

The Intersectionality of Gender and Ethnicity in (Social) Mobility: Migration of *Koryŏ saram* Women from Uzbekistan to South Korea

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Abstract

Imagined ethnic ties and affinities have funneled many *Koryŏ saram* into South Korea—the divided homeland of their ancestors—as coethnic labor migrants and foreign spouses over the past decade. Based on in-depth interviews with ten Uzbekistan-born *Koryŏ saram* women who currently reside in South Korea with their Korean husbands and children, this paper examines intersections of gender and ethnicity in the women's migratory paths and life experiences in the employment and family spheres. After contextualizing the ensuing influx of *Koryŏ saram* to South Korea from the perspectives of ethnic (return) migration and marriage migration, this study looks into how the ten informants' skills are devalorized as coethnic migrants who lack Korean language skills but appear "Korean" to contemporary South Korean people. This research also investigates the ways that the incipient *Koryŏ saram* community allows them to seek new employment opportunities while juggling between work and family as a married migrant with children. By examining two salient social differentiations in (social) mobility of *Koryŏ saram*, this paper not only betokens the social position of *Koryŏ saram* in South Korea, but also underscores the agency of the coethnic migrant women who struggle to pursue inclusion in the affluent homeland.

Key words: *Koryŏ saram*, Soviet Koreans, Ethnic (Return) Migration, Homeland, Marriage Migration, Intersectionality, Uzbekistan, Korea

Received January 20, 2018; Revised version received February 20, 2018; Accepted March 1, 2018

1. Introduction¹⁾

Even as an Uzbek national, why wouldn't there be discrimination, however implicit it is. Now I am here in Korea where my grandfather and grandmother were born—their homeland. Nevertheless, why do I still have to hear that I'm a foreigner? This has bothered me. I have the same *Koryŏ saram* blood, but still I'm a foreigner. I see two separate *minjok*: Koreans and *Koryŏ saram*. I thought *Koryŏ saram* would lead a good life once returning to the homeland, but we are treated differently for cultural reasons.²⁾

Sumin, an Uzbekistan-born *Koryŏ saram*, visited South Korea (hereafter Korea) in 2008 with the help of her older sister, who had migrated to Korea as a foreign spouse. In Uzbekistan, her father worked as a taxi driver until his legs became paralyzed and her mother was employed as an English teacher and vice-principal at a local elementary school. Her parents' income was not sufficient to support Sumin and her two sisters living in a suburban area of Tashkent. Pressed by economic concerns, Sumin's older sister chose to marry a Korean citizen through a cross-border marriage brokerage company and remitted roughly 200 US dollars to her family in Uzbekistan each month, equivalent of her mother's monthly income. After Sumin visited her sister in Korea, she witnessed fellow *Koryŏ saram* working arduously in manufacturing industries to send remittances to their families and thus began working illegally at an industrial factory where she later met her current husband. Sumin's narrative, first as a coethnic migrant and then as a naturalized Korean citizen through marriage, exemplifies the migration experiences of *Koryŏ saram* women in the homeland of their ancestors. Despite the hope that they will no longer be regarded as a societal "other," these women remain foreign spouses who never find themselves fully a part of Korean society.

1) My deepest gratitude goes to the *Koryŏ saram* informants who briskly participated in the interviews for this study. I would like to thank Ms. Shin Zoya and Ms. Kim Young Sook who introduced me to their staff and *Koryŏ saram* migrants at Korean-Cooperative (Koryŏinmaül) in Kwangju, and Neomeo in Ansan. This work was supported by the Seed Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies [AKS-2015-INC-2230004].

2) Pak Sumin, interview, South Korea, 2017.

The bulky amount of research and government policies being produced on foreign residents in Korea notwithstanding, *Koryō saram* migrants in Korea have seldom received academic attention. In fact, even Soviet scholars conducted few research on *Koryō saram* until the 1980s because Soviet Koreans, as a “taboo” ethnic group, were often absent from official Soviet surveys concerning ethnic minority issues (Kim and King 2001, 4; emphasis in the original). Young *Koryō saram* researchers and older generations of South Korean academics began studying the Korean diaspora in the 1990s as relations normalized between Korea and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Kim and King 2001, 4–6). Although studies on *Sahalin saram*³⁾ appeared in the early 2000s, a handful of research on *Koryō saram* residents in Korea did not surface until 2010 (Oh et al. 2015, 3). Two of the available Korean-language studies on *Koryō saram* migrant women in Korea attempt to provide a glimpse of how they migrated to Korea and what impediments there have been for them to settle down in their ancestors’ homeland. Yet the scope of the research is limited—drawing conclusions from interviews with only two or three *Koryō saram* marriage migrant women residing in a single region of Korea (Lee 2015; Chang 2013).

On the basis of in-depth interviews with ten Uzbekistan-born *Koryō saram* women residing in three different regions of Korea, this study examines *Koryō saram* women’s migratory paths from Uzbekistan to Korea and their life experiences in the employment and family spheres. While Uzbeks have migrated *en masse* to the other wealthier CIS countries in the 2000s due to the deterioration of the country’s socioeconomic circumstances, Korea has stood for a favorable destination where monthly income is 600 to 800 US dollars higher than in Russia (Massot 2013, 288), with the coethnic preference policies of Korea as the homeland

3) Contrary to *Koryō saram* whose ancestors emigrated from the northern part of the Korean peninsula to the mainland of the CIS from the late 19th to the early 20th century, *Sahalin saram* refers to Sakhalin Koreans who migrated from the southern part of the peninsula to Sakhalin Island as forced laborers by the Japanese colonial government (including their descendants). See German N. Kim, “Koryo Saram, or Koreans of the Former Soviet Union: In the Past and Present,” *Amerasia Journal* 3 (2009): 23–29. The South Korean government has launched a project to help the first generation *Sahalin saram*—who have a good command of the Korean language and are above age 65—migrate back to South Korea and “regain” their Korean citizenship. Since the beginning of the project in 1989, the number of Sakhalin Koreans currently living in Korea is 3,022. See Jung-Eun Oh, Kyung-Mi Kim, and Seok Won Song, *Kungnaegōju Russia-CIS (Koryōin) hyōnhwang chosa II* [An Investigation Concerning the Conditions of Russian and Other CIS Koryō saram Residing in South Korea] (Seoul: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2015), 20.

government, particularly in temporary labor migration. Since the migration of *Koryŏ saram* are mostly provisional except for the first generation *Sahalin saram* who are eligible for permanent residency upon their arrival in Korea (Oh et al. 2015, 4), this study focuses on *Koryŏ saram* women who have obtained permanent residency through marriage to a Korean citizen. Rather than approaching the case of *Koryŏ saram* migrant women as one of many contemporary marriage-scapes in which grooms from advanced states marry brides from industrializing countries (Constable 2005, 7), this research closely analyses the underpinnings of constructed ethnic ties by questioning how *Koryŏ saram* women select Korea to become settled in as foreign spouses as opposed to Russia and Kazakhstan, and why their husbands prefer to marry *Koryŏ saram* over other foreign brides.

The significance of the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity lies not only in *Koryŏ saram* women's migratory paths, but also (dis)advantages in seeking jobs and balancing between work and family as coethnic migrant women. Gender and "Korean" ethnicity in (social) mobility are constantly interactively intersected, thereby generating conspicuous and obscure forms of inequality at individual levels, whereas some informants express their life satisfaction in Korea as their migration decision is a choice to survive the ordeal of eking a living in Uzbekistan. In addressing the complexities of *Koryŏ saram* migration, this study draws on interactive intersectionality. Intersectionality was part of feminist scholarship questing dynamic ways to conceptualize how socially constructed differentiations and power work at individual and institutional levels (Davis 2014, 17). In this research, the dimensions of exclusion generated at the intersection are perceived as *interactive*, "located in changing, mutually constituted relationships with each other from which they cannot be disentangled" (Glenn 2002, Walby 2007, cited in Ferree 2011, 55). In lieu of a paradigm or theory, this study uses *intersectionality* as a *heuristic device* to identify the co-construction of marginalization (Lutz 2014, 8) at the intersection of gender and ethnicity in the course of their migratory paths and post-migration experiences.

To underline the role of ethnic affinity projected by the homeland and descendants of emigrants, many scholars apply the term "return" to ethnic migration (Tsuda 2009, 25; Shin 2014, 43). Considering the Korean government's

migration policies and the ten informants' decision to migrate to Korea, this study conditionally extends the term to third and fourth generation *Koryŏ saram* who “migrate back” to Korea, in spite of the fact that many of their ancestors had emigrated from the northern part of the Korean peninsula unlike *Sahalin saram*. The official English title of the act that offers a legal status for these descendants to enter Korea is “Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans” that originally excluded *Koryŏ saram* and Korean Chinese (*Chosŏnjok*) but was revised to include the two groups in 2004 (Seol and Skrentny 2009, 158). However, the precise translation of the Korean term *chaeoe tongp'o* is coethnics abroad, which was to a great extent disseminated during colonial Korea (1910–1945). *Chaeoe tongp'o* denotes “Koreans as a community of descent, history, and destiny” that had withstood the annihilation of its own state, regardless of whether they remained in the territorial boundary (Kim 2016, 183; emphasis added). While *kyop'o* or *kyomin*—the post-1962 Korean sojourners or immigrants—replaced the category during the Cold War period (183), *chaeoe tongp'o* reemerged as a statutory term in the 1990s to designate all coethnics abroad including those of foreign nationality in “the kin-state’s vision” (Lee 2010, 237; emphasis added). Given the resuscitation of the ethnic ties of the Korean state across borders, this paper uses the term coethnics abroad.

In analyzing gender and ethnicity in (social) mobility among *Koryŏ saram* migrant women, this paper first details the procedure of conducting interviews as its central method, providing a list of all ten of the study’s informants. The next section scrutinizes the ensuing influx of *Koryŏ saram* from Uzbekistan to Korea in the context of ethnic (return) migration and marriage migration; accordingly, the migratory paths of the participants are also delineated. Then the study explores the ways in which the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity are manifested in the everyday lives of the ten interviewees: to what extent and how their job-seeking process is (dis)advantageous as coethnic migrants who lack Korean language skills but appear “Korean” to contemporary Korean people. This research also looks into the ways that the growing *Koryŏ saram* community allows them to seek new employment opportunities while juggling between work and family as a married migrant with children.

2. Methods

Primarily based on in-depth interviews with ten *Koryŏ saram* migrant women born and raised in Uzbekistan, this study entails official statistics, government-sponsored surveys, and secondary resources (with transnational help for Russian language research). In order to reassure informants to speak flexibly and determine which parts of their lives to focus on within an established, general direction for dialogue, the interviews were semi-structured with a set of prepared questions on topics relating to: early childhood, education, work experience before and after migrating to Korea, family relationships, and social life. Most of the interviewees were recruited by means of snowballing with three different starting points—two community service centers for *Koryŏ saram* and one online community of Russian-speaking migrants in Korea. Below is Table 1 that lists the ten informants by year of migration, first legal status in Korea, education, and current residence and occupation; pseudonyms are given in accordance with whether informants' legal first names were Russian or Korean.

Table 1. Descriptions of Participants Listed by Year of Migration and Current Residence

First Name	Year of Migration	First Legal Status	Education	Current Residence	Occupation
Malvina	2001	Foreign spouse	High school	Kwangju	Kindergarten teacher
Yana	2002	Foreign spouse	Associate degree in Nursing	Kwangju	Kindergarten teacher
Minji	2002	Foreign spouse	B.A. in Accounting	Kwangju	Self-employment
Nina	2004	Coethnics abroad	B.A. in Accounting	Kwangju	Part-time waitress
Yuliaya	2009	Coethnics abroad	B.A. in Social Work (in Korea)	Kwangju	Social worker and translator
Sumin	2008	Coethnics abroad	Associate degree in English Language	Ansan	Elementary school teacher
Valeriya	2008	Coethnics abroad	M.A. in Korean Language Education	Ansan	Translator at a NGO
Marta	2014	Foreign spouse	B.A. in English Language and Linguistics	Ansan	English teacher
Taisia	2002	Foreign spouse	B.A. in Russian Language	Chŏnju	Part-time lecturer
Eva	2012	Coethnics abroad	B.A. in Korean Language Education	Chŏnju	Freelance translator

The interviews ranged from one hour to two hours, and were conducted during two fieldwork trips in 2016 and 2017. Since all informants have children and work either part-time or full-time, one of challenges in planning interviews with them was to find a time and place to meet. Consequently, they could join the interviews in the early afternoon when their children were at school or immediately after their work hours; the meeting points were determined per each informant's preference, for example, at a café, work, or at a local community service center for *Koryŏ saram*. With the exception of Marta, whose interview was conducted in English, all informants speak Korean fluently as a result of either having lived in Korea for around 10 years, or having done a major in Korean Language Education. Additionally, the author's analysis incorporates participatory observations from two week-long stays in Kwangju and Ansan, where Korea's two largest *Koryŏ saram* communities are located. During this time, the author not only observed the residential area in which *Koryŏ saram* are concentrated, but also spoke with many *Koryŏ saram* migrants, experts working at local social welfare centers, and Korean residents in the towns.

Without exception, all informants present themselves as neither Uzbek nor Korean, but as *Koryŏ saram*—former Soviet Koreans whose (great) grandparents emigrated to the present-day CIS from the Korean peninsula prior to the liberation of Korea in 1945. In doing so, they highlight their coethnic ties in that they belong to the same ethnic group of people in the Korean peninsula, the homeland of their ancestors. In the light of their life experiences in Korea, the informants also stress that they are a socially distinct group as they speak Russian as their mother tongue, and are more familiar with the sociocultural environments of the former Soviet Union than of Korea. Not surprisingly, all interviewees commonly used “we” in place of *Koryŏ saram*, and “our country” to signify Uzbekistan during the interviews.

3. *Koryŏ saram* Women in Korea: Ethnic (Return) Migration and Marriage Migration

According to the latest census in 2016 (KOTRA), the population of Uzbekistan

is 31,970,000. As of January 2011, the number of *Koryŏ saram* was estimated at 172,384 (Valeriy and Yong 2014, 118–119). The chief factor for emigration from Uzbekistan is economic. Russian-speaking people first began emigrating from Uzbekistan to Russia following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); however, since 2000, a large number of Uzbeks have migrated to Russia and Kazakhstan as labor migrants because socioeconomic conditions have deteriorated in their home country. With the impact of surging unemployment on 35 percent of working-age population, unbridled inflation has spiraled out of control, not in pace with increasing salaries (Massot 2013, 285). Due to proximity and the fact that there is no visa requirement, Russia remains the foremost destination for labor migrants from Central Asia. As of 2010, for instance, roughly five million Tajiks, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks were estimated to work seasonally in Russia (Laruelle 2013, 8).

Within this milieu, *Koryŏ saram* migration from Uzbekistan to Korea is motivated by both economic and ethnic concerns, such as ethnic discrimination in Uzbekistan and the coethnic preference migration policies of Korea—the putative homeland. With the plummeting standard of living soon after the disintegration of the USSR, Russian-speaking populations have been excluded or disadvantaged in economic activities under the Uzbekistan government’s policies of nationalization, including linguistic (Peyrouse 2013, 227–228). On the other hand, by working in their ancestors’ homeland, *Koryŏ saram* are able to receive three or four times more wages (J. Kim 2014, 152) and the chance to do so has been materialized through the Korean government’s preferential policies for employing coethnics abroad to fill unskilled labor shortages caused by the country’s period of economic prosperity and subsequent low fertility rates (Seol and Skrentny 2009, 154). Even though official diplomatic channels, private corporations, civic organizations, and religious associations supported *Koryŏ saram* to learn the Korean language and visit Korea since the early 1990s (Shin 2013, 166), *Koryŏ saram* migration to Korea, indeed, increased by leaps and bounds after the year 2007 when the Korean government set about granting the temporary employment visa (H-2) for coethnics abroad, known as the Visit and Work Program (Oh et al. 2015, v–vi).

The forms of *Koryŏ saram* migration from Uzbekistan to Korea, nevertheless, are not homogeneous as they enter with various visas (see Table 2). The so-called “the visa for coethnics abroad” (F-4)—rarely allotted to Korean Chinese and former Soviet Koreans until 2008 (Lee 2010, 239)—is accessible to those who are 60 years old and above, college graduates, or other highly skilled professionals less likely to work in manufacturing industries (Oh et al. 2015, vii). Although the F-4 visa holders used to be prohibited from working in low-skilled job sectors, the Ministry of Justice has permitted them to work in limited industrial job sectors since February 1, 2015 (Oh et al. 2015, 20). The Visit and Work Program (H-2 visa) allows *Koryŏ saram* who are at least 25 years old to work in Korea, which may be prolonged to 4 years and 10 months with the freedom of traveling in and out of Korea. Another visa offered to coethnics abroad is C-3 (specified as C-3-8) with which *Koryŏ saram*, less than 60 years old, are able to legally stay in Korea for a maximum of 90 days. In quantity, the most issued visa for Uzbek nationals is E-9, a temporary work permit given to foreigners for which *Koryŏ saram* are also eligible to apply. The Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) categorizes F-2, F-5, and F-6 as marriage migration visas, and the numbers for these permits are therefore not limited to coethnics abroad, but include foreigners who reside in Korea with their Korean family (F-2), who are foreign spouses (F-6), or who have permanent residency (F-5).

Table 2. The Number of Central Asians in South Korea in 2015 Listed by Visa and Sex

Country	Sex	C-3	E-9	F-4	F-2/5/6	H-2
Uzbekistan	Male	1,941	16,002	2,889	81	7,727
	Female	718	294	2,623	2,163	6,379
Kazakhstan	Male	178	62	471	12	873
	Female	100	9	400	223	636
Kyrgyzstan	Male	550	1,026	199	10	478
	Female	145	60	169	472	265

Source: KOSIS (2015)

The statistics in Table 2 also reveal several characteristics of migration from Uzbekistan to South Korea. First, more than half of all male Uzbekistan citizens

residing in Korea hold temporary work visas (E-9), whereas only about 300 females have come from Uzbekistan to Korea as migrant workers. Next, the figures for the number of *Koryŏ saram* migrant workers who hold H-2 visas demonstrate a less gendered distribution when compared with the E-9 visas. Third, most marriage migrants (F-2, F-5, and F-6) who came from Uzbekistan are females while the number of F-4 (coethnics abroad) visa holders is not as gendered. Fourth, because the Korean government does not keep track of Central Asian *Koryŏ saram* migrants unlike *Koryŏ saram* of Russian nationality, it is challenging to calculate how many *Koryŏ saram* reside in Korea (Shin 2013, 169); to give an example, some *Koryŏ saram* may hold F-6 visas (foreign spouse) rather than F-4 visas. If counting the two visas only provided for *Koryŏ saram* (F-4 and H-2), it is estimated that 19,613 *Koryŏ saram* from Uzbekistan are officially registered in Korea, accounting for 41% of the total number of Uzbek migrants. Lastly, that a greater number of *Koryŏ saram* hold H-2 visas rather than F-4 visas corroborates that the former Soviet Koreans from Uzbekistan are most likely to come to Korea as labor migrants.

Despite the option to migrate to Korea with special temporary visas for coethnics abroad, many *Koryŏ saram* women decide to migrate directly to Korea as foreign spouses through marriage. Malvina states:

I did not get even permission from my mother (laughing). I used to live in Tashkent, but sold the house and moved to Russia, living alone there at the time. Nevertheless, there was nothing to do, and I came back to Tashkent to apply for my passport. The middle-aged amateur matchmaker I know was back in the town and told me that Korean men are coming to see our women (*Koryŏ saram* women). Then I asked her if she could introduce me to them. I thought that I wanted to go to Korea, no matter how.⁴⁾

Marriage migrants in Korea have a high chance of gaining permanent residency after two years of living in Korea as foreign spouses if they or their Korean spouses

4) Yi Malvina, interview, South Korea, 2016.

are able to voucher for a consistent annual income, real estate, and a bank statement of 30,000,000 won (Kang and Kim 2015, 241–242). Articles 12 of Korea’s Immigration Control Act’s Enforcement Ordinance states that both F-4 and H-2 visa holders are also eligible to apply for permanent residency (National Law Information Center). An expert and activist working at the Ansan-based NGO Neomeo for supporting *Koryŏ saram*, however, points out that even though the visas currently given to coethnics abroad allow them to work and live in Korea temporarily for three to five years, the eligibility requirements for permanent residency—Korean language proficiency and proof of financial assets—are unobtainable for many *Koryŏ saram*. Likewise, the highest demand of *Koryŏ saram* from the Korean government is that it should offer more accessible channels to apply for permanent residency (Oh et al. 2015, xix).

Concurrently, many Korean grooms prefer coethnic brides to other foreign brides in cross-border marriages.⁵⁾ In the late 1980s, a bride shortage crisis in Korea first emerged as a societal issue in rural areas, stemming from economic and demographic social changes occurring throughout Korea: 1) a skewed sex ratio due to population control policies from the 1960s to the 1980s, 2) women postponing to get married or abandoning the idea of marriage altogether as a result of increasing levels of education and subsequent rising career aspirations (Kim and Kilkey 2016, 142), and 3) rapid urbanization and economic development since the 1970s that steered many young people, particularly women, to move from rural areas to cities in search of new opportunities (Park et al. 2005, 35). The plight of Korean rural bachelors struck a sympathetic chord with many Koreans; local governments and agricultural organizations initiated arranging “meetings” for marriage between rural grooms and urban brides, which later extended to Korean Chinese as they represented a lesser threat to the perceived “blood purity” of the Korean national identity (Kendall 1996, 5; emphasis added). The coethnic preference is implicated in Korean grooms’ longing for foreign brides who they believe hold cultural or racial similarities to themselves, predominantly if they

5) Rather than referring to “international marriage,” a term which is problematic when considering to what extent marriages between Korean citizens and coethnics abroad of foreign nationality must be considered international, this paper uses the term “cross-border marriage” to demonstrate migratory flows from one country to another.

come from industrializing Asian countries (Cho 2014, 3). The perceived resemblances lacking substantiation seems to be associated with their low educational attainment (Kim 2017, 86). Marriage migrants from Uzbekistan, including *Koryŏ saram*, account for 0.8 percent of all 266,547 (naturalized) foreign spouses married to Korean citizens as of 2012 according to Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI 2013, iii).

The ten informants in this study delineate the manifold ways by which *Koryŏ saram* women migrate to South Korea. Regarding the question of why their husbands preferred to have *Koryŏ saram* spouses, most informants responded that their husbands could not find their life partner at a local marriage market; they were in their late 30s or 40s with relatively low income, and looked for a younger bride who fulfills the duty of bearing and raising children. As they sought foreign brides through matchmaking services or personal networks, their family members wished them to marry a similar-looking foreign bride, rather than a white Uzbek or Russian woman. Perhaps, the social portrayal of *Chosŏnjok* as untrustworthy and opportunistic, after “sham marriages” of Korean Chinese aroused public indignation in the 1990s (Freeman 2011, 70–71; emphasis in the original), might have encouraged their husbands and family members to cull *Koryŏ saram* from the pool of coethnic brides.

Except for one informant who met her husband at a company in Russia, five of the ten *Koryŏ saram* migrant women migrated to Korea as a foreign spouse in the early 2000s before the Visit and Work Program was launched in 2008. In the face of unstable sociopolitical and economic conditions in Uzbekistan, two informants were looking for a way to go to Korea in order to avoid eking out a living. Through their own personal networks, they met middle-aged female amateur matchmakers who arranged a meeting between the interviewees and their current husbands. After all, these two informants chose to migrate to Korea through marriage even though they had considered moving to Russia; to them, Korea appeared to be a safer, more attractive new destination as the ethnic homeland of their ancestors. One or two years later, both informants even introduced one of her husband's friends to her friend and one to her sister—the two women are also informants in this study.

The other half of the ten informants migrated first as a coethnic migrant unlike the aforementioned informants who have come to Korea as foreign spouses. Two of the five informants were recipients of student scholarship and majored in Korean Language Education. One of these two informants met her current husband through her friend as a way to stay legally longer in Korea. The other three informants came to Korea on the F-4 visa to either go on a blind date arranged by their family members who had migrated to Korea or to search for job opportunities. These five interviewees substantiate the diverse migratory paths that *Koryŏ saram* migrant women may take prior to marrying a Korean male citizen by using special visas for coethnics abroad, albeit temporary.

4. *Koryŏ saram* Migrant Women's Employment and Work-Family Interface

Among all groups of coethnics abroad who wish to permanently settle in the homeland of their ancestors, *Koryŏ saram* migrants in Korea seem to confront the most challenging social conditions. Unlike *Chosŏnjok*, *Koryŏ saram* migrants rarely understand the Korean language and have almost no contacts with family members and friends in Korea, a factor that emerges as a fundamental disadvantage for them in finding jobs in the unskilled labor sectors and in integrating into local society (J. Kim 2014; Yoon and Kim 2016; K. Kim 2014). During the fieldwork in May 2016, many local civil officials and activists explicated their reflections on the *Koryŏ saram*'s slow pace of social integration in Kwangju, a phenomenon arising from the language deficiency and subsequent difficulties in securing their employment and housing. Ironically, these quandaries have destined that the *Koryŏ saram* ethnic community has grown internally and rapidly over the past decade. To ameliorate the seclusion of local *Koryŏ saram* residents in local society, "Family's Day in Kwangju," an event commemorating Parent's Day in Korea, was held on May 8, 2016. In the course of the occasion that aimed to facilitate interaction among the Korean residents and *Koryŏ saram* including their children, a language and cultural barrier was apparent as the author observed only a few

Koryŏ saram intermingling with local Korean residents and the event volunteers, mostly university students.

In terms of *Koryŏ saram*'s employment, coethnicity—the “Korean” look but with the lack of the Korean language—seems to result in marginalization of high-skilled migrant women. As presented in Table I, Marta is currently an English teacher at a private Russian school. Born and raised in Uzbekistan, her family migrated to Russia in 2000. Majoring in English Language and Linguistics at Moscow State Pedagogical University, she worked as a secretary at an international corporation where she met her husband. Soon after her daughter was born, she decided to migrate to Korea as a foreign spouse. In regards to her job-seeking experience in Korea, she states:

We are immigrant workers. I worked a couple of days at some factories. I didn't get a salary; it was very hard. It smells, just monotonous work. I worked with Filipino women, Chinese women, and one woman was Vietnamese, they were kind to me but the work was not meant for me. I just wanted to raise money, it was my decision—my husband did not force me to do that kind of job. I wanted to do just something; I couldn't find my job at the moment, a teaching job. In Korea, I have a degree from Russia but I don't appear like them. Some hagwŏn in Suwon and Seoul, they replied to me but they asked me to send my photos, it was over when I sent my picture. It was so sad because of my appearance, I couldn't find my teaching job...appearance does not tell your brain, your education.⁶⁾

As a *Koryŏ saram* woman who was raised in Uzbekistan and received a college education in Russia, she did not fit the employers' image of a “foreign” English teacher, which resulted in her not being able to pursue her first job of choice: working at an English cram school. Her experience working at a factory reveals that her language skills and work experience as a secretary are devalorized in the destination country. After several failed attempts, she compromised and began teaching English at a small, private Russian school where children of *Koryŏ saram*

6) Yi Marta, interview, South Korea, 2016.

and Russian labor migrant parents receive standardized Russian education. Whereas her occupational outcome was in line with her original plan and educational background, her narrative portrays the process of job seeking in which one's physical appearance as being of "Korean" ethnicity may derogate from one's high skills.

Although having a "Korean look" and inadequate Korean language skills may undermine the employment status of *Koryŏ saram* migrants, the coethnic network often generates new internal economic activities. Minji studied accounting at college in Uzbekistan, but had to take care of her ill mother instead of pursuing her career. After her mother passed away, she decided to visit friends in Korea and was introduced to a man in Kwangju. Upon marrying, she assisted with her husband's interior design work, did a part-time job at a small local restaurant, and as of recently has begun managing two Russian supermarkets owned by her husband. In Minji's case, the growing ethnic community provided her and her spouse the opportunity to open a business to meet the increasing demands of *Koryŏ saram* migrants and their family members. Without counting undocumented residents, more than 30 percent of the number of the migrants in the area had increased annually: 448 in 2011, 628 in 2012, 859 in 2013, and 1,134 in 2014 (Yoon and Kim 2016, 24). Roughly half of newly arrived *Koryŏ saram* migrants to Korea preferred Kwangju because their family, relatives, and friends were already settled in the region according to a survey conducted in 2013 (K. Kim 2014, 272).

Malvina, Yana, and Valeriya have also benefited from the emerging ethnic network and community. Malvina and Yana are currently kindergarten teachers working for children of *Koryŏ saram* labor migrants in Kwangju; they are hometown friends and decided to start a new life by migrating to Korea via marriage. Before moving to Kwangju, the only job option available to Malvina and Yana in the rural areas of Ch'ungch'ŏng-do was factory work for 10 to 12 hours per day. However, in Kwangju the growing *Koryŏ saram* community proved advantageous in seeking new employment opportunities and the opening of local support organizations gave them a chance to work as kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, Valeriya received a scholarship from the Overseas Koreans

Foundation for pursuing an M.A. degree in Korean Language Education at a university based in Seoul. Valeriya, who used to work as a part-time lecturer at a corporation, now works as a translator at an NGO for *Koryŏ saram* in Ansan where the majority of foreign workers are concentrated within Korea.

The multifarious workings of ethnicity and *Koryŏ saram* community manifested in the lives of the aforementioned five informants are rather balanced out when it comes to (social) mobility. In conjunction with gender roles, nevertheless, all *Koryŏ saram* informants experienced career discontinuities. Whether for economic reasons, self-fulfillment, or a combination of the two, all interviewees are currently employed at will: seven full-time, two part-time, and one freelance working coethnic migrant mothers. All informants who have children postponed looking for work until their children had entered at least pre-school or kindergarten. Except for Valeriya and Eva who majored in Korean Language, the other eight informants honed the basics of the language while staying at home as unpaid domestic workers. To many informants, the language barrier and their life as a stay-at-home wife brought about postpartum depression, which in turn motivated them to seek a job once some informants could send their children off at preschool.

In terms of the distribution of household chores after becoming employed, the informants have taken almost full responsibility for cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing; on the contrary, ideally they believe that house chores must be equally divided if women also work full-time. According to *Report on the Social Survey* by Statistics Korea, roughly 80 percent of working Korean wives take charge of domestic work regardless of their employment status (2014, 294) whereas approximately 40 percent of Korean and foreign wives presume that domestic work must be equally divided (290; KWDI 2016, 93). Like married Korean women, the traditionally bifurcated gender norms of the family domain are observable in the lives of *Koryŏ saram* women, a reality that seemed to promote career discontinuities among the interviewees.

The case of Sumin, nonetheless, exemplifies the *Koryŏ saram* migrant women's ability to negotiate with their Korean husbands in the work-family sphere. When it comes to her struggles with patriarchal culture in Korean family, she states:

We had some issues in regard to that at first. Men must earn money and women must do care work at home. Men should not enter the kitchen (laughing). He used to divide what men's job and women's job are. Now that I also work, I told him that you must share household chores; otherwise I will spend what I earn myself. He thought about it and said that it should not be (laughing). So he now cleans and goes grocery shopping. I still cook because he is just not good at it.⁷⁾

Sumin proactively positions herself as a full-time working wife to urge her husband to be more involved in the domestic work. Initially, illegally working at a manufacturing factory as a coethnic tourist, she began to stay home and take care of her children; meanwhile she eagerly learned the Korean language and looked for a job that would pay more than her previous low-skilled job. First lecturing at a welfare center, she managed to gain a teaching job at a local elementary school for children of cross-border marriages or “multicultural family,” a term first proposed by a civic organization and later adopted by the Korean government (Kim 2007, 103).

An examination of the devaluing of *Koryŏ saram*'s work experience at the intersection of gender and ethnicity merits careful attention to initial migration motivations as well as their life satisfaction in Korea. Unlike Sumin, Yuliaya took up both a full-time paid job and unpaid domestic work, as she would have been delighted to do so for her disabled husband and two children. Yuliaya married her current Korean spouse, introduced to her by her cousin in Korea when she came to Korea as a coethnic tourist after graduating high school. Her spouse is a physically disabled man (only one arm), has a limited number of decent job options, and is unable to help house chores. Yuliaya gave birth to two children and later attended a college to study social work while raising the children until they went to kindergarten. Once she received a college degree and polished her Korean language skills, she began her career as a social worker and translator. Even though she is burdened with household chores, she utilized her opportunity to be able to stay, work, and study in Korea, and made her own decision to pursue

7) Pak Sumin, interview, South Korea, 2017.

her career. Against the social stigmatization of a coethnic marriage migrant whose spouse is a so-called disabled man, she expresses her satisfaction with her life in Korea, even abandoning her Uzbek nationality for Korean citizenship.

Another example is Nina who used to be an accountant at an international gas corporation in Uzbekistan but has been working a part-time waitress from time to time in Korea. Her divorce from her first marriage hindered her from continuing to live in Uzbekistan as a single mom with her daughter from the first marriage. Her youngest sister, who married a Korean spouse, encouraged her to visit and meet someone in Korea for remarriage by which she was assumed to have a child before pursuing her career in Korea. Once her son attended kindergarten and her Korean language skills had improved to the extent that she could have daily conversations, she started to work part-time in the unskilled manual job sector. It was her solution to overcome socioeconomic hardships as a single mom in Uzbekistan with her younger sister's help to write her an invitation letter, the fact notwithstanding that her current employment status indicates a process of being deskilled. Hence, the case of Yuliaya and Nina illustrates that the devaluing of *Koryō saram*'s employment as a coethnic migrant woman must not be interpreted at face value.

5. Conclusion

In examining the migration of *Koryō saram* women from Uzbekistan to Korea, two salient social differentiations—gender and ethnicity—can be understood as strongly influencing (social) mobility in a multifaceted form. The ethnic (return) migration of *Koryō saram* occurs within the social and economic contexts of both Korea and Uzbekistan: economic hardships coupled with discrimination against ethnic minorities in Uzbekistan dovetail with the Korean government's coethnic preference policies for filling the unskilled labor shortage. Nevertheless, *Koryō saram* women's migratory paths and settlement mirror the Korean social impulse that urges migrant women to tie themselves to Korean nationals as wives and mothers in order to gain permanent residency or Korean citizenship. In "the

reluctant home state” (Kim 2016, 221) where family formation through heterosexual marriage provides migrant women a stable legal status and substantial benefits (Choo 2013, 464), paradoxically, the interdependence of ethnic migration and marriage migration allows for the agency of *Koryŏ saram* women who struggle to pursue inclusion or postnational citizenship.

The analysis of the *Koryŏ saram* migrant women *vis-à-vis* employment and the work-family interface seems to require qualitative approaches, rather than the orthodox macroscale examination of occupational changes. The research results reveal that education and work experiences—particularly skilled labor experience, such as English teaching and nursing—are devalued due to a lack of Korean language skills. At the same time, Korea’s poorly integrated and swiftly expanding *Koryŏ saram* communities act as migration and job finding networks. On the other hand, like married Korean women, the working *Koryŏ saram* migrant women encounter career discontinuity being burdened by the gender roles as a wife and mother, a full-time unpaid domestic worker, although being a foreign spouse offers them a relatively stable legal status in comparison with other migrants in Korea. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that some informants’ skills are devalorized and that they must juggle their job and unpaid domestic work simultaneously, many informants wished to settle in South Korea permanently as a means of surmounting their ordeal in Uzbekistan.

Finally, the intersections of gender and ethnicity apparent during *Koryŏ saram* migration and settlement shed light on the social position of *Koryŏ saram* in Korea. As can be seen in Sumin’s narratives in the beginning of this paper, *Koryŏ saram* are only welcome by the homeland of ancestors as temporary labor migrants or visitors. Nonetheless, *Koryŏ saram* women maneuver to directly migrate or later settle down in South Korea by marrying to a Korean national, a viable option to obtain permanent residency. Even after they pass through the circumscribed gates to Korea, albeit multiply coordinated, the women experience being othered by contemporary Koreans whereas they are imposed on gender norms by their Korean family members with relation to their roles as wives and mothers. In this sense, “Koreanness” *per se* is applied as an idea more associated with culture than race/ethnicity, questioning whether *Koryŏ saram* are “returned” to their ancestors’

homeland. However long all ten informants reside in Korea, they distinctively represent themselves as *Koryŏ saram*, an ethnic identity independent of modern conceptions of what it means to be Uzbek and Korean and a self-identification that continues to be reinforced in the putative homeland.

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