman is. They see her beauty and brains as a blessing for Seok Woo, a farmer who is not highly educated. Thi Vu is depicted as a catch because she is so pretty and smart, and almost unworthy of a Korean farmer.

In *Golden Bride*, Jin Joo is portrayed as less superior and lacking in character and upbringing than Korean girls. Thus, she must catch up with Korean women and be more like them. For example, when Jun Woo completely heals and finds a job, Jin Joo’s insecurity about her low education level and her simple knowledge of the world begins to surface. She begins to be conscious about what she lacks compared to Korean women. On Jun Woo’s first day at the job, she excitedly expects Jun Woo to wear the necktie she bought for him - a flowery yellow necktie which supposedly brings good luck in Vietnamese belief. In Korean society, however, the necktie is seen

as tacky and unfit for a corporate job. Jin Joo doesn't realize this until she accidentally overhears Han Sook and Geum Ja talk about this (Woon, 2007):

Han Sook: Don't hesitate. The first impression is very important in an interview. If you wear such a colorful tie, you're committing suicide. Change it quickly.

Jun Woo: Honestly, I'm rather stressed too. A bank or investment job is where money is managed so...That's why they want a more conservative look.

Han Sook: That's why I'm telling you to change it. Loyalty is good but it should match with reality.

Jun Woo: Then Jin Joo will be very sad. I'll put it on right before the interview.

Han Sook: Ah, that's right!

Geum Ja: That's a good idea. Hey, don't forget to change it then, understand? There's still a lot for Jin Joo to learn. Yes, from now on our Jun Woo is going to dash on a high speed, I wonder if Jin Joo can keep up or not.

Han Sook: Aigoo...she'll hear you!

Geum Ja: That's true! Don't dislike her for that when the time comes. Understand, Jun Woo?

When Jin Joo begins to meet people in Korean society and she comes face to face with Korean women such as Ok Ji Young, Jun Woo's elegant and intelligent ex-fiancee, and Cha In Kyung, Jun Woo's beautiful and intelligent junior in university, Jin Joo begins to feel insecure. She then changes her appearance, style, and behavior to

be like them. She also decides to learn rice cake-making at an etiquette school for the elite so that she can try to match these Korean women in terms of status. This echoes scholarly research and data about how foreign brides are assimilated into Korean society by being more like them in terms of language ability and culture (Cheng, 2011; H.-J. Kim, 2008). In this case, though, Jin Joo is also forced to match Korean girls not just in terms of language and culture, but also in terms of intellectual capacity, status, and personal style and appearance.

4.18 Characteristics and Representations of the Vietnamese Wife

Based from the representations gathered from the two Korean television dramas featuring Vietnamese migrant wives, seven common representations were identified. These representations form the images of Vietnamese migrant wives in Korean society as reflected in Korean television dramas.

1. Vietnamese Wives as a commodity to be traded between potential Korean husbands and potential Korean wives.

In both television dramas, matchmaking agencies was the first point of contact between prospective Korean husbands seeking Vietnamese wives. This is where Vietnamese wives are obtained for a fee. The actual transaction of meeting and choosing wives is portrayed in these television dramas.

The lead Vietnamese characters in the film also work in these agencies as translators. Although not intending to be migrant wives themselves, dire circumstances suddenly force them to marry Koreans. Thi Vu, in *Hanoi Bride* for example, considers marrying Seok Woo, her ex-boyfriend's older brother, to enable her to take revenge. She did not mind marrying a farmer since she came from a

farming family herself. In *Golden Bride*, meanwhile, Jin Joo marries Jun Woo for two reasons: to find her Korean father so that her mother can meet him before her mother turns blind, and because she has fallen in love with Jun Woo after seeing his photo at the matchmaking agency.

Both these television dramas and the Filipino films previously examined reflect the reality pointed out by G. W. Jones (2012) that matchmaking agencies which specifically act as go-between between prospective husbands from wealthier countries like Korea and prospective brides from poorer countries like Vietnam and the Philippines are important routes for international marriage in an increasingly multicultural Korea.

2. Vietnamese Wives as Exoticized Women

In both of these television dramas, the lead Vietnamese characters are initially shown wearing *ao dai*, while in Vietnam. Although in reality, contemporary Vietnamese women do not go around their country wearing this in daily life, their initial appearance seemingly asserts their foreignness and their presence in Vietnam, a country that is foreign to Koreans. Coupled with touristy images of Vietnam, this exoticizes these women in media, and consequently, in Koreans' minds. This is a stark contrast to Filipino wives' portrayals wherein very little local traditional culture is shown.

What is also interesting about these portrayals is the Korean connection that has been established in these women even before they marry Korean men. Jin Joo is half Korean and half Vietnamese, and can speak Korean. Thi Vu is a Korean language college student and had a Korean brother-in-law who taught him Korean, so she can

speak Korean like a native. Filipino wives in the films examined, meanwhile, only learn to speak the language when they begin living in Korea.

This seems to show that there is a closer connection between Korea and Vietnam more than Korea and the Philippines. This was already apparent in a Korean woman and Vietnamese woman's almost similar physical attributes such as the face and light skin color. Another factor that brings them closer together is their cultural proximity in terms of a shared Confucian belief. That is perhaps the reason why, although the Vietnamese wife's foreignness and difference is highlighted through the *ao dai* initially, this impression of foreignness and difference is eventually removed in the television drama. That is, the foreignness and difference is replaced by the Korean viewer's recognition of a similar and familiar physical body, similar Korean language in conversation, and parallel beliefs in terms of Confucianism. This, in turn, reflects the research finding of G. W. Jones (2012) that cultural affinity is a big factor in international marriages in Korea and that consequently, this cultural affinity actually does very little to change the country's diversity and ethnic composition.

3. Vietnamese Wives as Opportunistic Women

Like Filipino wives, Vietnamese wives were initially depicted as poor women who seek to marry for money. Because Korea is an affluent country, Koreans in these television dramas automatically assume that women from poor countries desire to marry Koreans to escape poverty. However, after getting to know the Vietnamese wives' real intentions for marrying, Koreans begin to change their initial impression of these main female characters to a more positive impression. Thi Vu and Jin Joo begin

to be seen as strong and caring women who marry Korean husbands because of real love.

4. Vietnamese Women as Luckier Wives Than Their Predecessors

Points of contact between Koreans and Vietnamese have been established through relatives in the past, but these relationships ended bitterly. Thi Vu's elder sister, for example, was married to a Korean man who worked as a teacher in Vietnam. This man, however, betrayed and left her and their daughter there. Jin Joo's mother was the same. Her mother built a family with a Korean man, who turns out to be the wealthy son of a conglomerate owner. They did not marry officially, making Jin Joo an illegitimate child. Worse, still, mother and daughter were abandoned when Jin Joo was just one year old.

These situations with Thi Vu and Jin Joo's elders are a stark contrast to the positive outcomes in Thi Vu and Jin Joo's marriage with their Korean husbands. Although initially filled with challenges, these challenges were overcome by these women. Both had happy endings with their Korean husbands. This is especially true for Jin Joo's story in *Golden Bride* wherein she marries a good Korean man and meets his Korean father. An important after-effect of this marriage with a Korean man and of meeting his Korean father is the establishment of a center for half-Korean and half-Vietnamese children in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam. Because of her father's guilt over abandoning her when she was just one year old, her father built a center that takes care of half-Vietnamese, half Korean children. Her father stayed in Vietnam to work in the center.

5. Vietnamese Wives as Malleable Wives

Both television dramas depict the Vietnamese wife as a malleable woman, that is, a woman who can easily adapt to Korean customs and traditions.

In terms of appearance, Koreans in the television drama *Hanoi Bride* are always surprised with how much a Vietnamese bride like Thi Vu can resemble a Korean woman closely in terms of facial features and manner of dressing. They always comment on how beautiful Thi Vu is, like a Miss Vietnam in a beauty pageant.

In terms of learning Korean customs, Thi Vu is also shown to adapt quickly. For example, when Il-Lan realized that Thi Vu needs to do the big bow with Sok Woo when they meet Sok Woo's mother, she offers to teach Thi Vu how to do it. She dresses Thi Vu up in a *hanbok* (Korean traditional dress) and teaches her how to do the ceremonial bow for greeting Korean parents.

Meanwhile, Jin Joo, in *Golden Bride* is often shown being taught by her mother-in-law Han Sook on how to be a good Korean wife by doing household chores well. In this context, doing household chores well means learning how to operate modern appliances. Jin Joo is depicted as someone akin to a country bumpkin by being clueless about how modern appliances should be used by a modern homemaker. She needs to be taught how to use these. In one scene, Jun Woo had to teach her how to use a rice cooker (See Figure 19). Han Sook as her mother in law also teaches her how to use high tech appliances (See Figure 20). In both of these instances, she is also shown wearing a *hanbok*, which emphasizes her need to be more like a Korean woman in order to survive in Korea.



Figure 19. Jin Joo learns how to operate an electric rice cooker from Jun Woo.

Screenshot from **황금신부**/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)



Figure 20. Jin Joo learns how to do household chores from Han Sook. Screenshot

from **황금신부**/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

In Figures 19 and 20, we see how Jin Joo needs to learn how to do household chores from Koreans. Jun Woo teaches her how to operate an electric rice cooker. Han Sook, meanwhile teaches her how to wash rags in a sanitary way, assuming that Vietnamese do not do it like the Koreans do. In both of these shots, Jin Joo is heavily engaged with learning these household chores as shown in the medium shot, frontal shots which connote engagement. Her attention is also directed toward the household task she must do and the appliance she must learn to use.

In one scene, Jin Joo is amazed at free food samples at the supermarket, and innocently and cheerfully asks if she can pack some sausages up to take home to

her husband, which baffles and annoys the seller. This unusual behavior makes the seller blurt out, “Miss, are you Korean? Where did you come from? Philippines? (Woon, 2007)”

Jin Joo then honestly replies that she is from Vietnam. “In Vietnam, these things aren’t free. There, you must pay to eat it (Woon, 2007),” she says. After which she shouts and motions for Han Sook and Geum Ja to come to the counter, because the sausages are for free (See Figure 21).



Figure 21. Jin Joo thinks that she can have free sausages from the supermarket to take home, which annoys and baffles the seller. Screenshot from *황금신부*/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

In Figure 21, we see how Jin Joo innocently calls Han Sook and Geum Ja to come and take home some sausages. While Jin Joo’s attention is directed at her relatives, the seller’s attention is directed at Jin Joo. The seller exhibits an annoyed gaze at Jin Joo, whom by now she knows is not Korean but Vietnamese – a Vietnamese who is clueless about the dynamic of supermarket shopping. This semi-reciprocal attention among the characters shows a Vietnamese wife’s innocence and cluelessness in modern Korean life, as well as the contempt by which an impatient Korean will view this innocence and cluelessness.

But Jin Joo's depiction as a clueless Vietnamese wife does not end there. At the checkout line, technology is still portrayed as something baffling for a country bumpkin like her. Han Sook briefly leaves her to look for something she forgot to buy. Jin Joo is clueless on how to pay, and she is nearing the cash register. She watches the woman behind her pay by credit card in three-month installments. She thought she could do the same with her alien registration card, so she hands this card to the cashier, which again baffles the woman at the checkout lane.



Figure 22. Jin Joo learns about a credit card as a method of payment for the first time. Screenshot from *황금신부*/Golden Bride (Woon, 2007)

In Figure 22, we see Jin Joo's amazed reaction at how she cannot use just any card (such as her alien registration card) to pay for her purchases. Rather, she must use a credit card, like the woman who transacted before her. The close up shot and frontal angle used gives a very vivid view of this amazement and cluelessness in Jin Joo as her whole attention is directed at the alien card which she cannot use for payment. Han Sook, meanwhile, is behind her. She is amazed, as well, but in a different way. Her attention is also directed at the alien card, which Jin Joo tried to use but cannot. She did not realize how clueless her daughter-in-law can be in living Korean daily life.

Back at home, while the whole family, including Han Sook's husband's right-hand man, were having dinner, this supermarket incident amuses them to no end. They couldn't believe that credit cards are not used in Vietnam, and which leads the right-hand man to casually remark, "This daughter in law is really amusing. Should I marry a Vietnamese girl as well? This way, she'll make me laugh everyday (Woon, 2007)." This represents Vietnamese wives as attractive and cheerful and malleable wives despite their seeming backwardness.

In all of these instances, Jin Joo's Korean family always recognized the need to educate her about modern Korean life. Because she is seen as someone who came from a poor country, there was always the need to assist her in adapting to a modern and wealthy country like Korea. This kind of representation echoes the observation of Siapno (2011) that foreign migrants like Southeast Asians are frequently depicted in Korean media as poverty-stricken people who an economically superior Korea must help to develop.

6. Vietnamese Wives as Panacea

Han Sook has a son who has been sick with panic disorder for over three years already. Running out of options, her last recourse is to go to Vietnam to buy a bride. She thinks this is the best option: to find a new love for his son, whose life was destroyed by the betrayal of his ex-girlfriend who left him for a wealthy Korean man while studying in the United States. Jun Woo's breakup with his fiancé was complicated by his fiance's police report of Jun Woo as a stalker when Jun Woo visited her in the US. This incident sent him to prison in the US and led to the development of his panic disorder. Han Sook is sure that no Korean woman would

want to marry his son, that's why she goes to Vietnam to find a wife for his son, as in the following dialog (Woon, 2007):

Han Sook: Do you remember that place? That global marriage company that your friend's uncle runs?

Geum Ja: Unni (older sister).

Han Sook: Right now, there's no reason to wait. And we can't carry on waiting either. The hospital has already done all they can do. This is the only way to cure my child.

Geum Ja: Unni....

Han Sook: Didn't you say that you're quite familiar with the chairman? Call him up quickly and tell him that we are going to Vietnam this weekend.

Geum Ja: Unni, what you're saying is...

Han Sook: The doctor also said so. The illness of the heart must be cured from within, so have him find affection for someone else. I can't just let him stay like this forever. My friend's daughter was depressed and didn't know if she was going to die or not. She was cured completely after she got married. So our Jun Woo...

Geum Ja: But what's the point of finding a girl for him if he's sick like this?

Han Sook: What is there to do? We have already waited three years for his illness to heal.

Geum Ja: I know, I know, I know it all. But who will be willing to give their daughter to Jun Woo, if he has become like this?

Han Sook: So that's why, so that's why we have to go to Vietnam. What are we to do if all the women in Korea don't want him? That's why we have to search around the world to find Jun Woo a mate. Whether it is background, money, or education, none of that matters. My pitiful child...As long as it's a woman who can love Jun Woo whole-heartedly.

This theme of Vietnamese wife as panacea was repeated again during Jin Joo and Jun Woo's wedding. The president's speech (as quoted below) hinted at what the theme of Jin Joo and Jun Woo's marriage will be – that of healing, both for Jun Woo who needed to heal over a lost love, and for Jin Joo who needed to heal over the pain of her father's abandonment of her when she was young. Thus, it was not only the Vietnamese wife who was the panacea. Jun Woo, the Korean husband, was there to heal Jin Joo, as well (Woon, 2007):

“That's not about finding someone that matches me. But to find a person that's able to live well with me. There will be hidden wounds in everyone's hearts. The two people here are also the same. Just like a difficult meeting after climbing over difficulties in your future lives, I hope you can become a pair of good couple that's able to cure each other's pains. Then may love and happiness always be with the two of you.”

Jin Joo's role as panacea is a reflection of real-life foreign wives' role in Korean society. Often, they are imported from sending countries like Vietnam and the Philippines (G. W. Jones, 2012) to marry Korean men from the fringes of society such as farmers, fishermen, and urban men from a lower socio-economic status (Nho

et al., 2008). In Jin Joo's case, she is married to a psychologically disabled man to whom she has been given the duty to heal. Like real-life foreign wives, she was given the duty to help carry out Korean men's societal duty to build a family. Because it is hard to find Korean women who would marry Korean men on the fringes of society, the only choice is to import Southeast Asian women who are willing to do so.

7. Vietnamese Wives as Counterpoint to Korean Wives

These two television dramas depicted Vietnamese wives as having better marriages than their Korean counterparts.

Thi Vu served as a catalyst for Il-Han, a well-educated and professional Korean woman, to finally choose love over status when she realized what a caring and loving person Seok Woo is despite his work as a farmer. While Sok Woo was with Thi Vu, Il Han saw for herself how the couple got along well with each other.

Jin Joo, meanwhile, was paralleled against Ji Young, Jun Woo's ex-girlfriend who betrayed him to marry the son of a wealthy conglomerate owner. Jin Joo was simple and sweet, Ji Young was elegant and highly educated. Jin Joo cared for family, Ji Young cared only for herself. Jin Joo sacrificed herself for the happiness of others, Ji Young sacrificed others for her own happiness. These contrasts between Vietnamese wives and Korean wives make Vietnamese wives seem more desirable than their Korean counterparts.

This representation thus tends to normalize and institutionalize the importation of foreign brides such as Southeast Asian wives as the best way to solve the lack of suitable Korean wives for marginalized Korean men. It seems to say that

these marginalized Korean men are actually fortunate to marry foreign women instead of a fellow Korean. This is because foreign wives' representations, in accordance with the research of S. Kim (2009), perpetuate the notion that they are keepers of traditional feminine and domestic-related values lost among present-day Korean women and that they engage in reproductive labor. That is, they give birth to future Koreans, especially sons.

4.19 Representations of Southeast Asian Wives in Korean Films and Television Dramas

From these representations, the overall picture of how Southeast Asian Wives are represented in Korean films and television can be deduced.

But first, some caveats: In these depictions of Filipino and Vietnamese migrant wives, there seems to be a hierarchy. That is, between Vietnamese and Filipino women, Vietnamese women seem to be perceived as the better choice by virtue of their physical attributes which resemble Koreans closely, as well as similarities in Confucian values of deference to authority and filial piety. Filipino wives are perceived as different, hence, the frequent disagreements and eventual separation with the Korean husband. This fits well with current statistics that says Vietnamese wives outnumber Filipino wives in Korea (Cho, 2013).

Another noteworthy observation is that consciousness of multicultural issues only began to emerge in the 2007-2008 drama *Golden Bride*, in the 2011 film *Punch*, and in the 2013 film *My Little Hero*.

Overall, the common thread among representations of Filipino and Vietnamese migrant wives in the films and television dramas examined is that they

are initially depicted as a commodity to be traded through matchmaking agencies. Because they come from poor countries, they are forced to marry men from an affluent country like Korea despite their education. As such, they are initially assumed to be opportunistic women who come to Korea for material gain and a comfortable life. Often, they end up marrying men from the lower rungs of Korean society—farmers, the sick and the disabled, and working class urban men. Although they end up marrying these kind of men, it is perceived to be much better than staying in a poor country. As Koreans get to know these migrant wives however, they often realize that these women are not opportunistic at all. They possess good hearts that enable them to be caring wives, devoted mothers, and filial daughters-in-law. In all the films and television examined, both Filipino and Vietnamese wives gave birth to sons as their first child. A son as a first child, in a Confucian society such as Korea, is important because the son continues the bloodline and is in charge of ancestral rites. Thus, Southeast Asian wives are often positioned as more desirable counterpoints to Korean wives. Marriages with Korean wives are often depicted as fraught with tension, disagreements, and unhappiness, whereas marriages with Southeast Asian wives, although also filled with challenges, are depicted as simple but happy marriages.

4.20 Representations of Southeast Asian wives vis-à-vis Southeast Asian wives' real life experiences

Representations of Southeast Asian wives in film and television appear to be favorable to them. International marriage between a Korean husband and a Southeast Asian wife is often portrayed as a simple but happy marriage. Thus, the idea of an international marriage is portrayed as more attractive than marrying a

Korean wife. This is because Southeast Asian wives are represented as caring wives, devoted mothers and filial daughters-in-law, which are attractive values that are perceived to be slowly disappearing among modern Korean women.

However, real life experiences of Southeast Asian wives are not as rosy as their depictions in film and television. Matchmaking agencies as the first point of contact between Southeast Asian wives and Korean husbands is already fraught with danger. Marriage brokers often deceive Southeast Asian women on the quality of Korean men they will marry. Marriage brokers lie to them about the wealth and status of their prospective husbands. The foreign wives only discover that their husband is poor, or worse, mentally ill, once they arrive in Korea (Borowiec, 2011; Dale, 2010). The church as a contact point for marriage between Filipino wives and Korean husbands is also filled with deception because Filipino wives do not know the poor economic and/or mental condition of their husbands until they set foot on Korean soil (Dale, 2010).

While living in Korea, almost half of foreign wives experience domestic abuse and violence at the hands of their Korean husbands and/or close relatives, according to the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (J.-M. Park, 2010). Some of them even get killed (Borowiec, 2011). Some Korean men believe that it is acceptable to marry foreign wives and treat them like slaves, or to make them manage their properties or take care of their parents during old age (Dale, 2010).

Common causes of breakups in international marriages include language issues and culture issues such as conservatism in Korean families which leads to overt and strict patriarchal views (Borowiec, 2011; Dale, 2010). Unlike what is

portrayed in *Hanoi Bride* and *Golden Bride*, Vietnamese wives in real life cannot speak Korean and are not familiar with Korean culture (Borowiec, 2011). Often, the husband does not want the foreign wife to learn Korean so that they can't escape or associate with other people (J.-M. Park, 2010).

Moreover, unlike multicultural centers that portray an inclusive and happy vibe in the film and television series that were examined, what is often built for foreign wives is a shelter for foreign wives who suffered domestic abuse. In this shelter, they are given food, a roof over their heads, medical treatment, and they are taught about women's empowerment (J.-M. Park, 2010).

Representations of Vietnamese wives are thus rosy but unrealistic when compared with real life experiences of Vietnamese wives. In television series, they are portrayed as young and beautiful women who can speak Korean well and adapt to Korean culture easily. They are also portrayed as women who can solve the problems of their husband and their family through their cheerful approach to life. In real life, as aforementioned, Vietnamese wives struggle to integrate themselves to Korean society.

Representations of Filipino wives, in contrast, are closer to what happens in real life, in particular, *Punch* and *My Little Hero*. Although physical violence was not depicted in *My Little Hero*, emotional violence through verbal abuse by the Korean husband's hurtful words toward his Filipino wife and son was shown. Cultural challenges such in terms of language and adapting to a foreign culture were also depicted in these films. Thus, although not as rosy as representations of Vietnamese wives, the depictions of Filipino wives are closer to what happens in real life.

4.21 Racialized representation vs. Sexualized representation

Mulvey (1975) sees “the gaze” as the eroticization of the female through the male’s patriarchal gaze. As such, representations of females are often sexualized. Female bodies are shown in a passive manner while the “male gaze” looks in an active manner (ibid). Often, this is the case in female representation in Hollywood film and television (Newsom, 2011). However, Korean women are also gazed at as beautiful bodies despite being portrayed as strong women (M.-H. Kim, 2002). Women, it seems, are sexualized despite their seeming power – at least in the discussion of women from industrialized and wealthy countries such as the United States and Korea.

Examining the gaze of Korean society toward Southeast Asian wives is more in line with hooks (2012) who says that representations of people of color are characterized by racial difference. Often they are either silent or absent in media.

This research project, however, found out that the Korean gaze toward Southeast Asian wives is utilitarian. Foreign wives in the films and television series examined are not sexualized (with the exception of the Filipino wife in *You are My Sunshine*). Rather, it retains a patriarchal view. The difference, however, is that this patriarchal view is rooted in the Confucian view of women as people in charge of the domestic sphere. As such, Southeast Asian women are prized by Korean men from the lower socioeconomic class as caring wives, devoted mothers, and filial daughters-in-law in the films and television series that were examined. Thus, Southeast Asian wives are seen according to their race, which is different from the Korean citizens,

but whose presence is deemed as necessary in order to keep the Korean family, and consequently, the Korean race, alive.



Chapter V

Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Korea has seen a rise in the number of foreigners in its shores, be they migrant workers or migrant wives, since the late 1990s. In particular, there has been a rise in the number of migrant wives coming to Korea, especially Southeast Asian wives. This is attributed to Korea's vibrant economy and perceived affluence of its people, which makes it an attractive migration destination for people living in less developed nations.

The increasing presence of Southeast Asian migrant wives in Korea has subsequently led to their slowly but steadily increasing presence in Korean media products such as films and television dramas. In the mid-2000s, films and television dramas depicting the lives of Southeast Asian wives in Korea began to be seen. The year 2013, meanwhile, was the year of multicultural films in Korea. Thus, there was a very conscious effort to create films and film festivals with this theme.

In films and television dramas featuring Southeast Asian migrant wives, particular representations were created and seen. Because representations have the power to influence how audiences perceive and treat those represented in real life, this research project sought to examine how Southeast Asian wives are represented in Korean films and television dramas through the concept of "the gaze" and Butler's theory of performativity. As migrants socially positioned within a multicultural family, this research project then sought to understand what the multicultural family means for Korean society, as reflected in the films and television shows examined. Finally, this research project then attempted to examine what the

implications of this gaze for the formation of a Korean multicultural family, and consequently, a multicultural society.

This research project found out that Southeast Asian wives are initially depicted as opportunistic women who seek a comfortable life by marrying someone from a wealthy country like Korea. The initial point of contact between Southeast Asian wives and Korean husbands is through the matchmaking agency, which implies that their body is a commodity to be traded in exchange for a supposedly better life in Korea. Because they come from under-developed countries, they are matched with Korean men who also belong to the fringes of society such as farmers, the disabled, and working class men from urban areas. These marginalized men, who cannot find Korean women to marry them because a well-matched profile and status is prioritized in Korean society, seek companionship from Southeast Asian wives.

The Southeast Asian stereotype as opportunistic women is broken with the emergence of the main Southeast Asian characters in the films and television dramas examined. They are portrayed as one-of-a-kind women who are caring wives, devoted mothers, and filial daughters-in-law, which are values that are thought to be slowly disappearing in Korean society. Thus, they are socially positioned as better alternatives to Korean wives. That is, for marginalized men in Korea.

In terms of the multicultural family, it is represented and portrayed as a family composed of people at the fringes of society—farmers, working class urban men, and the disabled—who are married to women from under-developed Southeast Asian countries, often from Vietnam and the Philippines. In these films and

television dramas, multicultural families are often (with the exception of *My Little Hero* where the Filipina wife was unwanted by her Korean husband) depicted as simple but happy families. Often, too, they are helped and assisted by a Korean who has direct experience of seeing wrongdoings toward migrants and foreigners. Examples are Wandeuik's teacher, whose father owns a factory that illegally employs migrant workers, and Jin Joo's father, who abandoned his family in Vietnam. To compensate and erase guilt for these wrongdoings, Wandeuik's teacher built a multicultural center in Korea while Jin Joo's father built a center for half-Korean, half-Vietnamese children.

Golden Bride ends almost the same way as the film *Punch*, where a Korean person takes the lead in establishing a multicultural center. Much like in *Punch*, the Korean character who initiates it – Jin Joo's father – undertakes the construction and maintenance of this multicultural center for mixed heritage children as a form of atonement for his abandonment of his daughter Jin Joo. The multicultural center is set in Hanoi to help abandoned mixed race children adapt to life in Hanoi.

In *Punch*, meanwhile, the multicultural center is initiated by the Korean teacher of Wandeuik, whose father took advantage of foreign workers in his factories. Again, the construction of this center is portrayed as a form of atonement for his father's past wrongdoings toward migrant blue collar workers. However, this multicultural center extends not just to Filipinos (unlike in *Golden Bride* where the center caters solely to Vietnamese-Korean children) but to foreigners of whatever nationality in Korea.

Thus, multicultural families are depicted as poor families who are often victims of society's ills, and who need aid and assistance from more powerful and concerned Koreans. This coincides with the research finding of S. Kim (2012) that migrants are depicted in newspapers as "victims" and "objects" at the fringes of society rather than full members of Korean society. Kim (ibid) also found out that although migrants are seen through media coverage, the news about them does not offer specific solutions on how to empower migrants and of what a multicultural society really is. In *Golden Bride*, the center that was established only seems to show children from international marriages as mere recipients of aid and as a form of atonement for Jin Joo's father, who abandoned her at a young age. In *Punch*, meanwhile, the multicultural center is seen to be more of a gathering place for foreigners rather than a center that offers empowering solutions to migrants.

Given this view of Southeast Asian wives as caring wives and devoted mothers to marginalized Korean men and of the multicultural family as a poor and simple but happy unit composed of a Korean man and a foreign woman at the fringes of society, what are the implications of this gaze in the formation of a Korean multicultural society?

First, this kind of frequent depiction of Southeast Asian wives and the multicultural families they form as positioned at the margins of society consequently boxes them as less fortunate people to be aided and saved, be it by the government or by well-meaning, wealthy, and powerful members of society. This kind of depiction may lead to the creation of the stereotype of a Southeast Asian wife and the multicultural family as an issue of social class rather than an issue of large-scale societal change.

Second, boxing Southeast Asian wives into a certain mold—that of poor and simple but cheerful women—eclipses the many faces of Southeast Asian women in real life. Frequently depicting them in working class jobs such as waitresses and factory workers overshadows the existence of Southeast Asian women who have made a mark in Korean society. One such example is National Assemblywoman Jasmine Lee, a Philippine-born naturalized Korean citizen, who works on the formation of a multicultural society from her beginnings as a television host and actress to her current role as a congresswoman.

Last but not least, the currently limited depiction of multicultural families as aid recipients makes the public understanding of multicultural families and multiculturalism too narrow to be conceived and perceived by the public as a national, societal issue that affects everyone. Rather, it comes to be seen as a social and economic issue merely pertaining to aid and its distribution. This should not be the case. Multiculturalism affects all people across all social groups.

Media forms such as films and television dramas are tools for entertainment, yes. However, these are also tools for education. As such, it reaches a wide range of audiences not just in Korea but across the globe, as well (Siapno, 2011). Choices in making portrayals and representations must thus involve careful selection, production, and distribution. As entertainment tools that also educates, these media forms must represent, and represent well.

5.2 Recommendations for further study

This research project uncovered issues surrounding Southeast Asian migrant wives in the context of their representations in Korean films and television dramas.

However, because of limitations in terms of a short time for data gathering as well as access to more recent films such as *Mai Ratima* (2013), a Korean film featuring a Thai wife, and *Thuy* (2013), a Korean film featuring a Vietnamese wife, a more thorough understanding of the development of representations of Southeast Asian wives could be done if these were included.

Representations of Southeast Asian wives must also be understood alongside their real life experiences. It is recommended for future research works to understand the complexity of representations and real life experiences by including actual interviews with Southeast Asian wives and their experiences.

In studying Southeast Asian wives' representations, representations of their offspring (specifically their sons) is the next logical topic to study as this gives a clearer picture of how a multicultural family is represented and understood in Korean society. Understanding how characters such as Wanduek in *Punch and Glory* in *My Little Hero* will help us understand how children from mixed marriages are represented in Korean society, how they fit in it, and how they are included (or excluded) from a multicultural society.

Studying representations of foreign wives from other races and ethnicities, meanwhile will give a more holistic picture of how foreign wives, multicultural families and multiculturalism is developed and understood in Korean society. Chinese wives as well as ethnic Korean women in China comprise the biggest portion of migrant wives to Korea next to Southeast Asians. Adding their representations to the overall picture of how migrant wives are represented will give a clearer picture of how foreign Asian women are seen by Korean society as reflected in media. At the

time this research project was conducted, only S. Kim (2009) had a study on the representations of ethnic Korean women in China are represented in Korean films through the film *Failan*.

As foreign wives and other migrants also engage in labor and employment while in Korea, and are part of the multicultural movement, studying them also adds another solution to the puzzle that is the formation of a Korean multicultural society. As this research found out, Filipino wives are depicted in working class jobs such as factory work and restaurant work. Vietnamese wives, meanwhile, have a slightly better working position as translators because of their knowledge of the Korean language. This is aside from the domestic labor they do as keepers of the household. It would be interesting to find out how labor affects foreign women in Korea.

Although this research project has tried to shed light on how Southeast Asian wives are depicted in Korean films and television series, and how multicultural families are depicted and understood through media, there are still many aspects to this issue that needs to be addressed. The researcher hopes though, that this research project has contributed to the growing literature on representations of Southeast Asian women in media.

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APPENDIX

너는 내 운명 / You Are My Sunshine (J.-P. Park, 2005) is a film about a farmer named Seok-Joong who falls in love at first sight with a Korean woman named Eun-Ha, a coffee shop delivery girl and bar girl. They eventually marry, but it was not a happily-ever-after kind of ending because Eun-Ha soon discovers that she is HIV positive. Seok-Joong stays faithful to Eun-Ha, however, and tries to support and defend her despite her past life and her current sickness. This thesis focuses on the side story of Seok-Joong's boss at the farm, who marries a Filipino wife through a match-making agency. The daily life of this multiracial married couple at the farm will be examined.

박쥐 / Thirst (C.-W. Park, 2009) is a horror story about a Catholic priest named Sang-Hyun, who suddenly turns into a vampire after miraculously recovering from a failed experiment as scientists tried to find a cure for the Emmanuel Virus (EV). News of this miraculous recovery spreads around town, including with Sang-Hyun's childhood friend Kang-Woo. Sang-Hyun re-connects with Kang-Woo and becomes a part of the group's weekly mah-jong sessions. Sang-Hyun becomes attracted to Tae-Ju, Kang-Woo's wife. They begin an affair which leads to Kang-Woo's murder by Sang-Hyun. At some point, Sang-Hyun turns Tae-Ju into a vampire and their affair turns sour. Tae-Ju does not mind killing humans while Sang-Hyun cannot do the same. Eventually, their affair and the murder of Kang Woo is revealed by Kang-Woo's mother, the paralyzed Mrs. Ra, during one of their mahjong sessions. A killing spree ensues. After, Sang-Hyun decides to end everything by killing both himself and Tae-Ju. The thesis focuses on the side story of Yeong-Doo and his Filipino wife Evelyn, who are part of the weekly mahjong group. Their interactions with each other as a married couple and with the group will be examined.

완득이 / Punch (H. Lee, 2011) is the story of Wandeuk, a Korean high school boy who comes of age with the help of his teacher Lee Dong-Ju. Teacher Lee helps reunite Wandeuk with his mother, whom Wandeuk discovers is a Filipino woman. The story centers on how Wandeuk goes through stages of re-connecting with her long lost mother, and how his father eventually re-connects his wife after experiencing conflicts and disagreements in the past.

마이 리틀 히어로 /My Little Hero (S.-H. Kim, 2013) is the story of a half-Korean, half-Filipino boy named Glory, who enters a musical reality show to realize his dream of performing. Together with musical Director Yoo Il-Han, they try to pursue music excellence, but not without the hitches – Il-Han is uncomfortable to mentor Glory because of his mixed ethnicity. His mixed ethnicity also sparks doubts as to the authenticity of the part that he will play in the musical – that of a Joseon king.

하노이 신부 / Hanoi Bride (G.-R. Park, 2005) is a Korean television drama about a Vietnamese woman named Thi Vu and a Korean man named Eun Woo. They initially meet in Vietnam where Eun Woo works as a doctor and Thi Vu as his translator. They fall in love, but because of the failed relationship of Thi Vu's elder sister with another Korean man, her elder sister disapproves of their relationship. This leads her elder sister to cover up Eun Woo's sudden departure from Vietnam. Thi Vu is led to think that Eun Woo left without a word, but in reality, Thi Vu's sister kept the fact that Eun Woo left Vietnam because of his father's sudden death hidden. This leads to a misunderstanding between Eun Woo and Thi Vu, and also leads Thi Vu to consider marrying another Korean man, who turns out to be Eun Woo's older brother Seok Woo, who has found difficulty marrying someone because of his unattractive status as a farmer. A series of events enable things to fall into place: Sok Woo eventually ends up with his childhood friend Il-han, while Eun Woo and Thi Vu get back together, as well.

황금신부 /Golden Bride (Woon, 2007) is a Korean television drama about Jin Joo, a half-Korean, half-Vietnamese, who decides to move to Korea to marry Jun Woo, a man whom she only “met” in a picture at the match-making agency. Although she is somewhat attracted to the person in the picture, her real intent is to find her father in Korea to enable her mother to see him for the last time before she totally turns blind. In Korea, she discovers that Jun Woo is actually sick with panic disorder and is unable to function well in society. Out of love, she takes it upon herself to help Jun Woo heal. In turn, Jun Woo later on helps Jin Joo heal in terms of her broken relationship with her Korean father.

VITA

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