

**A Study on the Difficulties from the Experience of Traditional Holidays of  
Vietnamese Marriage Women Immigrants in South Korea**

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the difficulties of Vietnamese marriage women immigrants, taking place through Korean traditional holidays. We hope to contribute to the improvement of the quality of their lives through exploring conflicts and changes arising through cultural contact and the way they are overcoming said conflicts and changes. This study was conducted using the qualitative case study method and the data collection was done through in-depth interviews with 7 Vietnamese marriage immigrants. According to the result of this study, it is difficult for Vietnamese marriage women immigrants to have communication together with the families of their husbands, especially when traditional holidays is a chance for Korean to meet and have communication. Moreover, they are also experiencing conflicts due to various differences including cultural values between Korea and Vietnam as well as generational differences with their in-laws.

Keywords: *Vietnamese; marriage women immigrant; Korean traditional holiday; cultural value*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Among 126,923 marriage immigrated women to Korea, the number of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam is 39,867 constituting 31.4% of total number (Korea Ministry of Justice, December 31, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, studies in dealing with marriage immigrated women from Vietnam have been actively conducted. Most of them have been researching the identification of current status including the purpose and route of marriage with Korean people, age difference with husbands, and residential areas as well as difficulty in cultural adjustment, changes in language skills, and home lives as a part of their circumstances.

However, considering social and cultural background of Vietnam they have already accustomed to, there has been insufficient effort to understand their lives in details (Gisun Chung, 2008). Many of the marriage immigrated women from Vietnam have been experiencing severe issues of cultural adjustment as they faced Korean culture that was different from Vietnam culture (Taewon Kim, 2013). In order to understand social lives of marriage immigrated women in Korea, it is required to view their lives in the 'perspective of multi-dimensions of culture' (Dukhee Seo, 2010).

This study is intended to explore what conflicts marriage immigrated women from Vietnam experience when making a family with Korean people after immigrating in Korea through the family events as traditional holidays. The reason why this study has focused on traditional holidays is that cultural features of various members have been reflected on traditional holidays handed down from the past to the present by a certain group in generation by generation (Jaechun Chang, 2009). When traditional holidays are handed down, they tend to be changed with the needs and demands of the time added on the value of culture that has been handed down from the past. Due to such reasons, understanding on traditional culture makes it feasible to fundamentally explore the current circumstances of a group that enjoys the culture as well as the relevant group.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.moj.go.kr>

## **II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **1. Characteristics of Vietnamese marriage women immigrants**

Horim Choi (2015) has clarified three reasons of an increase of marriage of women from Vietnam to Korea as follows. First of all, procedures of marriage immigration to Korea have become much simplified from the early 2000s. At that time, there was no need for Korean men who married with women from Vietnam to go through complicated interview procedures with women from Vietnam to issue marriage certificates. Secondly, since the diplomatic relations were established between Vietnam and Korea in 1992, Korea has become a major investing nation in Vietnam. Therefore, economic cooperation as well as exchange between two countries have increased, and Vietnamese increasingly started being positively recognized by Korean people. These are also the factors that increased marriage immigration of women from Vietnam to Korea. Third, active and sophisticated city lives realized in the public culture in Korea and Korean society represented with heart-warming family image have become the object of envy to them making them prefer to come to Korea.

Marriage immigrated women from Vietnam have been granted with the position of women in Vietnam before the immigration. In other words, they have immigrated to Korea after experiencing social education, school education, and home discipline in their mother country. From the beginning of establishment to the present, women from Vietnam have been serving as a significant role for the maintenance and development of the country (Luong, Đ. H., 2016)<sup>2</sup>. Lê, T.(2004) has emphasized that women in Vietnam have been serving as a key role in sustainable development of the country. Furthermore, it is not difficult to see female characters in the literature textbooks and history textbooks in Vietnam. Vietnamese women serve as a leading role for the happiness in their family and many high-ranked positions in society. Especially, they tend to serve a role of protecting the country during the war and leading the nation in the present. Therefore, they tend to be granted with high class position from the nation and society .

However, according to results of the review on previous studies conducted in Korea in dealing with marriage immigrated women from Vietnam, it turned out that they faced various problems while adjusting their lives in Korea due to language barrier and conflict of cultural value. According to results of the review on previous studies in dealing with marriage immigrated women from Vietnam, they turned out to face language barrier like other marriage immigrated women (Aeryun Lee, 2014; Gisun Chung, 2008) and discrimination and prejudice against multi-cultural factors in Korean society (Eunjoo Lee, Migyung Jun, 2014). In addition, there has been a discussion for how they experienced frequent conflict when adjusting their lives in Korea due to cultural values in Vietnam (Yugyung Shin, Jinkyung Chang, 2010; Taewon Kim, 2013; Younghoon Oh, Hyunhee Bang, 2013).

### **2. Vietnamese marriage women immigrants and traditional holidays**

Marriage immigrated women tend to participate in all the family events as they marry with Korean men and live with Korean husbands or family members. Traditional holidays are the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.haugiang.gov.vn>

repetitive events every year. Therefore, marriage immigrated women tend to repeat participating in them every year. Participation of marriage immigrated women in traditional holidays is not only for 'living culture of family members' of husband's families but also an opportunity to experience culture of Korean people in various aspects including religion, play, food culture, and relaxation. In line with the context of Junghee Yoon (2015) who insisted that adjustment of marriage immigrated women in Korean society depended on the recognition and experience of traditional holidays, marriage immigrated women who serve as a role of daughter-in-law, wife, and mother at home tend to experience complicated and various cultures by participating in traditional holidays. Such cultural experience might make marriage immigrated women more deeply understand Korean people or culture in Korea and prefer to live in Korea, or, otherwise, cause difficulty due to conflict with the culture in their mother country.

In the past, Vietnam was the country based on agriculture. Therefore, farming life has been strictly maintained every year. Furthermore, since both lunar calendar and solar calendar exist in the Roman calendar in both countries, there are many common factors in seasonal customs. For example, there are traditional holidays including Lunar New Year on January, the 15th day of the New Year according to the lunar calendar, Dano on May 5th, the fifteenth day of the lunar month on July 15th, and the fifteenth day of the eighth month by the lunar calendar. In Korea, due to distinct four seasons, there are rituals when season changes. This indicates a period when season changes containing the concept for the desire and praying for the safety in the next season.

In lunar calendar, the first month of the year is a season when spring comes after the winter. May is when season changes from spring to summer, and August is when season changes from summer to fall. Therefore, there are traditional holidays including the New Year and Daeborem in the first month of the year, Dano in May, and Korean thanksgiving in August (Inhak Choi, 2008). Called as paddy rice civilization, Vietnam has a year divided by 24 sessions depending on farming days in the similar manner with Korea, and there is New Year's Eve in each session. Therefore, traditional holidays in Vietnam are the event where family members, relatives, and neighbors gather together sharing with each other, eating delicious foods, and solidifying fellowship in the same manner with traditional holidays in Korea (Youngsoon Kim, et al. 2013). Vietnamese people perform the ritual for appreciating the secret act of virtue by ancestors during traditional holidays or festivals. With these festivals, they believe that they are able to enjoy peace and well-being with friends, family members, and communities of different sizes. Vietnamese people share the pleasure and pain with family members and neighbors through festivals and holidays, and families, local communities, and nation bond with each other with strong community spirit. In Vietnam, there are many holidays that are similar with the ones in Korea due to the lifestyle based on rice farming and influence from China.

### **III. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study has performed one of the qualitative researches, the case research, in order to understand the experience of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam with Korean traditional holidays. In order to explore what marriage immigrated women from Vietnam experience in family events named traditional holidays as a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, and how they experience cultural exchange from them, case study that focuses on 'interpretation on the context' is assumed to be appropriate. Case study is 'characteristic' with focus on one particular circumstance or phenomenon, 'descriptive,' and 'heuristic' in providing an insight on the researched phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

For the data collection, in-depth interview has been conducted on seven marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to Korea. These seven migrated women were recruited by 'snowball sampling' based on the personal network. Research participants were chosen according to following criteria to represent Korean traditional holidays of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam in more realistic and specific manner. Among those with an experience on Korean traditional holidays after being married with Korean men, the ones who are capable of honestly revealing and sharing their experience and thought, and the ones who experienced Korean traditional holidays more than two times, seven of them were chosen as research participants by considering the living areas. Interview has been conducted by researcher with the Korean language level 6 who was an international student from Vietnam living in Korea in Vietnamese language for more advanced and diversified interview by reducing the language barrier of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to Korea.

In this study, all the records from in-depth interview have been processed in computer and made in files to derive the trend of cultural exchange from the experience of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam on Korean traditional holidays making an effort to have an insight on resources by repetitively listening to the computer-processed data. In addition, themes that were repetitively shown were found while deriving the concepts by perusing computer-processed data for multiple times. Themes derived hereof have been supplemented and modified through discussion with two supervisors, while reviewing whether modified themes well reflected the cases.

#### **IV. RESULTS**

##### **1) Discontinuation of communication**

Human culture is not formed if not expressing what each member experiences and delivering it to others. Living in society, people send and receive something every day and identify them in one way or another (Sooyoung Hwang, 2009). In other words, communication serves as an important role in our lives. Especially, people go shopping for traditional holidays, prepare for food, and perform rituals to communicate with others.

Due to rapid changes in Korean society, there have been many changes in lifestyles of Korean people. As people become busy in a tight schedule, it is difficult for them to meet in modern society unless it is a special event such as traditional holiday. In other words, people in modern society tend to have less opportunity on communication. According to the experience of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam, traditional holidays in Korea are an opportunity to enjoy food and share with each other.

(In national holidays) People play card or Yutnori. However, I do not play them because I do not understand rules. One day, I, my husband, brother in-law, and nephews played Yutnori together. Husband won (laugh). However, nephews did not like it and kept on acting up. They did not understand the rules because they were young. I did play. I did not know how to play but played it for a while (participant E, November 11, 2017).

In the traditional holiday events, the main reason for discontinuation of communication of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam is language barrier. Among participants in this study, there were people who spent short amount of time in Korea (participant A) or the ones with long period living in Korea (participant F). The common factor of these two cases is that marriage immigrated women from Vietnam were not good at speaking Korean language. Research participant A who spent only a year in Korea after being married participated in Korean language class at multi-culture center learning Korean language. However, as she was pregnant, she decided to stop learning Korean language considering health conditions. Therefore, participant A was unable to communicate well with family members in family events such as New Years or Korean thanks giving.

I have not talked much. When people asked me questions, I answered because I did not have anything to say, and I was not good at Korean language. For example, when my sister in-law prepared food, she talked to me much. However, I was just sitting down there watching my son. He was playing with sisters (Participant A, March 18, 2017).

Unlike the research participant A, participant F had much experience in Korea. However, it has been more than 13 years since research participant F married to Korean man, but she was still going to multi-culture center taking preliminary course due to Korean language barrier. Participant F who always went to the hometown of her husband in every national holiday turned out to discontinue communicating with family members. This was confirmed by the statement of the following participant.

I have not talked to family that much. Since I am a foreigner, they do not talk to me much. Now, I am able to speak a bit, so I talk to them. However, when I was unable to speak Korean language and asked something to them in the past, my sister in-law has not responded. This was because of language barrier. In the past, when I said something, people could not understand. They only asked, "What?" (Participant F, January 17, 2017).

On the same context, as confirmed in the statement from the following research participant G, she turned out to be isolated when communicating with family members of her husband. Under these circumstances, participant G had a plan to make her own space 'turning on TV or music in the room.'

When my sisters in-law talk to my mother in-law, I go to my room turning TV or music. This is how I avoid the situations. If I keep on sitting there, I feel like I am an outcast. Therefore, I always go to the room and turn on music (Participant G, January 20, 2017).

The importance of communication is inevitable when forming human relationship. To marriage immigrated women, communication with Korean family serves as an important role to adjust their lives in Korea. Their lives depend on communication not only with their husbands but also with their family members including parents in-law or brothers/sisters in-law. However, most of the

marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to Korea who participated in this study turned out not to communicate well with others. In short, causes of discontinuation of communication of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to Korea with family members include the lack of their understanding in Korean culture, Korean play culture that they are not familiar with, and language barrier.

## **2) Conflict from national holidays**

Marriage immigrated women who manage their families in foreign countries are prone to suffer from stress and difficulty more than any other immigrants. As confirmed in the following statement of the research participant F, she was unable to play a leading role when participating in preparation for national holidays. Participant F was able to freely participate in various activities including the visit at friends' houses, invitation of friends, and preparation for food during national holidays in her mother country. However, she indicated that she was unable to do so after being married with her husband in Korea.

If I have friends, I might go out with them (during national holidays). However, I do not go out often in Korea. In Vietnam, I am free to do so preparing for food if my friends visit, and they also prepare for food if I visit. However, I have my mother in-law in Korea. So, I cannot do that. So, my friends barely come to my house (Participant F, January 17, 2017).

In Vietnam, there are many people who go to the temple to pray for a new year full of luck. Participant G also said that she always go to the temple in her mother country in New Years. However, her mother in-law opposed to do so when she participated in religious behaviors, and she still cannot do so. Conflict from religious aspects turned out to make it more difficult for marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to adjust their lives in Korea.

They do not have religion. They do not believe in any religion. And when I went to the Buddhist temple once, I was scolded by my parents in-law. At that time, I went to the temple with mother in-law of my friend. Yes, I went there with them. However, my parents in-law asked me not to go out. However, I did not say anything back because of my husband and son (Participant G, January 20, 2017).

Furthermore, experience of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam included the generation gap with their parents in-law. Due to such generation gap, marriage immigrated women from Vietnam ended up taking more domestic chores. However, they had 'no choice' but preparing for food.

However, my parents in-law are old. They are old generation, so they made that many dumpling. People in my generation do not make that many dumpling but buy them from restaurant..Omitted.. However, I had no choice. I could not say I was not going to do so. Well, I worked hard. I went to OO's house for New Years party (Participant E, March 15, 2017).

National holidays are repetitive every year. Therefore, domestic chores are what women need to take care of during national holidays every year. After immigrating to Korea, participant G started living with parents in-law and taking a leading role in preparing for food when their family members gathered. However, according to the statement of the following participant, participant G felt discriminated when preparing for food during national holidays. Participant G ended up working for domestic chores without communicating with her husband's family members and feeling isolated.

Speaking of three sisters in-law, well, they were younger sisters of my husband. However, there was one that was older than me. One of them was two years older than me, and the other one was two years younger than me. We were in about the same age, but they always talked to their parents when they came to house during national holidays (Participant G, January 20, 2017).

As for the division of role in domestic chores during national holidays, marriage immigrated women from Vietnam ended up feeling differently from their mother countries. This is related to the difference in child-raising methods between Korean and Vietnamese people.

I do not know about other families, but nephews do not do anything in our family. They do not know how to clean areas. Their parents are too easy on them that they cannot do anything. When they eat something, they put it down in front of them. I need to clean them all. Compared to my country, if nephews eat something, they clean them all. There are third grader in high school and also first and second graders in middle school. They do not know anything. After eating, they throw them, and leave clothes unorganized. I hate such things (Participate G, January 20, 2017).

Marriage immigrated women from Vietnam had much dissatisfaction about how their husband's family members did not do anything during national holidays. Participants believe that it was from the difference in child-raising methods between Korean and Vietnamese people. Compared to how Vietnamese people emphasize the independence in education, Korean parents over-protect their children that marriage immigrated women from Vietnam had lower opinion of. Therefore, research participants had much pride and attitude in child-raising method in their mother country that emphasized independence even though they lived in Korean society.



Hereupon, marriage immigrated women from Vietnam had preference in traditional culture in Korea through the experience of Korean traditional holidays but had conflict due to the difference of cultural values or ideology between Korea and Vietnam. Hereupon, this study has confirmed that there was a common factor for finding the conflict from different cultures but also how issues were solved differently depending on person.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study has been conducted to identify the difficulty of marriage immigrated women from Vietnam with Korean traditional holidays. Marriage immigrated women from Vietnam had difficulty in communication with their husbands' family members in family events named national holidays and also had conflict due to the difference of cultural value, religion, division of domestic chores, and generation gap with their parents in-law between Korea and Vietnam. In a tight schedule of modern society in Korea, national holidays are of a precious time for many of the family members to gather and communicate with each other. Stories in national holidays are also an opportunity to solidify the bond among family members. However, most of the research participants turned out to be isolated during national holidays when people communicate with their family members the most due to language barrier. In addition, there was much conflict in their experience in Korean national holidays. Such conflicts were mostly from the cultural difference between Korea and Vietnam.

According to such results of the research, implications are suggested for marriage immigrated women from Vietnam to adjust their lives in Korea. First of all, both marriage immigrated women from other countries including Vietnam and their Korean family members are required to make an effort for them to seamlessly communicate with their husbands' family members. Seamless communication with husbands' family members tends to improve interactions with marriage and marriage immigrated women from other countries deepening the understanding among them and also taking an important role to reduce stress. Secondly, interactive cultural education shall be provided to manage family based on deep understanding on the cultures in Korea and countries where marriage immigrated women come from instead of educating only the marriage immigrated women for peaceful lives in multi-culture families. Conflict or issues from family events such as national holidays were confirmed to be from the difference of cultural value in this study. In order to overcome such issues, it is required to know the values of people instead of superficially understanding the culture of them.

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