

Transnational Family Networks of Multicultural Families and Related Policy Implications¹

Yi-seon Kim²

Areum Lee³

Jung-mee Hwang⁴

Abstract

The lives of migrants and their family members are closely related to a number of broad connections spanning from the destination society to the country of origin. The prospects of multicultural families, including the families of marriage migrants and of naturalized immigrants, are not limited simply to Korean society, but extend to and are closely related with migrants' country of origin. This study surveyed a total of 534 marriage migrant women from China (including ethnic Koreans), Vietnam and the Philippines on general aspects of their transnational family networks, care support from their homeland for the birth or raising children, future family invitations, plans to return, attitudes, values, and experience of discrimination. The results of the analysis showed that a significant number of multicultural families show characteristics of transnational families who live an environment in which family members transit and exchange economic resources and emotions across borders. Also, changes in the family cycle of homeland families will also effect the directionality of transnational family networks. In order to address the current situations and project the futures of multicultural families, it is critical to hold a transnational perspective, including on relationships with homeland family members.

Key words: Transnational family networks, Multicultural family, Marriage migrant, Multinomial logit analysis

¹ This article summarizes a KWDI research report (Yi-seon Kim et al., 2014).

² Research Fellow, Korean Women's Development Institute

³ Researcher, Korean Women's Development Institute

⁴ HK Research Professor, Asiatic Research Institute, Korea University

Introduction

The lives of migrants and their family members are closely related to a number of broad connections spanning from the destination society to the country of origin (Schiller et al. 1995: 48). The prospects of multicultural families, including the families of marriage migrants and of naturalized immigrants, are not limited simply to Korean society, but extend to and are closely related with migrants' country of origin (Kim Young Ok and Kim Hyun Mee, 2013; Heo-Oh Young Sook, 2009, 2013). These connections have major impacts on the lives not just of migrants themselves, but also on those of their family members as well.

In the past, the family networks of migrants and the movements of people and both tangible and intangible resources have been examined within only a limited scope of research, such as regarding remittances and chain migration. However, today's transnational networks are no longer limited to particular occasions when remittance or chain migration occur, but include continuous flows of the information, emotion, economic resources and cares which constitute the everyday lives of families and societies.

The cross-border networks established by migrants in multicultural families are becoming part of family relations, and this trend is likely to expand in the future. Nevertheless, research on transnational family networks and the related social agendas and policy implications has not been energetically pursued. In consequence, this research aims to identify the state of transnational family networks by focusing on the relationships between multicultural families and migrants' families of origin.

This research examines how transnational family networks influence the everyday lives of marriage migrant women and their Korean spouses, their family relations and their raising of children. It also investigates any tensions that might arise in the process. In addition, it analyzes the important determinants influencing transnational family networks, such as the movement of family members in connection to the raising of children and future plans to return to a country of origin.

Since the family cycle is a critical factor influencing transnational family networks, this research explores the dynamics of transnational family networks in detail over the process of changes in the family cycle, such as childbirth, raising children, and retirement.

This research compares the interests and attitudes of marriage migrants and their Korean spouses towards transnational family networks and explores various modes of transnational networks pursued according to these varied points of view and attitudes.

Methodology

A total of 534 marriage migrant women from China (including ethnic Koreans), Vietnam, and the Philippines were surveyed on general aspects of their transnational family networks, care support from their homeland for the birth or raising children, future family invitations,⁵ plans to return, attitudes, values, and experience of discrimination. In addition, a total of 208 Korean husbands of the marriage migrant women surveyed were also surveyed on their attitudes toward and experiences with their migrant spouses' family members in their country of origin, allowing a comparison between the migrant women and their husbands.

Additionally, data from the 2012 National Survey of Multicultural Families were analyzed. Focusing on various determinants of transnational family networks, such as the gender of marriage migrants and naturalized spouses, country of origin, marriage status and types of household, for example single-parent households, this research compares homeland family invitation and visit experiences, co-habitation with homeland parents, having family members from the country of origin residing in South Korea and plans to send children to home country in order to compare them by group.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews were carried out with a total of 20 individuals, consisting of 15 marriage migrant women from developing Asian countries and five Korean husbands, regarding their experiences of tensions within their families related to homeland family members, as well as on policy concerns for mitigating the conflicts between government policies and experienced realities.

Transnational Family Networks of Multicultural Families

Experiences of Marriage Migrants with Inviting Homeland Family Members and Sending Children to Their Homelands

According to the 2012 National Survey of Multicultural Families, 46.6 percent of marriage migrants or naturalized spouses (hereafter migrants) have invited family members to visit after their migration to South Korea. By country of origin, 51.7 per cent of Korean Chinese and 51.2 per cent of non-Korean Chinese had experience with inviting homeland family members, which are each more than 10 percentage points higher than the results for those from other countries, such as the Philippines (40.9%), Japan/North America/Western Europe (40.8%) and Vietnam (37.6%).

At the time of the survey, 3.6 percent of the surveyed households were living together with the homeland parents of the migrant member. Among the migrants, 46.6 percent

⁵ Within this context, family invitation of marriage migrant women refers to an invitation letter for the visitor visa applications of homeland family members.

responded that they have country of origin family members who have resided in South Korea for more than three months.

In the matter of sending children to migrants' home countries, 45.2 per cent of the migrants with children responded that they plan to send their children to their home countries to study. By country of origin, 70.1 per cent of the Japan/North American/Western Europe-Oceania group responded as such, followed by the Philippines (60.8%). By duration of residence, the longer the length of residence, the more likely they were to plan to send their children to their home country to study.

Inviting Home Country Family Members and Co-habitation

Among the marriage migrant women surveyed for this research, 71.2 per cent answered that they had invited family members to visit. However, 31.6 per cent of the total respondents answered that they had wished to invite family members but could not for various reasons. The main reason reported was difficulty with government procedures such as visa applications (76.3%), followed by opposition from the husband and/or his family (10.0%), and the economic burden involved (9.5%).

Among total respondents, 68.2 percent answered that they had experienced visits of family members to Korea. As for the family members who visited, the mother was included in 78.6 percent of visits and the father in 44.5 percent, suggesting that it is usually one or more parents who are visiting.

Based on the result of the item asking about other family members residing in South Korea, 27.5 percent had one or more family members residing for the purposes of study, marriage or work. Among family members, sisters (39.5%) were the most common. Among the respondents, three out of ten communicated with or met family members every day, suggesting that they sustain very close relationships.

Among the respondents with family members in their home countries, 91.2% answered that they hope to invite them to South Korea in the future. Looking at the family members they hope to invite, most of the respondents indicated they wished to invite their parents, especially their mothers.

Visiting Home Countries and Communication with Homeland Family and Friends

The movement of family members through transnational networks is a two-way process as homeland family members visit Korea and marriage migrants visit their home countries. Eighty-five point two percent of total respondents answered that they had visited their homeland at least once since their migration. By country of origin, the most likely to visit their country of origin were Chinese migrants, who are also reported visiting the most frequently (at more than three times), suggesting the movement of family members between South Korea and China is relatively active.

Sixty-three point six percent of respondents with family in their homelands send remittances. By country of origin, the Philippines made up the highest not only in terms of number, but also in frequency compared when to Chinese and Vietnamese.

Twenty-three point eight percent of respondents with family in their homelands answered that they had communicated with them almost daily over the preceding year, while 43.2 per cent responded that they communicate more than once a week. By duration of residence, communication did continue as the term increased, but its frequency decreased as the term increased.

Family Cycle of Marriage Migrant Women and Transnational Networks

Raising Children and Mutual Visits

Among the 475 female respondents with experience giving birth, 47.4% answered that their family members visited South Korea either before or after the birth for post-natal care. It is worth noting that economic status is an important factor here. The higher the migrant's household income, the more likely they were to be visited for pre- or post-natal care by family members. The most frequent response regarding the family member who visited either before and after birth was the mother, with 184 (duplicate answers). In addition, it is significant that most of the women who received post-natal care by family members from their homeland (88.0%) were likely to receive assistance with the raising of their children from homeland family members as well.

Among the 475 women with children, 10.3 percent responded that they sent their children alone to visit their homeland for a certain period of time. By country of origin, the lowest rate was for Vietnam (2.6%), while China (17.2%) and the Philippines (12.5%) showed relatively higher rates.

Among the total respondents, an average of 1.1 homeland family members had visited the home of the marriage migrant women. The number of visiting homeland family members was influenced by the ages of children or whether or not they had borne a child. This suggests that marriage migrant women with babies or toddlers receive help in raising children from visiting homeland family members.

Plan to Return to Homeland and Family Cycle

Among the total respondents, 34.5 per cent reported that they plan to return to live in their homeland. By country of origin, the highest was the Philippines (45.0%), followed by China (39.4%) and Vietnam (23.7%). By length of residence, it is noteworthy that the longer marriage migrant women reside in South Korea, the more likely they are to plan to return to their homeland. This suggests that the general understanding that having children strengthens family relations and settlement among migrants in South Korea may in fact differ from the reality.

Attitudes and Values toward Transnational Family Networks

According to the survey, the degree of tension between couples due to homeland family

members is generally low, but specifically remittances to homeland families and communicating too frequently with homeland family members are relative robust sources of tension. The results show that after visiting the homeland family of their marriage migrant wives, husbands felt closer to their wives' homeland families and husbands' attitudes toward wives' homelands changed in a positive direction.

Types of Transnational Family Networks: Multinomial Logit Analysis

This study developed three different models based on the surveys performed on mutual family visits and plans to return by using multinomial logit analysis. Also, specific features of migrant women which were presented in the models were examined.

Model 1 analyzed the experiences of raising children by sending them to the migrant mother's homeland and of having homeland family members assist with post-natal care in South Korea. Through this analysis, it was found that husbands' support of migrant spouses' social activities in Korea have negative correlations with wives' homeland family's visit to Korea. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that migrant women expand their networks with their homeland family members when their networks and participation in social activities in Korea are limited by their husbands. Moreover other variables, including the attitudes of marriage migrant women or their identities, were insignificant.

Model 2 analyzed the motivation of marriage migrant women to return to their homeland. In planning a return to her homeland, it was found that a higher education level, willingness to maintain the homeland culture, and weak assimilation to Korean culture were all relevant factors in strengthening transnational networks.

In terms of plans to return to a migrant's homeland for retirement, the husband's identity and level of education play important roles. Husbands who received more than a college education have relatively higher levels of human capital and appear likely to show greater interest in and understanding of foreign cultures, which can have positive effects on wives' plans to return to their homeland.

Lastly, Model 3 identifies three clusters after cross-analyzing marriage migrant women planning to return to their homeland and planning to send their children to their homeland. Regarding plans to return to their homeland, country of origin, support for children learning the mother's native language and degree of cultural adjustment were all significant factors. It was found that plans to send children to the mother's homeland was influenced by term of residence, country of origin, experience of discrimination, support for children learning the mother's native tongue, and degree of problem-solving competence. It can be deduced from the results that longer periods of living in South Korea and raising children positively influenced plans to send the children to the mother's homeland. Also it was found that migrant women with greater problem-solving skills tended to more actively plan to return to their homeland.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis can be interpreted in terms of three points. Firstly, it is necessary to understand the patterns of family invitation and homeland visiting of migrant women through the multi-dimensional family networks which become established

around migrant women. For migrant women, their families of origin, families created through international marriage, and the relationship between their husbands' birth families are all overlapped. Also, it can be seen that family resources are mobilized in various ways according to families' changing lifecycles and family cycles.

Secondly, in the multinomial logit analysis it was found that networks and mutual visits with their homeland families strengthen as migrant women stay longer in South Korea.

Lastly, although migrants face difficulties and are restricted in their behaviors, there are also some cases in which they find new alternatives by accumulating human resources and financial capital.

Aspects and Major Issues of Transnational Family Networks

Dynamics of Transnational Family Networks

The cross-border family networks of multicultural families evolve out of the marriage-migration of a family member. The recent development of smart devices and other means of communication has enabled migrants to maintain family relations across borders by sharing each other's everyday lives and emotions (Goulbourne et al. 2010: 179).

In addition, there have been changes in migrants' interest in sending remittances. Marriage migrant women send remittances at the beginning of their residence in South Korea, but tend to begin to send them only sporadically or halt remittances entirely after a certain period. Most importantly, there is a general trend of decline in remittances over time. This may be due to the burden of raising children after giving birth, or because migrants become skeptical regarding the effects of their remittances.

Interviewees revealed that they all had experience with inviting homeland family members to South Korea. In most cases, the invited family members were one or both of their parents. The interviewees reported that the invited homeland family members who stayed the longest were their mothers. When marriage migrant women are about to give birth, face a health issue, or are in need of childcare due to employment, they commonly invite their parents in order to receive temporary assistance.

Movement of Family Networks through 'Chain Marriage Migration'

Some interviewees reported having sisters or cousins living in South Korea without a limitation on their term of residence. Sisters who marry internationally may influence each other in the process of migrating to South Korea. As such, a family network can migrate to South Korea through the phenomenon of chain marriage migration, in which multiple family members participate in marriage migration in a directly or indirectly connected series.

In terms of childcare, it is mothers or other homeland family members who visit South

Korea in order to provide childcare. If that is impossible, children may be sent to the homeland in search of a main care provider. As such, the origin families of marriage migrants play an important role in raising the children of multicultural families. Nevertheless, once children enter school in South Korea, the role of the homeland family in childcare diminishes considerably. At this time, the responsibility for childcare delegated to mothers or other homeland family members due to the employment of migrants returns to the marriage migrant women.

Most of the interviewees indicated that they consider migration to the marriage migrant's country of origin to be one of their alternatives for the future. For marriage migrant women, this would mean return migration, whereas for their husbands it would be considered accompanied migration as they follow their wives' return. This act of migration occurs when they hold an expectation that a return would provide a better life after retirement or a brighter future for their children. Korean husbands who seriously think about migrating to their wives' homeland tend to support their wives in maintaining their homeland nationalities.

Major Issues Related to Marriage Migrant Women and Multicultural Families

One common conflict related to family invitation, which is a main mechanism in transnational family networks, occurs when visiting family members work in South Korea. Under current South Korean immigration law, the visa status of visiting family members does not allow them to work in South Korea. Many invited family members do remain within the bounds of their visa status and visit purpose and participate only in childcare or domestic work. However, there are also some family members who seek employment.

From their point of view, childcare and work are not mutually exclusive. They feel they can perform childcare and still earn money by working in their spare time to cover the costs of travel, buy gifts for family members at home, or simply for personal spending money. Most importantly, they often view it as a way to reduce the financial burden of their daughter and son-in-law or of their family members who remained at home.

Multicultural families who invite their homeland family members undergo both small and sizable changes. In particular, as opposed to the marriage migrant women, who are related by blood to the newly arrived family members, it is a challenge for husbands to live with their in-laws. In addition, ethnic and cultural differences and generational gaps all compound the heterogeneity of the family, resulting in a range of discomforts.

One major factor is the economic burden involved. Homeland family members may be mobilized for childcare, but the costs of invitation and co-habitation can place major strains on the household economy. In addition, cultural differences or communication issues can also pose a serious problem. The role of the homeland family in the raising of children itself can be a source of tension, even though the homeland family members were invited specifically for that purpose. Language socialization, including children's Korean language proficiency, becomes an issue as well. Especially when children display problems with learning Korean, homeland family members may be blamed, triggering further tension

within the entire family.

Transnational care of children arises not only to meet childcare needs, but also out of aspirations for bilingual ability and multicultural experiences. However, contrary to the expectations of parents, life in the mother's country of origin is not always positive for children. Children may experience severe side effects from environmental changes and lose interest in the mother's homeland and language. They also may be hurt psychologically from discrimination they suffer in the mother's homeland due to ethnic and cultural differences. As such, there are both expectations of positive effects and negative influences from transnational childcare on children among multicultural families.

The interviews revealed that some marriage migrant women already experience considerable concerns regarding their role in taking care of their elderly parents in their homelands and had begun to seek avenues to bring them to South Korea to live together. In particular, for Chinese marriage migrant women born between the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s when the one child policy took effect in China, caring for elderly parents can be a major problem.

Among family members who reside in different countries, not only information about and intimacy with members in both countries, but also economic resources shift back and forth. As such, transnational family networks can be a burden on the economic life of multicultural families and a source of family tension in the event of economic hardship.

Conclusion

According to the results of the analysis, a significant number of multicultural families show characteristics of transnational families who live an environment in which family members transit and exchange economic resources and emotions across borders.

Relationships with homeland family members are uneven among migrants. According to the analysis, among marriage migrants and naturalized citizens, women have more experience with inviting homeland family members and more cases of homeland family members residing in South Korea than do men. Family structures and the burden of childcare also influence relationships with homeland family members. In other words, the degree of burden of childcare and whether or not it can be resolved within the family affect relationships with homeland families.

Among many aspects of family life, childcare is the concern for which multicultural families' transnational family networks are most often mobilized. In addition to the case of homeland family members coming to South Korea to help raise children, children also go to their mother's homelands to be raised, or switch back and forth according to the residence of the maternal grandmother, the main care provider.

At the beginning of migrants' residence in South Korea, daily communication and economic support are at the center of their relationships with homeland family members, but upon the birth of a child and the appearance of a need to raise young children, the focus

shifts to a situation in which homeland family members are invited to live together. However, the interests of multicultural families in regard to relationships with the homeland family do not end here, but shift in focus either to sending children to study or to life after retirement.

Among the children of multicultural families, many grew up in transnational environments, such as being raised by a foreign maternal grandmother or growing up in the mother's homeland. It is expected that these trends, especially being raised in the mother's homeland, will likely increase. In addition, considering the analysis of return plans, it is possible that some multicultural families living in South Korea will eventually migrate to the homeland of the marriage migrants.

Changes in the family cycle of homeland families will also effect the directionality of transnational family networks. As the parents of marriage migrants enter retirement age, the issue of taking care of elderly parents becomes one of the top concerns.

Among multicultural families, opportunities in marriage migrants' homelands may become a pull factor stimulating interest in transnational family networks. However, South Korean society's exclusion of migrants and their children could also become a push factor.

As discussed above, marriage migrant women and their Korean husbands are situated differently in transnational family networks. More importantly, marriage migrant women are not the only ones who mobilize transnational family networks. At the beginning of their marriages, it is the marriage migrant women who are critical in forming transnational family networks. However, as time passes, it is couples who take on their own roles in family life and develop an interest in forming relationships with the origin families of marriage migrants across borders.

Policy Recommendations

In order to address the current situations and project the futures of multicultural families, it is critical to hold a transnational perspective, including on relationships with homeland family members. In a state-centered world, various contradictions related to transnational family networks are inevitable. Therefore, attention must be paid to policies that would address the confusion and contradictions faced by core agents in transnational family networks, such as homeland parents, marriage migrants, and their children.

Also, there is a need for a reorganization of support services for multicultural families taking into consideration co-habitation with origin family members and their roles in childcare. It is important to consider extending services related to childcare, such as education, and providing information beyond the marriage-migrant mother to the actual primary caregiver, who could be an origin family member. In order to relieve the burden of medical costs for visiting origin family members, there should be information available for foreigners on joining the national health insurance.

In order to reduce the side effects and confusion of transnational childcare, professional

counseling services should be provided to parents alongside support for children growing up in a transnational environment in order to help them adjust to family and school lives. In addition, there is a need to develop programs for marriage migrants returning to a role as the main care provider and becoming parents of school-age children.

In addition, in order to provide support for the transnational economic activities of multicultural families, it is recommended that necessary information on small-scale overseas investment or starting businesses abroad that fit the realities of multicultural families be provided. Furthermore, programs related to transnational economic activities as part of employment support for marriage migrant women should be developed.

There is a need to seek alternatives that consider the standards of the international community and the demands of multicultural families to invite homeland family members. In addition, the maximum period of stay for an invited family member, currently set at four years and ten months, should be reconsidered. Of course, this reconsideration must be made through a social consensus. However, a more open approach considering the humanitarian views of the international community on family reunion must indeed be taken.

Realistic solutions regarding the employment of visiting family members are required. It may be practical to allow family members visiting South Korea for the purpose of offering childcare to work to a certain extent. Specifically, it is recommended that a possibility for part-time work be provided to homeland family members who are staying long-term in South Korea for the purpose of childcare and designate the types of jobs allowed to them.

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