Minjeong Kim, *Elusive Belonging: Marriage Immigrants and "Multiculturalism" in Rural South Korea*

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Over the past several decades, the oft-perceived "homogenous" South Korea has seen a diversification of its population on numerous fronts. While discourses about multiculturalism tend to generalize and simplify, the actual multiculturalisms that unfold are usually manifold, more diverse, and complicated. In *Elusive Belonging*, Minjeong Kim does a fascinating job of capturing the ways Filipina wives contribute to South Korea's diversification, which, in this case, takes place outside of cities and in the countryside. Not only is this book a timely contribution to studies of diversity in South Korea (and Asia more broadly), but it is also an exemplary piece of contemporary ethnography and critical theoretical engagement that should serve as a model for practicing ethnographers.

The book is divided into seven chapters plus an afterword. Chapter 1, "Introduction," aims to "[illuminate] marriage immigrants' intimate experiences in their families and communities and their elusive sense of belonging in the state" (2). In doing so, it introduces the phenomenon of *kyŏlhon iminja* (marriage immigrants), while setting the stage for the rest of the book by contextualizing these migrations in a wider sphere of rural Korean cultural norms and multicultural attitudes and policies. The latter part of the chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework for the book. While this portion touches on many important themes that the book delves deeper into later, arguably the most important (and perhaps most controversial) is whether the women presented in Kim's ethnography should be viewed as "victims" or as "agents." While not ignoring the problems and abuse that Filipina wives are subject to (chapter 4), Kim notes: "I set my sights on highlighting Filipina marriage immigrants' agency. I reject the image of international marriage migrants as passive brides or victims of sex

trafficking and choose to expand my focus beyond the problems faced by marriage immigrants that have inundated popular and academic discourses" (22). This allows Kim to provide a nuanced and balanced view of the lives, motives, and hardships that marriage migrants face, which ultimately provides the reader with a richer understanding of this complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

Chapter 2, "Marrying into South Korean Rural Towns," explains "the social and political contexts that serve as the backdrop" for the study (30). It begins with an overview of the changes happening in the Korean countryside and explains the cultural and gender dynamics that have shaped this case of marriage migration. It also explores the role of mediators, such as the Unification Church (37), in connecting rural men with foreign wives. The chapter concludes with discussions about multicultural policies and attitudes within South Korea (41) and a discussion of how race and racial identity affect the experiences of foreign wives (48).

Chapter 3, "Loving Strangers," uses Filipina-Korean marriages to critically question the often taken for granted notions of love, heterosexual relationship scripts, and intimacy. Here, Kim starts to introduce examples of stellar ethnography that strengthen her argument in an objective and lucid way. The chapter offers ethnographic vignettes from Filipina-Korean couples that exhibit diverse outcomes in their marriage trajectories. In doing so, the chapter explains how Filipina-Korean couples' lives can broaden our understandings of love and marital relations.

Chapter 4, "Clashing at Home," examines the issues that arise within Korean-Filipina households. Kim suggests that many of these problems arise from "economic anxiety," cultural gender roles in rural settings, and Korea's "ethnopatriarchial hierarchy," which together create tensions between Filipina wives and their husbands and in-laws. The chapter presents many of the hardships Filipina wives face within their Korean families and explores how these women cope with their struggles. Again, this chapter is filled with interesting and lively ethnography that ties back into the book's theoretical and conceptual aims.

Chapter 5, "Making Multiculturalism," explores the development of Korea's multicultural policies in greater detail and explains the role of "multicultural agents" in shaping these policies, their agendas, and the ways they operate (106). Drawing on the work of Nancy Abelmann and colleagues (Abelmann et al. 2015), Kim builds on the ideas of Korea's multicultural policies as being "makeshift multiculturalism," suggesting that the policies put forth by the Korean government are not thoroughly informed or planned but rather are instituted haphazardly and in a somewhat piecemeal manner. Additionally, the chapter addresses the discrepancies that exist between the objectives of top-down multicultural policies and the Filipina women who live out these experiences on the ground. While these policies can be patriarchal and unbalanced, Kim concludes by noting that even makeshift multiculturalism can engender beneficial outcomes.

Chapter 6, "Challenging and Transforming the Community," discusses "marriage immigrants' diverse paths of incorporation into Korean society" (127). In another excellent chapter balancing theory with interesting ethnography, this chapter considers the ways Filipina wives, and their biracial children, are accepted into Korean society in diverse ways over time. There are multiple patterns of incorporation into Korean society, with differing results, that are likewise shaped by a multitude of cultural, contextual, and economic factors. Interestingly, Kim contrasts Filipinas in rural Korea to

Filipinas in rural Japan (Faier 2009) and suggests that the Korean context is different than the Japanese one. Whereas in Japan, Filipina wives came to be more accepted as community members and led to redefinitions of Japaneseness, in Korea, Filipina wives "can only ever be . . . model marriage immigrant[s], distinct from native Korean daughters-in-law" (130). The chapter concludes with a discussion on how Korean society racializes Filipina women and how these racial scripts affect larger social perceptions of marriage migrants.

Chapter 7, "Searching for Filipina Sisterhood," presents "three forms of liminal space created through co-ethnic interaction" among Filipinas (147). These "liminal spaces" include interactions among Filipina wives and their identity anxieties, "local or extramarital spaces," and an annual community day that serves as "one of the year's most anticipated celebrations and the region's largest co-ethnic space for Filipino immigrants" (147). Again, with excellent ethnography, Kim presents a unique view of the tensions and concerns that emerge around these co-ethnic spatialities and discusses their implications. The book concludes with a short afterword explaining what the presence of Filipinas in the Korean countryside signifies for South Korea moving forward. The afterword is followed by an appendix, which includes information about Kim's interlocutors.

This book is a fantastic example of contemporary ethnography. It provides an in-depth look at the lives of Filipina women in South Korea and shows the multifaceted outcomes of these women's experiences. Kim also succeeds in substantiating her argument that these women are not helpless "victims" but instead exert significant agency over their lives.

While the book is overwhelmingly praiseworthy, there are two points that the book could have further explained. First, the book does not particularly frame Filipina women in relation to other foreign populations in South Korea. To be fair, this is somewhat outside the scope of the book, however, the reader is nonetheless left unaware of how Filipina rural wives exist in South Korea vis-à-vis groups such as marriage migrants from other countries, the *Chosŏnjok* or *Koryo-saram* (ethnic Korean return migrants from China and Central Asia) and other Central Asians, recent migrants from Vietnam, or perhaps even English teachers. Since the book is on the shorter side, a section or chapter contextualizing Filipinas within South Korea's larger framework of diversity would have been interesting from a larger societal perspective. Second, there is a lack of voice from the husbands in Kim's study, despite the fact that Kim hired a male ethnographer to interview Korean husbands (52). Again, to be fair, Kim notes that there were issues related to the Institutional Review Board that she needed to deal with regarding interviewing husbands. While there is some mention of them in the book, the extent of their roles in this context remains rather ambivalent, and the reader is left wanting to know more about how they directly factor into the development of relations with Filipina wives and how they conceptualize their marriages. Both of these would perhaps be topics for future ethnographers to undertake.

Elusive Belonging is a fascinating and well-written work that will be useful to scholars interested in South Korea's diversification, Asian migration more broadly, anthropologists, sociologists, gender studies scholars, and scholars interested in multiculturalism. Furthermore, the book provides an excellent example of ethnography and one that strikes perhaps a near-perfect balance between theory and ethnography. Readers will find Kim's theory engagement readable and lucid, even to non-specialists. The

book would thus make a great addition to introductory classes on ethnography, and I will be experimenting with using this book as such in my classes. In short, Kim has produced a well-written, theoretically engaging, and timely ethnographic work that is useful in a multitude of ways.

References

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