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#### Citation

SONG, Jiyoung.(2015). Five phases of brokered international marriages in South Korea: A complexity perspective. *Asian Studies*, 1(1), 147-176.

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# **Five Phases of Brokered International Marriages in South Korea: A Complexity Perspective**

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Published in *Asian Studies*, 1(1), September 2015, 147-176.

## **Abstract**

The paper examines the evolution in international commercial marriage migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea from a Complexity Theory (CT) framework, originally from natural sciences but vastly entering the field of social sciences. CT stresses the non-linear nature of complex systems that are composed of a large number of individual components operating within a conditioned boundary whose interactions lead emergent properties in an unpredictable way. The study is based on the author's fieldwork interviews and participatory observations of marriage migrants, government officers, and social workers in South Korea in 2010-2013, which establishes five phases of brokered marriages, namely, (1) Outsourcing Brides (mid 1980s-), (2) Emerging Anti-Trafficking Norms (early 2000s-), (3) Institutionalizing Multiculturalism (2006-), (4) Regulating Brokers (2008-), and 5) Sham Marriages and Emerging Nationalism (2010-). She explains the key elements of marriage migration as a complex adaptive system such as feedback loops, adaptation, emergence, self-organisation and agency, and suggests persistent observation and CT as an alternative methodology to study migration.

Keywords: marriage migration, South Korea, Southeast Asia, complexity

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The current research is generously funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education (Fund No.: 14-C242-SMU-006). The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments to improve the earlier version of the paper.

## I. Introduction

As of 2013, the total number of marriage migrants in the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea, hereafter) was 150,865, which accounts to approximately 15 per cent of the entire immigrants and 0.3 per cent of the South Korean population (see the Table 1 below).<sup>1</sup> Among these, 128,826 are female, 85 per cent of all marriage migrants.<sup>2</sup> One in ten weddings in South Korea is international in 2013, compared to only 1.6 per cent in 1993. With its vibrant economy and socio-political development, young Korean women leave for bigger cities seeking better education, jobs or marriages. Men, on the other hand, tend to stay behind in rural areas as they have more land ownership and inheritance rights as well as responsibilities to look after their elderly parents that their sisters can be free from, under traditional Korean Confucian traditions. The declining indigenous female population and imbalance in the sex ratio in the countryside have become an issue for local governments since the late 1980s, which then sought to redress the problem through “outsourcing” potential wives from overseas.

In mid-1980s, Korean-Chinese (ch’osŏnjok) women were first invited through private marriage brokers, subsidised by local governments. Ch’osŏnjok women, being ethnically Korean, speak the language and know how to cook Korean food. Brides from the Philippines and Japan were brought in through the Unification Church. As you can see the Table 1, since 2000, the brides’ countries have become widely diversified and there are observable patterns and “balloon” effect of marriage migration, in other words, a decrease in one Southeast Asian country leads an increase in another. The figures from Vietnam and Cambodia in 2002-3 and 2006-7, for example, demonstrate that there were sudden hikes in the number of marriage migrants. These two countries are where commercial brokers were actively involved in marriage migration processes.

The article focuses on brokered marriage migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea. It assumes that emerging patterns of this particular form of marriage migration through brokers are not just the direct result of the linear economic push and pull factors, but more of non-linear dynamic local interactions among relevant stakeholders and their responses to existing domestic and regional politico-legal structures as well as to increasing pressures from the domestic and international women’s rights and human rights activists. Key actors include marriage migrants themselves, Korean husbands and marriage brokers. However, there are peripheral actors like families, friends and relatives, government immigration officials, service providers and human rights activists who also shape the discourses, change interests of migrants and influence government regulations and policies. States, sending and receiving, are both actors and structures.

They act to change legal frameworks but also provide the overall structure under which actors pursue their respective interests and play their roles. Brokered marriage migration is also transnational issues between the sending countries in Southeast Asia and the receiving country, South Korea, which create diplomatic tensions and might affect trade relations.

In order to understand these trends and emerging patterns of brokered marriage migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea, this article is based on the author’s fieldwork interviews in 2010-2013 as empirical

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Korea Immigration Service, there are 985,923 immigrants in South Korea as of December 2013. The entire South Korean population is approximately 48 million according to the Korean Statistical Information Service at [http://kosis.kr/statisticsList/statisticsList\\_01List.jsp?vwcd=MT\\_ZTITLE&parentId=A#SubCont](http://kosis.kr/statisticsList/statisticsList_01List.jsp?vwcd=MT_ZTITLE&parentId=A#SubCont), last visited on 9 February 2015 (in Korean)

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Korea, “Statistics on International Marriages” at [http://www.index.go.kr/egams/stts/jsp/potal/stts/PO\\_STTS\\_IdxMain.jsp?idx\\_cd=2819](http://www.index.go.kr/egams/stts/jsp/potal/stts/PO_STTS_IdxMain.jsp?idx_cd=2819), last visited on 9 February 2015 (in Korean).

evidence and utilises Complexity Theory (CT)<sup>3</sup> as an organising framework. For this article, CT is referred to as a new theoretical discourse, a conceptual framework, and a set of methodological tools for interdisciplinary social sciences. It demonstrates not only the linear “push and pull” factors but also the dynamic interactions among various stakeholders involved in the process and between the agents and the inter-state migration systems across national boundaries. CT offers much to understand and explain interactive and adaptive spatio-temporal processes of migration. The article, then, draws a model of brokered international marriage migration by dividing the non-linear self-organising process into five distinctive stages: (1) “outsourcing” brides (late 1980s-); (2) emerging instances of violence in the media, followed by social norms of anti-trafficking (early 2000s-); (3) institutionalising multiculturalism (2006-); (4) regulating marriage brokering businesses (2008-) and (5) emerging instances of sham marriages in the media, followed by tighter immigration policies (2010-). Each phase, conceptually framed in the CT language such as emergence, adaptation and self-organisation, begins with either a government action or emerging social norms through the media in the complex migration system that was triggered by socio-economic and diplomatic needs, which create feedback loops. This self-organising behaviour is a result of unpredictable interactions among various individual agents in the migration system.

## II. Complexity Approach to Marriage Migration

Migration research has been criticised for its descriptive and theoretically “un(der) elaborating” nature as well as its normative bias (Bommes and Morawska 2005). Similarly, existing work on marriage migration has approached the issue with various normative angles, describing marriage migrants as “picture brides” (Chai and Gabaccia 1992; Makabe 1995), “mail-order brides” (Cooke 1986; Cahill 1990; Chuah et al. 1992; Cunneen and Stubbs 1997), “war brides” (Glenn 1986; B.-L. C. Kim 1977), reproductive workers (Kojima 2001; Trung 1996), prostitution (Demleitner 1994; Hauge 1995), or victims of human trafficking (Cao 1987; Cheng 2002), human rights abuses (McConnell 1992; Schneider 1992; Anderson 1993; Meng 1994) or illegal marriage brokering (Glodava and Onizuka 1994; Nakamatsu 2003; Lu 2005). Most studies are descriptive and case-specific. A few have attempted to build a systematic theory or a model, regarding why and how marriage migrants themselves move across the national and ethnic boundaries, the process of which is highly interactive and constantly evolving.

The paper proposed CT as an alternative approach to study marriage migration. CT started in natural sciences, namely biology, chemistry and physics, but become truly multidisciplinary over the past few decades as it is widely used in the fields of social sciences. David Byrne (1998) has set solid foundation on complexity and social sciences while others have used CT in their sociological process theory (Cederman 2005) or artificial societies (Epstein and Axtell 1996). A large volume of empirical studies is now based on CT analyses on public policy (Dennard et al., 2008; Morçöl, 2008), governance mechanisms (Blackman 2001; Trochim and Cabrera, 2005; Teisman and Klijn 2008; Cairney 2012) and public health (McDaniel and Driebe 2001; Beverly et al. 2004). From bird migration to traffic systems, drugs policy (Xiao et al. 2013), public education systems (Kayuni 2010), feminist intersectionality studies (McGibbon and McPherson 2011) and visitors’ movement in amusement parks, CT’s tools such as agent-based models (ABMs) have been widely employed already.

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<sup>3</sup> Good beginners’ materials on CT include Waldrop (1992), Kauffman (1993), Holland (1998), and Mitchell (2009). Melanie Mitchell’s online introduction course at the Complexity Explorer hosted by the Santa Fe Institute (<http://www.complexityexplorer.org>) is also a great start.

This does not mean that humans behave like animals or cars. Nor does marriage migrants behave the same way park visitors do. The common feature across all these various human behaviours is that their local interactions present emergent properties in a system level, which can be observed persistently over a certain period. In this particular sense, CT has significant potentials to contribute to migration studies. Its non-linear evolutionary perspective is apt to explain current dynamics of transnational migration than the neoclassical linear push-pull factor approach, which is still a dominant analysis. CT emphasises non-linear Darwinian processes in which a large number of heterogeneous agents interact with one another and with the system they are in (Kauffman 1993; Holland 1998, 2012; Mitleton-Kelly 2003; Mitchell 2009). A complex system wants to maintain its equilibrium and presents observable self-organising criticality to seek its fitness level. These patterns are observed in marriage migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea, which the article aims to elaborate.

### **Marriage Migration as a Complex Adaptive System**

All of these features of a complex adaptive system, described above, have explanatory power in the current case of marriage migration to South Korea. There are a large number of heterogeneous agents, who constitute marriage migrants, hosting spouses and their families, marriage brokers, governments, service providers and NGO activists. They interact with one another and with the system they are in, either in the Vietnamese migration regime or in the Korea system. Marriage migration is a system in which certain regulations and operating principles shape each agent's interests and behaviour. Each agent has fairly simple rules to make their decisions, but they also make spontaneous decisions through interactions with other agents, spatially limited. As agents move across state boundaries, the scope and intensity of interactions with multiple agents increase dramatically and temporally. Observable patterns of individual behaviour and social phenomena emerge through the media, which create public discourses and social norms. Actors have certain expectations towards the others and this may cause unpredicted tensions among the agents as well as conflicts between a particular group of agents and the legal political structure of the state's migration regime. These emerging properties are normally observable through public discourses, statistical patterns or material transactions.

### **Interactions and Feedback Loops**

The mainstream analytical approaches on migration have the neoclassical linear "push-pull" factors (Borjas 1989; Faini et al. 1999; Chiswick 2000) and/or historical structuralism (Peek and Standing 1982; Beneria and Roldan 1987; Cohen 1987; Lin 1993; Jordan and Duvell 2003; Castles and Miller 2009). While the former is mainly based on neoclassical economic analyses, the latter explains how endogenous socioeconomic interests of marriage migrants are met with exogenous environments. For example, one of the deciding factors for inter-Asian marriage migration is identified collective norms of gender roles within a society (Massey et al. 1987; Taylor 1987; Stark 1991). In the Korean case, too, traditional collective gender norms in the migrant's country of origin are reinforced by even stronger gender stereotypes in the South Korean rural social norms. What CT can add here is the social interactions marriage migrants experience and cope with in a non-linear manner to emerge their aggregate behavior in a societal or national level, what is best explained by John Holland's (2012) signal/boundary concepts in complex adaptive systems. Described below, migrants interactions with social workers and women's activists in South Korea created the normative feedback loop and emerging social norms of anti-trafficking and human rights in the society that led the central government to enact the law to regulate marriage brokering business.

## **Self-Organisation**

Self-organisation occurs at individual, societal and national levels and mainly in two forms: adaptation and co-evolution. How resilient individuals and the system are to new environments depends on their fitness and self-organisation criticality. Each country develops and transforms its policies and regulations on brokered marriage migration by the feedback loops, constantly created in the system. The Korean case is not unique in this. Japan, Taiwan, Australia, the US and some Western European countries experience similar phenomenon (Cahill 1990; Betts 1995; Martin 1995; Wang and Chang 2002; Nakamatsu 2003). Mika Toyota's (2008) special issue in *Citizenship Studies* offers extensive comparative views to how each East Asian country had shaped its own policies on marriage migration, which are largely similar in terms of the overall border control framework but different in places where it comes to citizenship and entitlements, depending on the political nature of the system where migrants are. The comparative study presented the spatial diversity in a given temporal framework.

## **Agency**

The sentimental "victim" approach by the media and human rights groups is helpful, only to certain extents, where it generates sympathy among the public who then can influence government policies to implement more protective measures and support systems for marriage migrants. However, this victim approach depicts them as passive, poor, helpless women from developing countries and, therefore, undermines the agency of marriage migrants while harming their dignity and personal integrity. This also limits our cognitive process to realise to what extent marriage migrants can exercise their agency to become ROK citizens and beyond. Despite good intentions, the victim approach is inherently discriminatory and cognitively limited. Some have worked on improving this limitation. Yeoh et al. (2002) emphasises women's agency in transnational marriages whereas Piper and Roces (2003) offers a more insightful agent-based sociological framework for Asian marriage migration by focusing on the rights and entitlements of marriage migrants have.

To further this, CT's ABMs can be highly useful in theorising various forms of marriage migration by simulating individual migrants' decisions and their aggravate behaviour in the system level. Unlike other areas of public health or education that have utilised ABMs, little have been done to employ ABMs in migration studies yet. Many studies on marriage migration to South Korea remain descriptive and policy-oriented (Abelmann and Kim 2005; Freeman 2005; Sol and Yun 2005; G. S. Han 2006; M. C. Kim et al. 2006; H.-K. Lee 2008; Y. J. Lee and Bae 2008; Cho and Yi 2010; Shim 2010). Women's agency, interactions with other actors, emergence of social norms, self-organisation of regulations and institutions need a better theoretical framework, which can be offered by complexity science.

CT is more than a metaphor from natural to social sciences or a general paradigm shift from existing theories. It provides rich methodologies, including computational ABMs, system dynamics or scenario simulations, which are currently missing in migration studies. ABMs and scenario planning are particularly relevant and meaningful for various migration case studies. ABMs are a computational methodology and provides a social laboratory that creates, analyses and experiments with artificial worlds populated by agents that interact in nontrivial ways and that constitute their own environment (Axelrod 1997). Schelling's (1978) segregation model, Axelrod's (1984) emerging political actors model, Epstein and Axtell's (1996) ABMs for sociological processes, Bhavnani and Backer's (2000) ABMs for the emergence of ethnic norms in Burundi and Rwanda, and Cioffi-Revilla and Rouleau's (2009, 2010)

“RebeLand” and “AfriLand” pose particular relevance to migration studies. Standard computational packages, such as Netlogo or Repast, offer built-in software for this purpose, which is relatively easy for social scientists who do not have substantive mathematical backgrounds. A combined or hybrid methodology of data collection, ABMs and empirical validation would be ideal, which is already used in cities, traffic control and commuter mobility.<sup>4</sup> Given the limited space, this article would only introduce its theoretical framework that can be applied in migration studies in general.

### **III. Five Phases of Brokered International Marriage**

#### **Migration to South Korea**

The following sections are based on, first of all, the primary data collection from publicly available government statistics and other documents (Ministry of Public Health and Welfare 2005; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2007; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2009; South Chungchong òng Province 2009; Emergency Support Centre for Migrant Women, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2010; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2012); NGO reports (Centre for Asian Gender Studies 2007; M. C. Kim 2009; K. Y. Han 2010; Kwon 2010), websites of match-making companies in South Korea, and newspaper reports. These preliminary data is supplemented by the author’s own fieldwork interviews and participatory observations of marriage migrants in South Korea in 2010-2013. During the fieldwork in South Korea, she visited six cities (Seoul, Taejòn, Kũmsan, Nonsan, Asan and Kongju) and carried out 60 qualitative interviews with marriage migrants. Interviewees include marriage migrants, Korean husbands, social workers, government officials, scholars as well as marriage brokers. In addition, she also visited two of the source cities, Manila (Philippines) in August 2010 and Hanoi (Vietnam) in September 2013, to interview potential marriage migrants to South Korea. In June-August 2010, the author participated in several socio-cultural programmes run by local NGOs and government-funded multicultural centres by teaching Korean and mathematics for young children with mixed-heritage at the age between four and six and joining potato farming organised by marriage migrants themselves. The main purpose of participatory observation was to understand the deeper inner logic and dynamics of marriage migrants’ interactions with other actors such as their husbands, fellow foreign wives, children, social workers and government officials.

Figure 1 demonstrates the five-stage model of brokered international marriage migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea. Each phase represents distinctive features, triggered either by a government policy or emerging social norms. A new phase co-exists with the previous phase(s). Norms, institutions and regulations evolve in a non-linear and unpredictable way as actors change their identities and act according to their interests. This process has no end, in other words, Phase I will eventually be withered away while new phases will constantly be created with new norms or government intervention.

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<sup>4</sup> The Singapore Agency for Science Technology and Research A\* has been conducting complexity research on city dynamics using ABMs (<http://www.research.a-star.edu.sg/research/6749>). Similarly, the Santa Fe Institute (<http://www.santafe.edu/research/cities-scaling-and-sustainability/>) and the LSE Complexity Programme (<http://www.psych.lse.ac.uk/complexity/Research/others.html>) carry out similar research on cities including transportation and migration.

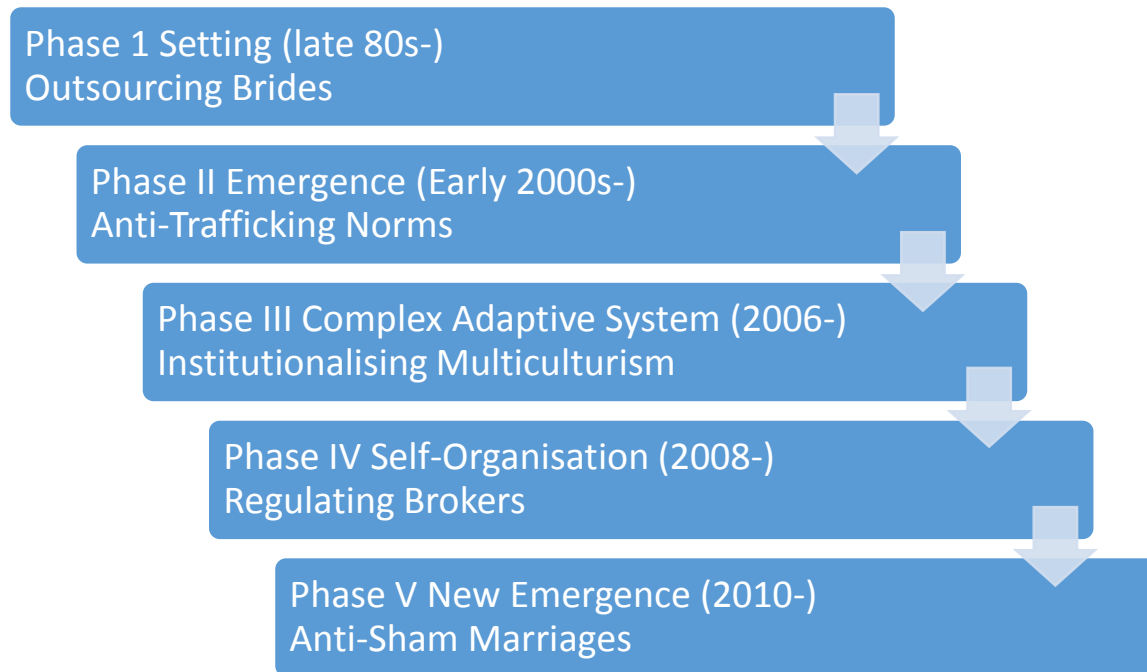


Figure 1. Five phases of brokered marriage migration in South Korea

### Phase I: Local Adaptation and “Outsourcing” Brides

There are several forms of marriage brokering in Korea:<sup>5</sup> traditional matchmakers, called “madangbal (yard-feet)” for domestically arranged marriages; the Unification Church, led by Reverend Mun Sŏn Myŏng, which has organised mass weddings since 1960;<sup>6</sup> overseas Korean evangelicals or settled marriage migrants;<sup>7</sup> and commercial match-making agencies, emerging from the mid to late 1980s, following the Japanese model for subsidising marriage funds for bachelor farmers to find foreign wives.<sup>8</sup>

Phase I started with the Korean local governments’ functionalist approach to the gender imbalance and aging population in Korean countryside (Simmons 1993), which is a system’s self-organising behaviour

<sup>5</sup> Elmer Malibiran at the Action Research on Marriage Migration Network (ARMMNet), identifies four modes of marriage migration, which are: intermediary agencies such as marriage brokers and recruitment agencies; interaction with common network and friends, and traditional matchmakers; internet (chat-rooms and emails) and other communication channels; and recruitment through the Unification Church (Maria Aleta O. Nieva, “Tales of women ‘marriage migrants,’” ABS CBN News, Philippines on 28 October 2008 at <http://www.rickross.com/reference/unif/unif331.html>, last visited on 8 August 2013.

<sup>6</sup> The Unification Church, Introduction, The Blessing at [http://www.tongilgyo.org/system/intro\\_06\\_en](http://www.tongilgyo.org/system/intro_06_en), last visited on 9 February 2015 (in Korean).

<sup>7</sup> A Philippine marriage migrant I interviewed in Kŭmsan, an agricultural town in South Chungchong, for example, met her husband in her hometown through her aunt who had already married a Korean man through the Unification Church. Many cases I have seen during my fieldwork are through these informal matchmakers and/or commercial brokers.

<sup>8</sup> In Yamagata, Japan, for example, there are approximately 2,000 foreign wives through marriage brokers. “Korean Wife in Japan Big Success in Kimchi Business,” Chung Ang Daily, 17 February 2010 (in Korean) and Hiroko Tashiro, “Imported Brides: A struggling rural community looks beyond Japan to save its way of life,” Time Asia, 21 August 2000.



to tackle the local problems without considering its long-term impact. Many local governments introduced the “Wedding Campaigns for Bachelor Farmers” in the mid-1980s, some formally in their provincial level decrees while other informally.

Heterogeneous agents with respective interests and identities in the system reacted to the change. Traditional match-makers became more organised and commercialized to facilitate international marriages because there were government subsidies, available directly to them.<sup>9</sup> Local governments transferred KRW 4-6 million (approximately USD 3,800-5,700) to the brokers, not to the farmers, in fear that the farmers would use the funds for other purposes.<sup>10</sup> This government scheme became the major attractor for the increase in the number of commercial international marriages in South Korea. There were around 60 such programmes existed in 2007. In 2011, about twelve programmes were run: six in North Kyōngsang, three in North Chungchong, two in Kangwon and one in South Chōlla.<sup>11</sup> During the author’s fieldwork in July 2010, five out of fifteen counties in South Chungchong Province had the “Decree on Supporting Bachelor Farmers’ International Marriages” in place while one, Puyō, was still implementing this scheme.<sup>12</sup> As a result of these local adaptation to gender imbalance, the system has shown that 80 per cent of Vietnamese and Cambodian brides met their husbands through brokers in 2009 (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2009).<sup>13</sup> It has also shown as in Table 1, there was a surge from 2002 to 2003 in Vietnam and also from 2006 to 2007 in Cambodia, which indicates marriage brokers’ shifting behaviour of choosing a target country.

With the half of “marriage funds” going directly to brokers, Korean men became customer-grooms. Some of them became active “regulars.”<sup>14</sup> This interaction between brokers and husbands-to-be has brought emerging phenomenon. The brides were initially ethnic Korean from China. In the 2000s, however, the nationalities became varied to include the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia and Uzbekistan.

## **Phase II: Emergence of Anti-Trafficking and Human Rights Norms**

Phase II began with emerging norms of anti-trafficking and human rights locally through the media and NGOs, which was joined by sending countries. The local government-induced marriage campaigns and

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<sup>9</sup> “Wedding campaigns for bachelor farmers,” News 21, 30 September 2002 (in Korean).

<sup>10</sup> “What is wrong with the project for supporting international marriage funds?” Chewoe Dongpo Sinmun on 14 June 2007 (in Korean).

<sup>11</sup> “Local governments abandon bachelor farmers’ wedding support programmes,” Seoul Sinmun, 4 November 2011 (in Korean)

<sup>12</sup> The Decree (no. 1827) on the Support of International Marriages for Bachelors in Puyo, South Chungchong Province, adopted on 21 February 2007, for example, grants 3 million Korean won (approximately 1,700 GBP) for bachelors in the age between 35 and 50 who have lived in the town for more than 3 years, marry foreign wives and finish marriage registration. Similar decrees were passed by local city councils in other regions. Kosong, Samchok and Hoengsong in Kangwon Province passed the decrees and will implement the subsidy scheme for bachelor farmers in the region by granting 5 million Korean won (approximately 3,000 GBP) for marrying foreign wives (“Government fund for farmers and fishermen,” Local Seke on 30 June 2010 (in Korean).

<sup>13</sup> A 2008 survey conducted by Yukyong Kim also shows that 31 per cent of marriage migrants met their spouses through brokers. Another survey done in 2006 by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family says that 45.7 per cent of female marriage migrants met their husbands through friends or relatives and 19.5 through brokers.

<sup>14</sup> A 53-year-old Korean man I interviewed married three times through brokers. For his second marriage with a Korean-Chinese, he was granted the government subsidy of approximately USD 6,000, which went directly to his broker. Interview with S on 27 July 2010 in Asan, South Chungchong.

subsidies in Phase I resulted in sizeable scale of international marriages between Korean men, mostly from low-income groups, and women from developing countries, especially Southeast Asia.

The size of the brokering industry also grew, with some companies still unregistered. Unregulated, some business practices have gone rampant and inhumane. Abusive business practices were captured by the media, which then alarmed women's and human rights activists as well as the embassies of the sending countries in South Korea. A complex system is an open one that allows free flow of information. Websites of broker companies list merits of women by country and set racial and nationality-based stereotypes.<sup>15</sup> Some of the street advertisements for "bride shopping" say, for example, "Marry Vietnamese Virgins," "Vietnamese Virgins Never Escape. Guaranteed!" or "Never Mind Your Second Time or Disability."<sup>16</sup> These commercial activities have gone, uninterrupted by the Korean governments until the issue was raised by local women's groups.

Feminists and human rights activists were the main actors who were creating the social norms, highlighting various problems of violence, abuses and crimes committed during the brokering processes. They reported fraud, deception, omission of critical facts in brokering marriages, no written contracts,<sup>17</sup> debt bondage, unlicensed "virginity" tests, restricted freedom of movement, confiscation of brides' passports, limited contact with fellow countrywomen (M. C. Kim 2009; Korean Consumers Agency 2009). They were spreading feedback loops through interactions with other individual actors in the system through the social media, news, campaigns and petitions. Women's and human rights groups came up with various policy suggestions, including restricting visas to Korean grooms who have mental diseases, criminal records, or marital history with multiple foreign wives<sup>18</sup> or complete banning of brokered marriages seeing it as a form of human trafficking.<sup>19</sup> A National Assembly person, Kim Chun Jin, proposed the antihuman trafficking bill as well as the ratification of the Palermo Protocol.<sup>20</sup>

The role of media is extensive in shaping these social norms. While Korean husbands with foreign wives were depicted as violent alcoholic chauvinistic losers,<sup>21</sup> Asian brides were victims of domestic violence, suffering from language barriers, lack of access to social services and amenities, food, age difference,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Some of these websites say: "The Filipina cannot divorce and will not have abortions because of their Catholic beliefs. They speak English, which is good for children's education and can also provide extra income for the families by teaching English;" "Filipinas' dark skin can become lighter a few months after they arrive in Korea;" "The Vietnamese are subservient, mostly virgins, diligent and respectful of the elderly;" "Cambodians are positive and cheerful;" and "Uzbeks are pretty and tall while respecting traditional male chauvinistic values."

<sup>16</sup> Numerous online bloggers reported these street signs and posted on the Internet between 2007-9.

<sup>17</sup> The compulsory written contract translated to a bride's language was legislated only in November 2010.

<sup>18</sup> "Endless Human Trafficking Stories of Brokered Marriages," Salad TV, 17 September 2010 at

[http://saladtv.kr/?document\\_srl=234015](http://saladtv.kr/?document_srl=234015) (in Korean) and Asia Today, 20 July 2010 at

<http://www.asiatoday.co.kr/news/view.asp?seq=379925>, last visited on 9 February 2015 (in Korean).

<sup>19</sup> "New Form of Human Trafficking through Brokered International Marriages," Seoul Sinmun, 16 July 2010 (in Korean).

<sup>20</sup> The ROK has signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crimes of 2000 (hereafter the Palermo Protocol), but not ratified it yet as of January 2015.

<sup>21</sup> The Korean husband, Chang, beat his 19-year-old Vietnamese wife to death in June 2007. He was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in March 2008. "Vietnamese wife killer, Chang, sentenced to 12 years imprisonment," Salad TV, 13 March 2008 at [http://saladtv.kr/?document\\_srl=18447](http://saladtv.kr/?document_srl=18447), last visited on 10 November 2010 (in Korean).

<sup>22</sup> The average age difference between Korean men and foreign wives is 11.7 years. Cambodian wives are 17.8 years younger than their husbands and Vietnamese wives 16.6 years. South Chungchong Province 2010 "2009 Survey of Multicultural Families in South Chungchong Province": 7-9 (in Korean).

low income,<sup>23</sup> unemployment<sup>24</sup> and racial discrimination.<sup>25</sup> The critical boundary condition is that marriage migration happens in an open system that allows individual agents to interact and share with, and learn from other agents, which is a democratic and normative feature of a complex adaptive system. The boundary is semi-permeable and, therefore, the information and feedback loops move across the national boundary. Sending countries joined by expressing strong voices against human trafficking and human rights violations. The issue became transnational.

Sending countries create their own feedback loops and self-organisation, based on the political nature and social norms imbedded in the society. Viet Nam has regulations on trafficking and inter-country marriages, stipulated in the Criminal Code and the Marriage and Family Code, respectively.<sup>26</sup> Sex traffickers are prosecuted and women are rescued. The government also designated one of its women's associations to handle international marriages. Under the Vietnamese Decree No 150, marriage brokering is illegal and subject to penalties<sup>27</sup> However, the fine was so minimal, compared with commission fees for a successful marriage,<sup>28</sup> that most brokers ignored the former. Brokers bribed immigration officers and faked marriage certificates (National Human Rights Commission 2008). Similarly, Cambodia defined brokered international marriages as a form of human trafficking. The Cambodian Ambassador to the ROK publicly expressed that Cambodian women were “not commercial products [of Korean men].”<sup>29</sup> In March 2010, the Cambodian government stopped issuing international marriage certificates for Cambodian women-Korean men couples.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the number of marriages between Cambodian women and Korean men was dropped by around 20 per cent in 2011 and 55 per cent in 2012 (see Table 1).

The UN and the US government created and confirmed the international environment that would support the emergence of social norms against brokered international marriages. The UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) indicated that international marriages “may lead to foreign women being trafficked into the ROK for purposes of marriage and exploitation.”<sup>31</sup> The UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking used a even stronger message that Vietnamese “are trafficked within marriage”<sup>32</sup> and “disguised under the form of arranged marriages, many women become domestic slaves rather than honoured wives” in South Korea. The US State

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<sup>23</sup> 59.7 per cent of international couples earn less than 13,250 GBP per year per household (cf. ROK's GDP per capita is 17,756 GBP as of 2009). The Office of the Prime Minister 2010 “Plans for supporting multicultural families”: 1 (in Korean).

<sup>24</sup> 72.8 per cent hope to work but only 10.4 per cent participate in vocational training courses.

<sup>25</sup> 34.8 per cent experienced racial discrimination.

<sup>26</sup> Vietnam Country Report, SOM6, Vientiane Lao PDR, November 2008 from the Strategic Information Response Network, SIREN Human Trafficking Data Sheet. The Decree 69 of 2006, in particular, aims to prevent trafficking through international marriages.

<sup>27</sup> Approximately VND 10-20 million. “Law fails to deter illegal marriage-broker services,” VietNamNet, 25 April 2009 at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/social/2009/04/844007/>, last visited on 22 January 2011.

<sup>28</sup> The fine for a first domestic offender of international marriage brokering is VND 1.5 million and for the next offence VND 2 million whereas a commission fee for a successful match is VND 10.5 million, which is approximately USD 670.

<sup>29</sup> “Interview with the Cambodian Ambassador,” Kyunghyang Sinmun, 23 June 2008 (in Korean).

<sup>30</sup> “Cambodia complete ban on marriages with Koreans,” Kyunghyang Sinmun, 20 March 2010 (in Korean).

<sup>31</sup> CEDAW, Concluding Observations: Republic of Korea, 10 August 2007, CEDAW/C/KOR/CO/6. The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Joy Ezeilo, was invited to Korea in June 2010 to attend the conference on human trafficking and marriage migration in Korea, but did not issue any statement on this issue.

<sup>32</sup> Strategic Information Response Network, SIREN human trafficking data sheet at [http://www.no-trafficking.org/reports\\_docs/vietnam/vietnam\\_datasheet\\_eng.pdf](http://www.no-trafficking.org/reports_docs/vietnam/vietnam_datasheet_eng.pdf), last visited on 9 February 2015.

Department's Trafficking In Persons (TIP) reports helped buttress this international pressure by stating that "Vietnamese women are trafficked to [ROK] via fraudulent or misrepresented marriages for commercial exploitation or forced labor."<sup>33</sup> The 2010 TIP report reiterated that "women from less developed countries recruited for marriage with South Korean men through international marriage brokers are subjected to forced prostitution or forced labour upon arrival in the ROK."<sup>34</sup>

This victimisation of all brokered Asian wives as the subject of "sexual exploitation," "forced labour" and even "forced prostitution" seriously undermines women's agency in making their own decisions for future and marriage. Most marriage migrants I interviewed for this study stated that they had anticipated difficulties and a great deal of uncertainty of coming to Korea to marry a Korean man. It was their least-worst option, given the underdevelopment and lack of education, to their calculation. The US State Department's naming them as "forced prostitutes" is highly demeaning and hurting marriage migrants' personal integrity while ignoring their agency.

One case demonstrates the complexity in approaching the brokered international marriage issue while respecting women's agency and integrity. A 30-year-old Vietnamese marriage migrant who had what it seemed to be forced abortion to the author. She was brought by her Korean sister-in-law to a local gynaecologist and, without her consent, had her unborn 6-month child aborted. Her husband, 60-year-old with mental disabilities, is the first son who, under the Korean Confucian tradition, has the most direct inheritance right from his parents. If the couple have a son, he will inherit the family assets. The sister-in-law did not want it to happen and took the Vietnamese sister-in-law who did not speak or read Korean, to the hospital to remove the foetus, the future heir. The Vietnamese wife was in deep abdominal pain but she was doing all the domestic work for her mentally-ill husband as well as the highly elderly mother-in-law while facing daily verbal abuses by in-laws. This was a clear abuse case to any modern standards. When the author carefully asked whether the Vietnamese wife would like to proceed with a criminal case against the sister-in-law about the forced abortion (this was beyond the researcher's hat), her answer was a definite no. She continued: coming to Korea as a Korean's wife at the age of 30 was "better" than staying in Viet Nam. She survived a very abusive marriage back home. She wanted to leave but nobody wanted to take her because she was considered too old and "already used." Going to Korea was one feasible way to get out of her misery and social prejudice. She managed to find a broker and paid for the service. Her marriage in Korea was no good either, but at least better than one in Viet Nam. At least, she is not beaten by her current husband. She wanted to have a baby as her "survival strategy." Her sister-in-law questioned her pregnancy as her husband was too old and disabled to be reproductive. She was taken to a hospital by her sister-in-law for a medical check-up. However, when she woke up, the baby was gone. It hurt but she still needed to carry on and survive in this family first. Her next strategy was to learn the language. Fortunately, the family allowed her to go out and learn Korean, so there she was. I was interviewing her at one of the multicultural centres. At the end of the interview, she gave the author another surprise: she was inviting her own younger sister in Viet Nam to come and marry a Korean man, turning herself into a match-maker. She was looking for a young(er), abled and decent Korean man for her sister. She spoke in broken Korean, "Korea is not perfect but still much better than Viet Nam." For her, being rescued by domestic violence and forced abortion, and sent to a shelter was unacceptable shame and waste of time. Her aim is to survive and acquire Korean citizenship to be independent. The

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<sup>33</sup> US State Department, Trafficking in Persons Report 2008, 260 at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/105659.pdf>, last visited on 9 February 2015.

<sup>34</sup> US State Department, Trafficking in Persons Report 2010, at [http://seoul.usembassy.gov/p\\_sr\\_061410sk.html](http://seoul.usembassy.gov/p_sr_061410sk.html), last visited on 9 February 2015.

agent's motivation is to survive in her complex small world where she can adapt to, not to be rescued and making things complicated.

In Phase II, local NGOs, in active interaction with other domestic and international actors in the marriage migration system, created emerging social norms against trafficking which subsequently bring about various self-organising measures to tackle self-defined problems and pursue respective interests. For marriage migrants, it is the survival and citizenship, for which they identify reproduction as the most achievable step towards. This is perfectly rational thinking, and, regardless of outsiders' normative standards, marriage migrants decide to carry on engaging with who seem to be alleged perpetrators, while exploring other opportunities to advance their interests. The Korean government, on the other hand, facing domestic and international criticism, introduced multicultural centres in regional cities where marriage migrants were concentrated, offering various programmes for them.

### **Phase III: Institutionalising Multiculturalism**

A complex system self-organises itself to maintain equilibrium and to seek optimal fitness in the system. Social norms created in Phase II have changed the domestic and international environments to which the system of marriage migration had to respond. Phase III started with one of the government's responses to tackle social integration of marriage migrants, domestic violence and international criticism that was setting up multicultural centres.<sup>35</sup> These government-funded centres run various programmes for marriage migrants and their children such as Korean language classes, daily childcare, vocational training and family programmes, some of which the author took part in. Local NGOs and religious organisations also run various community services while advocating equal opportunities to work and within family, right to security, access to justice and the protection from domestic violence (M. C. Kim 2009).

Despite its name, multicultural centres tend to assimilate "multicultural" wives into the Korean society, rather than "multiculturing" the Korean society. Institutionalising multiculturalism is a complex process where various actors' interests collide or merge that constitutes what multiculturalism means in the particular Korean context. Korean multiculturalism would be different from Singaporean or UK multiculturalism in terms of its degree and the forms of social institutions. The contents of the programmes in multicultural centres have already changed over the years, starting from Kimchi making to showcasing marriage migrants' home food competition, from Korean language lessons to preserving mixed children's mothers' languages such as Vietnamese, Tagalog or Bahasa.<sup>36</sup> Korea becoming fully multicultural is a distant future, given its highly concentrated Korean ethnic population.<sup>37</sup> The process has now begun.

At an individual level, marriage migrants' inner logic and survival strategies are operated in both horizontal and vertical interactions with other agents and the political legal structure. Their decision-making process is complex and reasoning is transformative. The common reasons for marriage migration

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<sup>35</sup> The official name is the Multicultural Family Support Centre. 21 centres were in 2006 and as of August 2013, there are 205 centres nation-wide.

<sup>36</sup> The Goyang city offers a programme for mixed-heritage children to retain their mothers' languages in order to nurture them as "Future Global Leaders," for example. <http://www.goyang.go.kr/family/business/sub01/>, last visited on 9 February 2015.

<sup>37</sup> According to the UN Populations Division, 96 per cent of South Koreans are Korean as of 2006. [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2006/WPP2006\\_Highlights\\_rev.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2006/WPP2006_Highlights_rev.pdf), last visited on 9 February 2015.

are for fleeing from poverty, securing basic income, escaping from family problems, catching up with age, wanting to live in a foreign country or even simply pursuing romantic love they dreamed while watching Korean drama.<sup>38</sup> In spite of difficulties they face in Korea, women's decisions to stay in their marriages are calculated endogenously and again through interactions with others, given the environments and opportunities to succeed.<sup>39</sup> Some marriage migrants have already achieved reasonably stable careers in Korea as interpreters. In 2012, South Korea, for the first time in the Korean parliamentary history, elected the non-Korean member of the National Assembly: Jasmine Lee, originally from Manila and naturalised Korean citizen, proves what a one highly adaptable agent can achieve in interactions with other agents in the evolving marriage migration system in Korea.<sup>40</sup> Married in 1995 and naturalised in 1998, she has been engaging with the local TV media as an actress, and active in NGO activities and self-help groups. Since the mid-2000s, the Korean government started promoting multiculturalism under the Lee Myung Bak administration and his conservative pro-business party was leading the discourse. In the 2012 General Election, the ruling Saenuri Party appointed Jasmine Lee as the first-in-line proportional representative of the party. Her active interactions met with the right political environment. She is a model example how a highly motivated and adaptable individual exercises her agency by interacting with other local agents, especially the TV media in her case, being sensitive to the temporal signals, in this case, the political environments and changing marriage migration system in South Korea. Not all marriage migrants are lucky or adaptable as she is, but many do overcome challenging environments and tremendous amount of abuses and discrimination. The majority find their own self-organising criticality. It is the women's agency that shapes the forms of marriage migration and ways to citizenship, which should not be undermined.

#### **Phase IV: Regulating Marriage Broker Businesses**

Another self-organisation measure the Korean legislators have taken, in response to the domestic and international pressure on the abusive nature of brokered international marriages, was regulating the business conduct. Phase IV almost immediately followed Phase III. Within the complex system of marriage migration, the state enacted the Law on Regulating Marriage Brokering Firms to stop abusive business practices in 2008. When it was first implemented, the number of registered marriage broker companies were 1,237 in 2009 (The Office of the Prime Minister 2010). The number reached its peak at 1,519 in 2011.<sup>41</sup> Many of these businesses are small-scale but transnational, having local partners in sending countries who recruit young women, help organize meetings or weddings and the processing of immigration documents.

The law amendment process is a complex and dynamic one. When it was first proposed, it did not include any clauses on the criminalisation of deceptive brokers or on the legal obligation of written contracts among relevant parties. The law went under further scrutiny by NGOs. The 2010 amendment reflected

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<sup>38</sup> Elmer Malibiran, "Tales of Women 'Marriage Migrants,'" ABS CBN News, 28 October 2008 at <http://www.rickross.com/reference/unif/unif331.html>, last visited on 8 August 2013.

<sup>39</sup> A 30-year-old Vietnamese wife, who had been categorically abused by her husband and in-laws, was still inviting her younger sister and friends to come to Korea to marry Korean men, functioning as an informal matchmaker. She did not see herself a victim. When asked why she wanted her sister to come after all her personal tragedy (she had a forced abortion by her in-laws), she said "Korea is still better than Vietnam." Interview with S in Asan on 27 July 2010.

<sup>40</sup> "A Year after the First Foreign MP," Joongang Ilbo, 29 June 2013 (in Korean). Interview with Jasmine Lee on 29 May 2014, Seoul, Korea.

<sup>41</sup> "Marriage brokers with less than USD 90,000 seed money should close," Seoul Sinmun, 11 July 2013 (in Korean).

these two aspects. Under the amendment, a deceptive broker could face the cancellation of registration (Article 18) or up to two years of imprisonment (Article 26.2). In 2012, the government proposed another amendment, which is in effect from 2 August 2013, that an international marriage broker company must have a capital of KRW 100 million (USD 90,000) to maintain his/her business. Many small-scale matchmaking companies will have to close down. The number instantly dropped to 1,370 in 2012 and is expected to decrease more in the following years. The latest figure is 954 as of March 2014.<sup>42</sup>

Government institutions in charge of marriage migrants have been diversified and compartmentalised. While the Ministry of Gender equality and Families deals with overall marriage migration issues, other ministries have separate programmes for language education, welfare, child support or vocational training. They include the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Administration and Security, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Labour. The Ministry of Justice involves marriage migrants' entry visa, residence and naturalisation whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade works on diplomatic relations with source countries.

The state is both an agent and a structure at the same time. When the state acts as an agent, the degree of responsiveness depends its political nature. Enacting new laws on regulating broker business and amending them are the results of the emerging social norms created through interactions among the agents. A complex system allows individuals to interact with other agents in and outside the system and to create emerging social norms and diverse opinions. The system also responds accordingly. A complex system is fundamentally a democratic one.

### **Phase V: New Emerging Norms of Nationalism and Equilibrium**

Phase V is beginning with a new cycle of emerging norms of nationalism and anti-multiculturalism. Norms are not always benign. The system faces internal resistance from the right-wing conservatives. When borders are open, local tensions and clashes occur among different ideas and interests. As the number of incoming marriage migrants and multicultural families increased, that of system-abusers did as well. According to the Ministry of Justice, there were 9,712 visa-abusing marriage migrants in December 2009 (7.8 per cent of the total marriage migrants) who came as brides through brokers, divorced before becoming permanent residents or citizens, and are overstaying while working in unlicensed massage shops or bars.<sup>43</sup>

The group of Korean husbands claim that they are the “real” victims of brokered international marriages that encourage “runaway brides,” not the women who the media portrays as victims of human trafficking. They organised a group to publicly condemn brokered international marriages as the intentional crime of sham marriages, jointly planned and committed by foreign brides and brokers in collaboration. Marriage brokers were once human traffickers accused by women's NGOs, became licensed businessmen by the Korean government and now people smugglers accused by Korean husband victim groups. On 3 July 2010, the group of Korean husband victims was formally founded, called “Helping the Victims of International Marriages.”<sup>44</sup> They blame marriage brokers for their runaway brides and failed marriages.

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<sup>42</sup> Email interviews with a government official at the Ministry of Gender Equality and Families who does not want to be named. The author acquired an internal government document, which is the list of 954 marriage brokering companies registered under the Law as of March 2014.

<sup>43</sup> “Marriage Migration→Divorce→Illegal Migration 10,000,” *Munhwa Ilbo*, 11 April 2011 (in Korean).

<sup>44</sup> “The first group established for husbands who are victims of international marriage,” *Seoul Sinmun*, 5 July 2010 (in Korean).

Its representative, An Jae Song, argues that there are so many women who exploit the current system only for the access to job opportunities in Korea and that, in divorce trials, most Korean judges are prejudiced against Korean men with Asian wives and tend to make judgements in favour of the wives.<sup>45</sup> A number of Korean immigration officers I interviewed during my fieldwork in Manila and Hanoi also shared this sentiment and assumed foreign brides were job seekers.

The conservative media joins by re-creating the images of Asian brides as mere job seekers or potential runaway brides.<sup>46</sup> With the increasing membership of the husband-victim groups and anti-multicultural organisations, the new discourse of anti-sham marriages and anti-multicultural families gain slow currency among nationalists.<sup>47</sup> Various online and offline communities were formed to criticise the “quality” of marriage migrants, “runaway brides” and the government’s “excessive” welfare policies for multicultural families. Some of them formed offline anti-multiculturalism groups called “Citizens’ Alliance for Foreign Workers Policy,” “Action Solidarity for Rethinking Multiculturalism” and “the Call Centre for International Marriage Victims.” Their members send petitions to stop idealising multicultural families on TV, address to MPs to stop migrant-friendly legislations and urge the government to stop immigration that would raise the unemployment rate among Koreans and “damages” Korean identities.

The central government, as a complex system, acted very quickly to respond these conservative concerns. The system constantly seeks to find equilibrium and moderate tensions in the environment. The Office of the Prime Minister (2010) held a meeting with all relevant government departments concerning multicultural families and marriage migrants. The internal report included plans for improving the pre-entry screening system to receive more “self-reliant” marriage migrants. As a result, the number of female marriage migrants since 2011 has been stabilised (see Table 1).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This article attempts to theorise a case study of brokered international marriage migration, developed in South Korea over the past three decades, using the CT’s analytical framework. The case I have shown here is not unique in Korea. Korea followed the Japanese model by introducing the government-sponsored marriage campaigns for their fellow countrymen. Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore also present similar patterns of marriage migration from mainland China and Vietnam with less or little government intervention, despite various problems arising from it. How it develops would be unique in each country, which needs careful empirical observation for a considerable period. However, what CT tells us is the logical flow and observable patterns of governments’ utilitarian approach to gender balance that leads rampant commercial brokering, the emergence of ethical social norms that pushes governments to regulate brokering activities, and a new set of emerging norms of nationalism that makes more restrictive immigration policies against marriage migrants, which provides a relatively universal dependent path in brokered marriage migration.

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<sup>45</sup> Ahn and his associates created an online café called “the Centre for International Marriage Victims” and organise offline public protests against pro-foreigners policies of the government at <http://cafe.daum.net/mna5319>, last visited on 7 August 2013.

<sup>46</sup> “Sudden increase in the number of husband victims of international marriages,” Korean Broadcasting Services Busan, 18 December 2012 at [http://busan.kbs.co.kr/news/news\\_01\\_01\\_view.html?no=3047522](http://busan.kbs.co.kr/news/news_01_01_view.html?no=3047522); “My wife disappeared,” Hankuk Kyongjae, 26 July 2013 (in Korean).

<sup>47</sup> “Beyond online organisation,” Donga Ilbo, 11 May 2011 (in Korean); Anti-Multiculturalism Café at <http://cafe.daum.net/dacultureNO>, last visited on 9 February 2015.



Marriage migration is a non-linear process in a complex adaptive system under particular local environments. Each agent self-organises and constitutes his/her own interests and identities (see Table 2). The process of identity transformation is evolutionary. For Korean husbands, they were customer-grooms and later became self-claimed “real” victims of sham marriages. Their Asian wives, on the other hand, were once ‘outsourced’ brides who were often demeaned to be domestic or sex slaves. They were helpless trafficking victims, the subject for social integration who later became job-seekers or “runaway brides.” Marriage brokers’ identity changed from government-subsidised matchmakers to fraud criminals, human traffickers, lawful businessmen and finally smugglers of economic migrants. Throughout the process, NGOs, media and international society play significant normative roles for pushing the government to protect marriage migrants or regulate brokering businesses. They are norm changers.

Table 2. Identity transformation of marriage migration in South Korea

Phase (State) \ Actors	Phase I: Outsourcing Brides (1980s-)	Phase II: Anti-trafficking Norms (2000-)	Phase III: Institutionalising Multiculturalism (2006-)	Phase IV: Legalising Brokering (2008-)	Phase IV: Anti-Sham Marriages (2010-)
Husbands	Customer-grooms	Exploitative abusers	Indifferent supporters	Customers	Victims
Wives	Outsourced brides	Trafficked victims	Subject for integration	Customers	Runaway brides; Job-seekers
Marriage brokers	Government-subsidised matchmakers	Traffickers	-	Legalised businesspersons	Smugglers
NGOs	-	Anti-trafficking norm creators	Emergency service providers	Business monitors	Migrant rights' activists

Marriage migration to South Korea is also an on-going process. Both marriage and migration are multi-faceted complex human behaviour. The initial functionalist approach opened the semi-membranes of borders for marriage migration. This semi-open system, heavily controlled by states, and rigorous interactions among agents in the system brought and grew social evils of exploitation, abuses, forced abortion and even murder in the family. Soon after, the system is informed by aggregated social norms of anti-trafficking and adapts to the new environment, which create a new set of interacting agents, feedback loops and emerging properties. The spiral evolutionary process of marriage migration will continue. A government action is an indicator to set a new spire methodologically (see Figure 2).

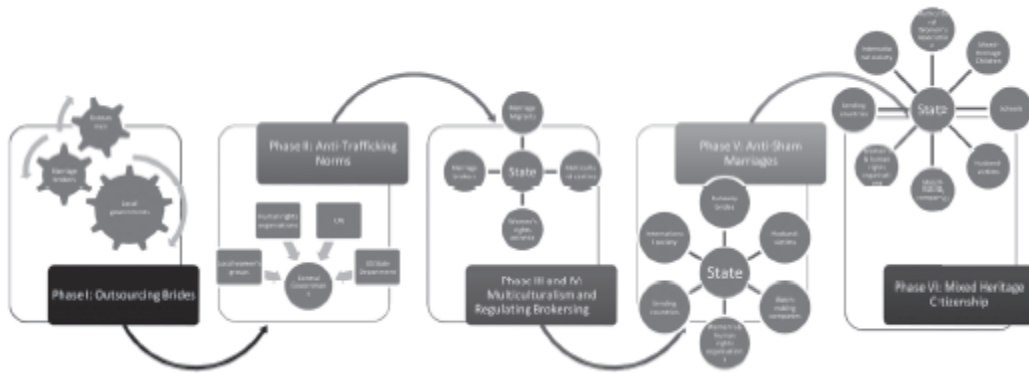


Figure 2. Feedback loops in brokered marriage migration

The next phase is the mixed-heritage citizenship. There is not enough empirical data to be examined yet. Limited educational resources, bullying and racial discrimination in school start being observed and are becoming factors for the low academic performance and psychological development of mixed-heritage children between “Asian” mothers and Korean fathers. The number of mixed-heritage children is growing and many of them are reaching their adolescence.<sup>48</sup> The stories of Asian brides will soon become those of Asian mothers and their mixed-heritage children. How the story develops depends on the interactions they have with other actors in the complex systems of migration, immigration and multiculturalism in South Korea.

Policy-makers and migration scholars are better-informed and prepared by CT and its models for the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future of a multicultural Korea. CT provides an evolutionary lens for policy-makers to pay attention to small local interactions, how they are linked, how social norms are created and moderated, tipping points where individual agency start abusing the system, and most importantly, these processes occur in an open complex system which allows constant and free flow of feedback. CT, therefore, has no explanatory power for a closed system that is simple and controlled. Here lies the political ramification for CT to have any analytical importance. Brokered marriage migration is found in other Asian countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the last of which does not present any similar patterns to the other cases yet. The possible reason is either the number has reached the critical mass or there are simply no feedback loops, created by a free and open civil society. CT, as an analytical tool, only works in an open democratic system and therefore, not universally applicable.

<sup>48</sup> The Ministry of Education announced that, as of April 2013, the number of mixed-heritage children in school (inclusive of primary, secondary and high school for students between the age of seven and nineteen) reached 55,767, 18.8 per cent increase from 2012 and six times more than 9,389 in 2006. The number accounts for 0.86 per cent of the total student population in Korea from [http://news.kbs.co.kr/news/NewsView.do?SEARCH\\_NEWS\\_CODE=2702049&ref=H](http://news.kbs.co.kr/news/NewsView.do?SEARCH_NEWS_CODE=2702049&ref=H), last visited on 7 August 2013.

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Table 1. Number of female marriage migrants in South Korea

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	6,945	9,684	10,698	18,751	25,105	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163	25,142	26,274	22,265	20,637
Marriages between Korean men and foreign women													
China	3,566	6,977	7,023	13,347	18,489	20,582	14,566	14,484	13,203	11,364	9,623	7,549	7,036
Vietnam	77	134	474	1,402	2,461	5,822	10,128	6,610	8,282	7,249	9,623	7,636	6,586
Philippines	1,174	502	838	928	947	980	1,117	1,497	1,857	1,643	1,906	2,072	2,216
Japan	819	701	690	844	809	883	1,045	1,206	1,162	1,140	1,193	1,124	1,309
Cambodia	1	2	2	19	72	157	394	1,804	659	851	1,205	961	525
Thailand	240	182	327	345	324	266	271	524	633	496	438	354	323
Mongolia	64	118	194	320	504	561	594	745	521	386	326	266	217
Others	961	1,002	967	1,218	1,252	1,136	1,236	1,359	1,354	1,648	1,532	1,796	1,899

Source: 2013 Marriage Statistics (Seoul: Statistics Korea, 2013), unofficial translation by the author.