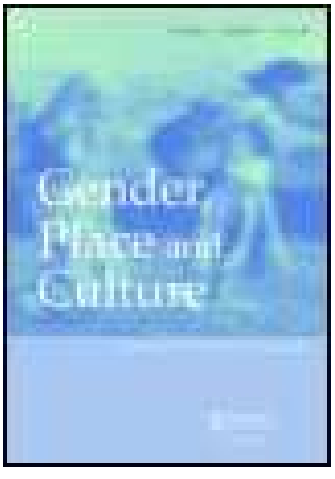

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Trafficking in women? Or multicultural family? The contextual difference of commodification of intimacy

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Trafficking in women? Or multicultural family? The contextual difference of commodification of intimacy

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This article attempts to link commercially arranged cross-border marriages to the discussion of the commodification of intimacy and to explore how a transnational phenomenon is contextualized in national politics. The question of commodification – what can or cannot be assigned economic value – has been a contentious area of intersection between economics and ethics, and intimacy has often been at the heart of the recent debate on commodification. Yet, commercially arranged cross-border marriages are perceived differently in Vietnam, a country that sends brides, and in Korea, a country that receives brides. In Vietnam, cross-border marriage has been portrayed negatively and is often associated with trafficking in women. Although a similar discourse exists in Korea, the official discourse on cross-border marriage has focused on supporting multicultural families. The difference in discourse with respect to the same phenomenon suggests that the tension around commodification is not necessarily shaped uniformly across the national border. In this article, I juxtapose the contrasted discourses and policies on commercially arranged cross-border marriages in both countries and discuss the contexts that may have contributed to the difference in discourse. By doing this, I show that the global trend of commodification of intimacy and the cultural meaning of this phenomenon cannot be divorced from national politics.

Keywords: cross-border marriage; marriage migration; commodification of intimacy; Korea; Vietnam; trafficking

> commodification of intimacy is not an analytical end point itself, but instead offers a valuable starting point for analyses of gendered social relations, cultural meanings, social inequalities, and capitalist transformation. (Appadurai 1986, in Constable 2009, 55)

Intimacy is often at the heart of the recent debate on commodification. Intimate relations refer to 'social relationships that are – or give the impression of being – physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring, or loving' (Constable 2009, 50). The commodification of intimacy has become more important in the transnational context as seen in the examples of cross-border marriages, migrant domestic workers and care workers, and sex workers (Constable 2009). In addition, the commodification of intimacy is easily observed in the rise of the care, sex, and marriage-brokerage industries on a global scale. Yet, this is not an entirely new topic, as we have seen in the long-lasting discussion on the commodification of life, love, and sex, which have generated fierce moral debates over the incommensurability of intimate relations, which are often associated with shared social norms (Radin 1987; Anderson 1993). However, what constitutes social norms and the social

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meaning of values are historically constructed; hence, the grounds for controversy to the commodification of intimate relations tend to be specific to a particular historical and cultural context. In the case of commercially arranged cross-border marriages, the public discussion often highlights the violence against women or the constraint of exercising the individual woman's agency in this marriage, but the social meaning and the conditions of these marriages have been barely highlighted. In other words, would commercially arranged marriage be accepted as 'real marriage'? What are the social contexts of this acceptance or denial? Furthermore, would it contribute to changing or managing the meaning of the marriage in a given society? In this article, I attempt to link commercially arranged cross-border marriages to the meaning of the commodification of intimacy and its context, with the case of commercially arranged marriages between South Korean men and Vietnamese women. In doing so, I extend the scope of analysis from the individual agency and power relations among individuals to the structural changes in the countries of origin and destination in the ways that care has been organized, desire has been created and managed, and the cultural meaning of intimate relations and the institution of the family have evolved or managed in relation to the other two.

Commodification of intimacy and the market

The question of commodification – what can or cannot be assigned economic value – has been a contentious area of intersection between economics and ethics (Radin 1987; Anderson 1993). Commodification refers to 'the process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market ' (Marx 1978, quoted in Constable 2009, 50). Radin (1987, 1859) distinguishes the market rhetoric from the activity of buying and selling. She offers a broad definition of commodification as follows: 'commodification includes not only actual buying and selling but also market rhetoric, the practice of thinking about interactions as if they were sale transactions, and market methodology, the use of monetary cost-benefit analysis to judge these interactions'. This is an important distinction, as it enables us to discuss degrees of commodification.

The boundary between the commodifiable and the un-commodifiable has shifted over time, a shift that cannot be divorced from the expansion of markets, which is supported by institutional and ideological mechanisms. In the current discussion of commodification, 'the market' does not mean just a place for buying and selling activities *per se* but is a self-regulating space in which the commodity fiction can be applied and institutional mechanisms are in place.[1] The boundaries between what is perceived as market and as non-market need to be redefined, and the arrangement of the institutional mechanisms must be changed as well. Tensions around commodification occur often around this process.

The debates on intimate social relations and monetary transfer were extensively reviewed by Zelizer (2000, 818) who presented 'the hostile worlds view' as a dominant approach and explored alternative approaches to overcome this view. According to Zelizer (2000, 818), the hostile-worlds view assumes two separate spheres of intimate social relations and monetary transfer, and any crossover between these two spheres results in moral contamination. Incommensurability is at the core of the hostile-worlds view. Yet this is rather an ideal dichotomy. These two spheres are indeed intertwined in various forms and with the variety of social meanings that are attached to the diverse forms of intimate relations and purchases (Zelizer 2000). In a way, Zelizer (2000) turned the question of 'what can or cannot be assigned economic value?' into the question of 'what kind of purchase is regarded legitimate under what circumstances?' In regard to the

question of commodification of intimacy, what we should ask is *where is the boundary of incommensurability, and how it is constructed, and in what context does this construction gain legitimacy* rather than whether the intimate relation is incommensurable or not.

Recent debate on the regulation of the industry of intimacy provides a clue to answer this question. Economic conditions tend to be singled out from this discussion, although the livelihood is an indispensable context (Richardson, Poudel, and Laurie 2009). Radin (1987) suggests regulating the sex industry rather than criminalizing individuals involved in the sales of sexual service,[2] as she recognizes that many women involved in selling sexual services are in poor economic situation. She also sees that creating a market and advertising that market contributes to the commodification of sexual services by normalizing it in a rhetorical sense and feeding by into the promotion of actual selling and buying.

Given the rise of this industry in the context of globalization, more attention needs to be paid to the market and its specific relation to the commodification of intimacy. Constable (2009, 50) links the commodification of intimacy to transnational mobility and the global flow of capital by noting that the commodification of intimacy is 'linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration, echoing a global capitalist flow of goods'. Yet, when the commodification of intimacy is discussed with respect to transnational mobility, it cannot be divorced from the formation of markets for intimacy or intimate labor both at national and at international level. It includes not only the emergence of the transnational industry, which supplies intimate services, e.g., brokerage for international marriage, migrant care labor, and sex work, but also governments' deployment of market rhetoric in planning for migration and labor, in particular for care. Although this industry appears to be operated on a global scale, it is subjected to the state regulation because of the very nature of the transnational mobility. While the market rhetoric tends to be operated explicitly to the labor migration, it has been less obvious in the case of marriage migration.

Commodification and cross-border marriages

Commercially arranged cross-border marriages tend to be widely associated with trafficking in women as an extension of mail-order brides or forced marriages in the literature (Constable 2005; Robinson 2007) and the marriage-brokerage industry is often depicted as a subset of international sex industry or traffickers (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010; Van Liempt 2011; Constable 2012). For example, Trafficking in Persons Report included commercially arranged marriages in Vietnam as a case of trafficking by noting that 'some Vietnamese women moving to China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and increasingly to South Korea as part of internationally brokered marriages are subsequently subjected to conditions of forced labor (including as domestic servants), forced prostitution, or both' (US Department of the State 2012, 371). The International Marriage Broker Regulation Act demands the anti-trafficking task force to investigate the role of International Marriage Brokerages (Constable 2012). In this discussion, women tend to be treated as victims uniformly. The agency of women has been much debated in the literature of trafficking; these women's decisions on migration area constrained choice and the quality of trafficking may appear or disappear throughout the experience of migration (Yea 2012). Yet, some of these women use migration as an opportunity to improve their life, the blanket designation of women as victims in the policy may restrict women's mobility (Van Liempt 2011). The policies to protect 'victims' of trafficking may contribute to problematize the violence against women that potentially results from the economic structural conditions, and the deceptive and forceful practices of commercial brokerage, but they rely on 'a simplistic construction of the legislative role of the state in rescuing vulnerable women from evil men'

in reminiscence of 'the 19th century "moral panic" over "white slavery"' (Dozema 2000, Sharma 2003, Chapkis 2005, Agustin 2007 in Constable 2012, 1138).

What is often understated in the discourse of trafficking is that not all commercially arranged cross-border marriages are the result of trafficking, and not all marriage migrants who moved through the commercial arrangement are victims. The general logic follows that women are forced to be subjected to the trade; hence, their agencies were failed to be exercised and, therefore, these marriages are not valid. Yet, the monetary transaction in marriage is not a new practice of cross-border marriage. Across many cultures, money has been part of the institution of marriage in various forms, for notorious examples, as the dowry or bride price, although they have been criticized (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008; Xiang 2008). The form of monetary transaction may matter but marriage migration and its gender relations cannot be reduced to the narrow notion of the market (Robinson 2007). As Jongwilaiwan and Thompson (2012, 364) argued,

> the extent to which market or economic logics, metaphors and desires are at play varies significantly across contexts and cannot be reduced to a singular 'global ecumene' in which men and women act in a liberal individualist mode, freed from both economic forces and the practical and ideational entailments of kinship.

The rise of commercial marriage brokerage is an important aspect of cross-border marriage in East and Southeast Asia, yet the notion of commodification has been used rather loosely. Wang and Chang (2002) argued that commercial marriage brokerage plays an important role in the increase in cross-border marriages in Taiwan.[3] The emergence of this industry cannot be divorced from regional economic disparity, the socio-demographic conditions of each country, and unequal gender relations. Yet, this industry ironically serves to form the family, an indispensable social institution, often regarded as a unit for social reproduction or non-capitalist production outside of the market (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2004; Safri and Graham 2010), and these unions are legally recognized in some countries. Indeed, cross-border marriages fall under the control of the authorities more than any other form of marriage or migration. Yet, unlike care labor migration, market rhetoric is not applied to marriage migration by the government directly. How commercially arranged cross-border marriages are regulated to maintain or change the ways in which seemingly non-market domains such as marriage and family function in a given society remains to be researched.

The growth of the marriage-brokerage industry on a global scale has emerged through computerization and the use of communication technologies (Kojima 2001; Constable 2003). From the 1960s, the marriage-brokerage industry has increased both within and across the borders, and the marriage pattern as of the 1970s was primarily between men from the industrialized countries including Western Europe and Australia and women from the Southeast Asia (Kojima 2001, 199). The number of international marriage-brokerage agencies increased during the 1990s and 2000s in many East Asian countries. As of 2009, 1236 international marriage-brokerage companies were in business in Korea.[4] The number of cross-border marriages in Korea increased dramatically, from 4710 in 1990 to 42,356 in 2005 and decreased to 29,762 in 2011 (Korean Statistical Information Service n.d.). According to the National Survey on Multicultural Families in 2009, 25.1% of marriage migrants and 66.6% of Vietnamese marriage migrants met their spouse through the commercial marriage-brokerage agencies (Kim et al. 2010). However, the context and the scale of the rise of this industry and international marriages and the characteristics of those involved in this process vary from region to region. For example, whereas Korean men in the same situation are generally described as middle-aged, less educated, and low-

income, American men who marry foreign women through commercial agencies are described as rather diverse (Kelly 2001; Constable 2003; Thai 2008; Kim et al. 2010; Lee 2012). The commercial marriage-brokerage industry caters to the needs of different social groups. It is intertwined with the socio-demographic and institutional contexts.

The legal status of this industry varies depending on the country. For example, commercial marriage-brokerage agencies are legal in the United States and Korea but illegal in Vietnam and the Philippines, although there has been controversy in the process of this (il)legalization in each country. The legal status of the industry reflects the regulatory concerns, but it often has a larger extra-legal effect, for example, indicating what is acceptable or not in a given society. Why the same phenomenon is acceptable in one country and not acceptable in another draws our attention to its context. Understanding these different dynamics and contexts would help enrich our understanding of the commodification of intimacy and its social meanings.

Data and methods

This research attempts to examine the relationships between the discourses, the regulations, and the trends and the conditions of cross-border marriages in both sending and receiving countries of brides. Newspapers were used as a praxis for observing how cross-border marriage is discussed publicly. I reviewed news articles on cross-border marriages from 11 major newspapers in Korea from 1991 to 2012 by using Korean Integrated Newspaper Database System and *Chosunilbo* Archive. Government policies were examined as they represent the official stance of the government on cross-border marriages, and also the premises of these policies often reveal the logic of state formation and nation-building, although these policies work rather incoherently at various institutional levels. Statistical data including census, vital statistics, and the 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families were reviewed for understanding the trend and the conditions of cross-border marriages. Finally, qualitative data from the field research and other online sources including web pages of commercial marriage brokerage agencies and online discussion boards on cross-border marriages were used as references for the patterns of cross-border marriages and the practices of the marriage-brokerage industry. Field research was conducted from October 2007 to July 2008 in Korea and Vietnam. I worked as an intern for 4 months for a local group which provides support program for marriage migrants in Dangjin County in Korea. During this period, I spent time with marriage migrants, visiting their homes and talking to other family members. I was able to talk to local government officers and organizers of the marriage migrant support program. On the basis of the information from marriage migrants, I chose Tay Ninh as a major field site in Vietnam, as most of the migrants came from the same area in Southern Vietnam. As an intern at the International Organization for Migration in Ho Chi Minh City, I was able to meet the officers from Women's Union from various level in Vietnam. Also with the support from the marriage migrant interviewees in Korea, I visited their hometown and talked to parents and neighbors in Vietnam. I was also informed by the conversation with a Korean government officer, an organizer of predeparture program for Vietnamese brides, and a number of Korean marriage brokers in Vietnam, and observed the commercial marriage brokerage process. Ethnographic data are from this participatory observation and in-depth interviews with 14 Vietnamese women who married Korean men, 11 Korean men who married Vietnamese women and their family members, 22 parents in Vietnam, 15 single women in the sending communities in Vietnam, and 3 Korean brokers in Vietnam and Korea.[5]

'Traditional woman' as a scarce commodity: formation of the market of good wives

Since the early 2000s, banners reading 'Marry a Vietnamese Girl'[6] have hung on nearly every street corner in Korea. These banners usually include statements objectifying Vietnamese women such as 'Pay later', '100% guaranteed refund', and 'They never run away'. Marriage between Korean men and Vietnamese women began in the late 1990s with the development of the commercial marriage brokerage industry and increased dramatically in the mid-2000s, as seen in Figure 1. According to the 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families, 66.6% of the Vietnamese marriage-migrant women respondents answered that they had met their spouses through a marriage-brokerage agency (Kim et al. 2010). Similarly, the websites of marriage-brokerage agencies presented photos of Vietnamese women with descriptions such as follows:

> sharing the Confucian culture [respecting elders and husband], having similar appearance, innocent [do not care about men's education, family background and age], diligent and family oriented. (Compiled from seven active websites of international marriage brokerage agencies)

These advertisements send mixed signals. While the banner evokes sexual desire and objectifies a woman's body, the descriptions on the websites highlight the virtues of the Vietnamese woman as a good wife who is diligent, family-oriented, and respectful. The emergence of marriage-brokerage industry has been associated with 'the individual experience of transiency, isolation, and loneliness and with the intensive effects of intensified industrialization and accelerated urbanization as well as improved international mobility' (del Rosario 1994, in Kojima 2001, 199). What people see as important qualities in a prospective spouse may be a matter of individual preference. However, the emergence of this particular rhetoric on an industrial scale reflects the structural changes in Korean society. The gap between gender-role expectations and the changing gender relations resulting from the rapidly changing socioeconomic situation in Korea including women's increased educational attainment and labor participation and from changing family patterns left certain groups of men and women unmarried (Lee, Williams, and Aguillas, n.d.). Kojima (2001, 200) argues that commercially arranged cross-border marriage system provides substitutes to maintain the sexual division of labor by reproducing a certain type of femininity as mothers and homemakers. Here, the issue is not just the commodification

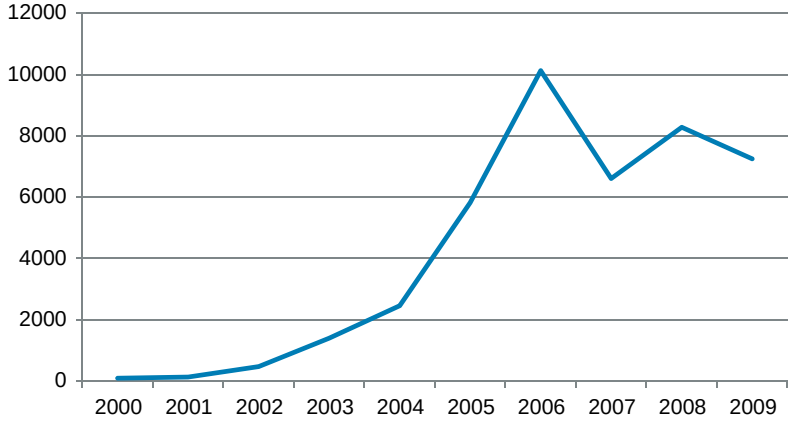

Figure 1. Commercially arranged marriages between South Korean men and Vietnamese women. *Source*: Korean Statistical Information Service.

Vietnamese Virgin
Cost $7,800: First Marriage, Second Marriage, The handicapped Welcomed
Up to 65 years old=100% marriage
Reproduced with the permission from Chamyeoyeondae

Vietnam International Marriage
Pay later
First Marriage / Second Marriage / The handicapped
Reproduced with the permission from Chamyeoyeondae

Illustration 1. Advertisements for marriage to Vietnamese women. *Source*: Chamyeoyeondae (2006).

of an individual body *per se* but the broader social context of the emergence of this industry with the particular rhetoric of the 'traditional wife'. Commodification of individual bodies, the emergence of the marriage-brokerage industry, and the popularity of the rhetoric of the traditional wife are not mutually exclusive processes in the case of commercially arranged cross-border marriages. The public response to this phenomenon took the meaning of this in a different way.

Contrasting legal and discursive responses on cross-border marriages in Vietnam and in South Korea

The commercial marriage-brokerage practices between Korean men and Vietnamese women generated a controversy in both Korea and Vietnam; however, each handled the controversy differently. Commercial marriage brokerage between Korean men and Vietnamese women takes place via 'the marriage tour', which depends on affordable international transportation. A marriage tour is a 5–6-day trip to Vietnam that is offered by commercial marriage-brokerage agencies. During this period, Korean bachelors meet a group of single Vietnamese women and get married. The process usually takes the form of a beauty contest, in which a large number of women are presented and a small number of men choose their partners. The publication of these practices of marriage-brokerage agencies in a newspaper in Korea[7] evoked nationalistic responses in Vietnam, such as the following:

> More than anger, it is also the pain and the shame of Vietnamese women, of every Vietnamese. The pride of our nation has been seriously hurt by this event. (Laborer online in Vietnam 2006 in Bélanger, Hong, and Wang 2007, 13)

> The disgraced image of Vietnamese women made me feel pain. I have raised this issue multiple times but no organization in the party has provided proper measures. How could we continue the tradition of Vietnamese women? Who on earth could clear the disgrace? (Vo Van Kiet, Former Prime Minister, translated from *Hangyere* 2006a)

What was seen as a problem is the portrayal of Vietnamese women as commodities, as if no Vietnamese women would mind putting themselves in the position of being treated as a commodity if it meant she could go to Korea. The logical expansion from the commodification of Vietnamese women to national shame seems to have happened 'naturally', and it appears to be legitimate grounds for intense emotional responses. As Yuval-Davis (1997, 67) noted, 'women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's "honor" and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture'. Hence, the intense emotional response needs to be understood in the context of the nationalist project rather than in an account of individual rights.

> In Vietnam, marriage between a Vietnamese woman and a foreign man occurs based on voluntary love under legal protection. The Women's Union in Vietnam sees a Vietnamese woman who is subject to any form of trade as a victim who needs protection, regardless of her residency. Any activity that is related to illegal marriage brokerage violates morals and laws and it should be punished by law. (Letter from the Women's Union in Vietnam to Korea, 27 April 2006, in *Hangyere* 2006a)

Commercially arranged marriages are not legally recognized in Vietnam. The paragraph above reiterates the hostile-worlds view. Voluntary love is legitimate, whereas any form of trade renders women victims; hence, the Vietnamese state needs to protect them regardless of their residency. In other words, individual will is critical for the socially legitimate love, just as Giddens (as quoted in Robinson 2007, 491) noted that 'romantic love is historically related to the realization of the self as a quintessential fact of the modernity'. When one is in an environment where individual agency fails to be exercised, one needs to be protected by the state. In this case, being subject to trade is regarded as incompatible with exercising free will. Clearly, the grounds for the protection of Vietnamese women are not their citizenship but their failure to be individuals. Consequently, such marriages are not legally recognized in this case. Decree 68 and Decree 69, which were implemented in 2002 and 2006 to regulate commercial marriage brokerages, reiterate this viewpoint. For example, Decree 69 indicates that 'marriages are illegal if the interview and investigation show that the marriage is supported by illegal matchmakers, not in accordance with national customs and morals, a result of women-trafficking and for sexual abuse, or for other profit making purpose' (*Vietnam News* 2006). The regulation is geared toward verifying whether the marriage is genuine, that is, based on the modern conception of voluntary love between individuals. The violence and abuse in these marriages are assumed to be the result of the commercial arrangement. Yet, the mechanisms to make these women lose agency is not explained. Even if we assume that there was no financial transaction involved in marriage, the violence in the marital relationship would not disappear. The issue is not just being in the market or financial transaction but the conditions that subject women to trade and under which the financial transaction becomes meaningful for the livelihood of their families. The emphasis on the financial transaction as a root cause of violence indirectly normalizes marriage as a violence-free institution without questioning the violence inherent in the marital relationship.

The Korean government responded to the unjust practices of the marriage-brokerage industry by banning advertisements that include discriminatory expressions in 2007 and

passing a law to regulate the marriage-brokerage industry in 2008. It was largely a response to the campaign by NGOs, which problematized the sexualized and racialized texts in the advertisement and the practices of marriage-brokerage industry. How commercially arranged cross-border marriage is regulated in Korea is similar to Radin's suggestion for regulating the sex industry; although the marriage-brokerage industry is regulated, prospective bridegrooms are not criminalized nor prospective brides victimized. The commodification of the marriage brokerage appears to be relatively tolerated in the public policy despite the various representations of Vietnamese women, such as a victim of violence in addition to a good wife or a cheater. This discourse seems to have been rather dissolved in the official discourse of 'multicultural families', which is supported by a series of Korean government policies (Lee 2012). 'Multicultural family' is an official term used to refer to the union between a Korean national and a person of foreign origin. It was initially used by NGOs but appropriated by the government later. A number of news articles that contain 'multicultural family' increased from 2 in 2001 to 81 in 2006 to 2935 in 2011.[8] A bill to support multicultural families largely addresses the state's responsibility for creating a non-discriminatory environment for marriage migrants. It is linked to the broader scheme of the 'Healthy Family Campaign' and to re-creation of the national image for a 'multicultural Korea'.

The discourses and institutional responses around cross-border marriage in Vietnam and Korea contrast quite clearly (see Table 1). Whereas the Vietnamese government does not recognize commercially arranged marriages as legal and the public discussion on cross-border marriage has often been framed negatively in terms of trafficking in women (Bélanger, Hong, and Wang 2007), in Korea, similar concerns surrounding commercially arranged cross-border marriage were dissolved in the policy of supporting multicultural families and the discourse of multiculturalism (Lee 2012). The fact that different discourses became prominent with regard to the phenomenon of cross-border marriages raises the question of contextual differences in how the commodification of intimacy is received in each society. The discourse at the national level in particular reflects each nation's particular political and economic contexts.

Who are the trafficked women?

The Vietnamese government's restrictive approach to commercially arranged marriage can be seen as a part of its socialist legacy. The Marriage and Family Law of 1959 abolished

Table 1. Major discourse and policy responses in Vietnam and Korea.

	Vietnam	South Korea
Major discourse	Trafficking in Women	Multicultural Family
Policy response	Decree 68 (2002) Decree 69 (2006)	Multicultural Family Support Center[a] (2006) Act to Support International Marriages for Local Bachelors (2005–2006) The Support for Multicultural Families Act (2008) Ban on the Advertisement[b] (2007) Act on Regulation of Marriage Brokerage Agent (2008)

[a] As of 12 August 2010, 134 centers are in operation.
[b] The regulation on outdoor advertisement was amended in 2007. It bans advertisements that include racial or sexual discrimination (5.2.5).
Source: Law Information Database in Korea.

Table 2. Number of news articles, which includes the keyword by year in Korea.

Keyword	Multiculture	Multicultural family[a]
2001	90	2
2002	112	0
2003	119	4
2004	116	6
2005	159	10
2006	364	81
2007	767	363
2008	1817	957
2009	3318	2102
2010	4431	2816
2011	4768	2935
2012	3529	2494

Note: The data are from Korea Integrated Newspaper Data System, which cover 10 major daily newspapers in Korea, which are distributed nationally, namely, *Dongailbo*, *Kyonghyangsinmun*, *Kukminilbo*, *Naeilsinmun*, *Munhwailbo*, *Seoulsinmun*, *Segyeilbo*, *Hangyerye*, *Hankokilbo*, and *Asia Today*. It is a keyword search, the context of the article is not counted. The result may overlap.
[a]The result includes the keywords *damunhwakajok* (multicultural family) and *damunhwakajŏng* (multicultural household), as these two terms are used interchangeably.

arranged marriages and specified the basic rights of women and children (Wisensale 1999). However, why this issue became such a sensitive one in recent years requires scrutiny. The discourse of trafficking in women in Vietnam needs to be understood in the context of the nation-building process. Bélanger, Hong, and Wang (2007, 3) argue that 'in the context of Vietnam, where women have been called upon to build a socialist society, leaving the country for marriage is portrayed as a failure to meet the needs of the nation'. In the context of rapid economic development along with socioeconomic structural changes and growing social inequalities, the individual household became an even more important unit of production and consumption under the new economic system (Barbieri and Bélanger 2009). The burden of caring for individuals shifted to the family, as shown in the Law on Marriage and Family of 1986, which delineated the rights and duties of parents, children, grandparents, and grandchildren (Wisensale 1999). The fact that young Vietnamese women moved away from the family formation and renounced their nationality may be regarded as a threat to the nation-building project in the new economy.

Furthermore, Vietnamese women are treated as a homogenized category in the nationalistic discourse presented above. Yet, not all Vietnamese women engage in commercially arranged cross-border marriages. Both statistical data and interview data show that these women have less prestigious socioeconomic status. According to the 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families in Korea, 63.4% of Vietnamese marriage migrants are younger than 25 years, 61.8% have less than high school education, and 60.5% indicated that they have work experience in Vietnam including physical labor (23%), technician or mechanic (15.5%), sales (14.8%), service (12%), agriculture and fishery (11.9%), household chores (5.4%), and other (17.3%). Given their educational backgrounds and occupations, it is evident that Vietnamese marriage migrants come from less privileged backgrounds. The following story of single Vietnamese woman whom I met in a rural village in Vietnam illuminates the contexts of their decisions for marriage migration.

'I cannot think of anything but my family now', said 20-year-old Nga with rather exhausted voice. Nga wanted to marry a foreigner and work there in order to support

her family. The will to support family and the economic opportunity abroad seemed two important elements for Nga's decision for marriage migration. She exhausted the economic opportunities available to her. She dropped out of school at the third year of junior high school because her father was ill. In order to support her family, she started working as a maid in Saigon. Then she came back home when she was 19 years old, started working at a Korean factory. However, she said 'the monthly salary there was only good for living expenses in Vietnam. But my family is poor. We cannot escape poverty by working in Vietnam'. Rapid economic development in Vietnam in the last three decades created new economic opportunity for a young woman like Nga. Given her limited resources, these are the best she can do. Yet, as she indicated, her income is not enough to uplift her family's economic situation. Her aspiration to go abroad with a medium of marriage can be seen as her individual aspiration to improve the economic situation. Yet this aspiration came from the recognition of the structural constraints that made them see their future in Vietnam as not being very bright. Here, marriage is not a goal and the marital relationship is of less concern even though many marriage migrants expressed their hope for working marital relationships in the interviews.

The Vietnamese government recognizes that a specific socio-demographic group of women engage in commercially arranged cross-border marriages. The Women's Union recognized that poor women from rural areas are usually involved in this process and diagnosed the lack of job opportunities as a cause, as seen in the following:

> We are working on how to improve the unemployment of rural women, how to guarantee equality in the job-seeking process and how to create more job opportunities for more women. (Chairperson of the Women's Union, Interview with *TouiTre*, 26 April 2006, translated from *Hangyere* 2006a)

If the primary cause of cross-border marriage is economic inequality and a lack of job opportunities in rural areas, it becomes a problem of national economic development in Vietnam. In other words, those who are engaged in commercially arranged cross-border marriages are members of a relatively marginalized population in the economic structure. The increase in commercially arranged cross-border marriages indirectly indicates the problems of Vietnam's unprecedented economic development. The discourse of trafficking in women obscures the issue of economic inequality in Vietnam by turning attention to national pride.

Who are the multicultural families?

As noted earlier, the discourse of the multicultural family is prominent in Korea in the context of the Healthy Family Campaign and the Multicultural Korea Campaign. The multicultural society is one of the five themes of the Presidential Council on Nation Branding, which was established in 2009, and the importance of creating a multicultural environment was emphasized to attract foreign human capital. Around this period, a series of laws on foreign residents in Korea were implemented or amended.[9] While the Multicultural Korea Campaign is a discursive effort to reinvent Korea as a node of the knowledge-based global economy, the Healthy Family Campaign is an effort to deal with the problem of social reproduction that resulted from the national economic development in Korea (Lee 2012).

The Korean government faced the problem of reproduction of population and care provision that had developed during the rapid industrialization process beginning in the 1960s. It often boiled down to issues around family, including the weakening function of

the family and the decline in marriage and fertility rates. Hence, restoring family both ideologically and physically became an important policy agenda during the 2000s. The Framework Act on Healthy Families was implemented in 2004. Its context is laid out as follows:

> Families in Korea made huge contributions to develop and maintain Korean society by carrying out various functions including (biological) reproduction, welfare and human development, but the functions of the family have been undermined as female labor participation increased and the size of the family became smaller and the Korean family experienced chronic functional overload. The weakening (biological) reproductive function and care provision of family has emerged as a new social danger. (Korean Government 2006, 10)

While this law emphasized the government's responsibility to provide welfare policies for maintaining the family, the issue of family formation remains a problem. Local governments and para-governmental organizations facilitated programs to encourage marriage actively during the 2000s. For example, the Planned Population Federation of Korea, which used to lead a family planning campaign, offers a dating service, often with the local government (see Illustration 2). In particular, 26 municipalities implemented bills to support the international marriages of local bachelors, which provide financial support for local bachelors in many cases. These local governments' effort for family formation is very much aligned with the presence of marriage-brokerage industry.

'Multicultural Family' is an odd term where the national desire to reinvent Korea as a node of the global economy meets the needs for social reproduction. What is overlooked in the discourse of these families is that multicultural families tend to belong to the low socioeconomic strata in Korea, and that marriage migrants play an important role in providing care to family members (Lee 2012). It is evident how marriage migrants are defined in the laws and policies in Korea. For example, marriage migrants appear to be wives and mothers in the Support for Multicultural Families Act (Act. No. 8937) in 2008. While this law addresses the responsibility of the government to promote the multicultural environment to avoid the prejudice and discrimination against multicultural family and marriage migrants and to provide multilingual services, the details of the support for multicultural families are predominantly focused on educating marriage migrants by providing a range of education programs including language, vocational training, social adaptation, relationship, parenting, family life, nutrition, and health. In particular, two substantive articles are devoted to reproductive health and the care and education of children. Moreover, the concerns of the language proficiency of children from the multicultural family show the lack of confidence on marriage migrants as Korean mothers. A similar language is repeated in the Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea (Act. No. 8442) that 'the national and local government can provide support for marriage migrants including Korean language education, Korean cultural education, childcare and education for children, and medical support' (12.1) and this applies to 'the foreigners in Korea who raise children born out of the common-law marriage to Koreans and their children' (12.2). The needs of the Korean state, which faces the problem of population and care, are projected in the needs of marriage migrants, which are articulated in this law. The discourse of 'multicultural families' contributes to transform the physical and material needs for the social reproduction of the low-income families in Korea into a part of the bigger discursive project, 'multicultural Korea'.

Contextual differences in commodification of intimacy

The two discourses on cross-border marriages contrast with each other clearly, yet the geography of the discourses on cross-border marriages in each country is much more

2013 Ulsan Metropolitan City
Speed Dating Festival for Single Men and Women
Organized by Ulsan Metropolitan City Government and Planned Population Federation of Korea
Reproduced with the permission from Planned Population Federation of Korea, Ulsan Branch

Congratulations! Chungbuk Province, Danyang Country Family Formation
Reproduced with the permission from Durian International Marriage Brokerage Company

Illustration 2. Local Government's involvement in family formation in Korea. *Sources*: Ulsan Metropolitan City Government Blog (http://ulsannuri.tistory.com/4226, accessed 27 November 2013) and Durian International Marriage Brokerage Company, Durian (http://www.durianwedding.com/, accessed 27 November 2013).

complex, and they are not mutually exclusive in terms of substance. This article focused on the public discourse on cross-border marriages in order to show how a particular discourse tends to be deployed and accentuated in each country based on its political-economic situation. In this process, certain parts of the reality tend to become blurred or obscured. For example, while the discourse of trafficking in women disguises the reality of young Vietnamese women who are marginalized in the process of Vietnam's national economic development, the discourse of the multicultural family obscures that these Korean-man and Vietnamese-woman couples are located in the low socioeconomic strata in South Korea.

The rise of the international marriage-brokerage industry is an important factor in the discussion of the commodification of intimacy and cross-border marriage. While globalization and the development of communication technology are important contributing factors, regional and national economic disparity and socio-demographic changes in the region cannot be separated from this development. That this industry is legal in Korea and illegal in Vietnam indicates that the boundary of incommensurability was drawn differently in each discourse. Accordingly, individual agency and violence are defined differently.

While women's participation in commercial marriage brokerage was regarded by the Vietnamese government as selling women as a commodity, men's participation in the commercial marriage brokerage was regarded as using a brokerage service by the Korean government. In the discourse in Vietnam, the financial transaction is equated with the cause of violence. As soon as a woman enters the market and the financial transaction is made from man to woman, the woman stops being an individual with a free will and becomes a constituency of state protection in the discourse in Vietnam. However, what makes women lose their agency is not simply being in the market but the conditions that subject women to trade and under which the financial transaction becomes meaningful for the livelihood of themselves and their families. In the discourse in Korea, 'woman' is rather absent, but is implicitly imagined as a rational individual in the market. For instance, insufficient information was identified as a problem of the commercial marriage brokerage; hence, it can be solved by providing enough information on each party.[10] According to the same logic, the commercially arranged marriage is invalid in Vietnam but valid in Korea, because a marriage should be a voluntary union between two individuals. In this case, the boundary of incommensurability is closely linked to how 'woman' is imagined as an individual with free will and where 'woman' stops being an individual with free will. Assuming women's free will collapses with the contact of the market is problematic because it fails to recognize that women's agency can be exercised in various contexts as many studies on cross-border marriages or trafficking in women have shown. However, imagining a 'woman' as an abstract, rational individual with free will in the market is equally problematic as it moves away our attention from the context in which these women live in.

What seems fruitful to further the debate on women's agency and the commodification of intimate relations is to bring in the context of the nation-building/reproducing process and to explore how 'women' and women's role are imagined in the laws and policies on cross-border marriage. Despite the obvious contrast in discourses in each country, there appears to be little difference in the place of women in the broader context of nation-building/reproducing. In the discourse of the multicultural family, the place of marriage-migrant women is clear; they are wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, which resonates with the rhetoric of 'good wives' in the marriage-brokerage industry. In the discourse of trafficking in women, trafficked women are the daughters and sisters whose agency was disabled and hence who are in need of the protection of the state.

The global trends of cross-border marriage cannot be divorced from national politics, even though the discourse appears to have transnational elements. The social meaning of commercially arranged cross-border marriage that is assigned in each society may be very different depending on the context. How women and men in each society understand this phenomenon is more complex, depending on their location in that society, and it remains to be discussed in the future. Also how marriage-migrant women experience the whole process and how they make meaning out of it remain to be discussed in the future.

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Notes

1. Polanyi (1957) discusses the emergence of the 'self-regulating market' and notes that 'the commodity fiction' played a role in this process. He provides an empirical definition of a commodity as something that is prepared for sale. For example, labor is not a commodity and is instead a part of human activity. But the availability of labor is important to a functioning industry. Imagining labor as a commodity requires an institutional mechanism.
2. 'The issue thus becomes how to structure an incomplete commodification that takes account of our non-ideal world, yet does not foreclose progress to a better world of more equal power. I think we should now decriminalize the sale of sexual services in order to protect poor women from the degradation and danger either of the black market or of other occupations that seem to them less desirable. At the same time, in order to check *the domino effect* of market rhetoric, we should prohibit the capitalist entrepreneurship that would operate to create an organized market in sexual services even though this step would pose enforcement difficulties. It would include, for example, banning brokerage and recruitment. It might also include advertising' (Radin 1987,1925).
3. They used the term 'commodification' in relation to the emergence of the actual marriage-brokerage industry but did not conceptualize the notion further.
4. Ministry of Health and Welfare, http://mw.go.kr/front/al/sal0101vw.jsp?PAR_MENU_ID=04&MENU_ID=040102&page=51&BOARD_ID=110&BOARD_FLAG=01&CONT_SEQ=45544&SEARCHKEY=&SEARCHVALUE=&CREATE_DATE1=&CREATE_DATE2=.
5. This number does not include informal conversation.
6. In Korean, '*Chonyoo*' means both 'single woman' and 'virgin'.
7. In 2006, *Chosunilbo*, one of the major conservative newspapers in Korea, published an article on marriage brokerage between Korean men and Vietnamese women titled 'To Korea, a Land of Hope'. The editorial board of a Vietnamese newspaper, *TouiTre*, sent a letter of complaint to *Chosunilbo* to problematize the way in which Vietnamese women were portrayed as a commodity in the article. The Women's Union in Vietnam, one of the mass organizations in the government, also sent a letter of complaint to the relevant Korean authorities. Vietnamese students in Korea also held a press conference on this issue. This evoked nationalist sentiments in Vietnam and quickly became an issue of national pride. According to Bélanger, Hong, and Wang (2007), 100 articles on cross-border marriages were published in 2006, 20 of which were about the *Chosunilbo* article.
8. The data are from the 11 major daily newspapers in Korea, which are distributed nationally, namely, *Chosunilbo*, *Dongailbo*, *Kyonghyangsinmun*, *Kukminilbo*, *Naeilsinmun*, *Munhwailbo*, *Seoulsinmun*, *Segyeilbo*, *Hangyerye*, *Hankokilbo*, and *Asia Today*. The result includes the keywords, *damunhwakajok* (multicultural family) and *damunhwakajŏng* (multicultural household), as these two terms are used interchangeably (see Table 2 for more details).
9. Basic Law on Treatment of Foreign Residents in Korea, Bill to Support Multicultural Family, Law to Promote Foreign Investment.
10. For example, the enforcement decree on regulating marriage-brokerage industry in 2010 (Presidential Decree No. 22494) suggests that brokers should provide information of the prospective bridegroom to the prospective bride (Article 3.2).

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

¿La trata de mujeres? ¿O la familia multicultural?: la diferencia contextual de la comodificación de la intimidad

Este artículo intenta ligar los casamientos internacionales arreglados comercialmente a la discusión sobre la comodificación de la intimidad y para explorar cómo un fenómeno transnacional es contextualizado en la política nacional. La cuestión de la comodificación - ¿qué puede y qué no puede tener asignado un valor económico? – ha sido un área polémica de intersección entre la economía y la ética, y la intimidad ha estado a menudo en el centro de estos recientes debates. Sin embargo, los casamientos internacionales arreglados comercialmente son percibidos en forma diferente en Vietnam, un país que envía novias, y en Corea, un país que recibe novias. En Vietnam, el casamiento internacional ha sido retratado en forma negativa y a menudo está asociado con el tráfico de mujeres. Aunque existe un discurso similar en Corea, el discurso oficial sobre el casamiento internacional se ha centrado en apoyar a las familias multiculturales. La diferencia en el discurso con respecto al mismo fenómeno sugiere que la tensión en torno a la comodificación no está necesariamente moldeada uniformemente a través de la frontera nacional. En este artículo, superpongo los discursos y las políticas contrastantes sobre los casamientos internacionales arreglados comercialmente en ambos países y discuto los contextos que podrían habercontribuido a la diferencia en el discurso. Por medio de ello,

muestro que la tendencia global a la mercantilización de la intimidad y el significado cultural de este fenómeno no puede ser separado de la política nacional.

Palabras claves: casamiento internacional; migración por casamiento; mercantilización de la intimidad; Corea; Vietnam; tráfico

女性的人口贩运？抑或多元文化家庭？亲密性商品化的脉络差异

本文企图将透过商业安排的跨国婚姻，连结至对于亲密性商品化的讨论，以探讨此一跨国现象如何在国族政治中被脉络化。有关商品化的问题——何者可被或不可被赋予经济价值？——成为经济与伦理交汇中的争议性范畴，而亲密性则经常成为晚近有关商品化争议的核心。但透过商业安排的跨国婚姻，在送出"新娘"的越南以及接收"新娘"的韩国，则有着不同的认知方式。在越南，跨国婚姻被负面描述且经常与女性的人口贩运有关。儘管韩国方面有着相似的论述，但对于跨国婚姻的官方论述，则聚焦于支持多元文化家庭。有关同一个现象的不同论述，显示关于商品化的冲突并不必然在国境两端被同质化地塑造。我将在本文中，并列两个国家对于商业安排的跨国婚姻所具有的相互冲突的论述与政策，并讨论可能导致论述差异的脉络。藉此，我将展现出亲密性商品化的全球趋势以及此一现象的文化意涵，无法与国族政治相互切割

关键词：跨境婚姻；婚姻移民；亲密性商品化；韩国；越南；人口贩运