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**“I AM RAISING KOREA”: ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS ON MOTHERING
AND MARRIAGE-LABOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN KOREA**

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ABSTRACT

The recent surge in marriage-labor immigration to Korea has complicated long-held discourses of what it means to be Korean or a Korean mother, a meaning firmly rooted in patriarchal and hierarchal cultural beliefs and the practices of mothers and families (Song-Yi Kim, Chang, & Kim, 2008). Growing concerns about future generations in Korea have also intertwined with this marriage-labor immigration phenomenon, which includes social problems associated with low birth rates of native-born Koreans (Suzuki, 2003) and pressures to cultivate a citizenry that can compete successfully in today's global marketplace (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). Through a series of semi-structured ethnographic interviews, "go-along" interviews, and fieldwork in Korea in 2013, 2014, and 2015, I investigated the discourses about mothering that emerged from interviews with marriage-labor immigrants. This study draws from educational anthropology and reconceptualist scholarship in early childhood education as a theoretical and methodological framework for examining discourses on mothering and mothers from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea. Employing a Bakhtinian textual analysis of semi-structured ethnographic and "go-along" interviews, this study looks at discourses on mothering and mothers through three ethnographic case studies with key informants Minh, Haejin, Gouba (Haejin's husband), Sabai (Haejin's sister-in-law), and Myungsoo. Next the dissertation provides a comprehensive analysis of the major themes that emerged during the interviews based on a Bakhtinian textual analysis. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of implications this study has for early childhood policy and possible new directions for research.

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DEDICATION

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection

Chapter 1

Introduction

During the first interview at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center¹ in Hamshin, Korean in 2013, Juan, a social worker who originally came from China thirteen years ago, shared stories about working with marriage-labor immigrant families. Juan insisted that marriage-labor immigrants should be applauded for their courage to immerse themselves in the unknowns of their new home country. In our 2013 interview, Juan explained to me that marriage-labor immigrants told her repeatedly: “I don’t just raise my child, but I am somebody that raises Korea. I am a mother that raises Korea.”

Juan’s stated purpose and hope was for the voices of marriage-labor immigrants to be heard. In our interviews from 2013 to 2015, Juan elaborated on what she perceived to be the fundamental necessity for bettering the lives of marriage-labor immigrant families: improving the overall negative public image of marriage-labor immigrants. Juan’s voice was filled with a sense of determination, imagining her own self and others being understood beyond the mainstream assumptions and stereotypes about marriage-labor immigrants. These assumptions and stereotypes, according to Juan, were predominantly from a deficit perspective, had the effect of marginalizing women, and devaluing the role that marriage-labor immigrant families played in Korean society. Over time, it appeared Juan had let go of her initial uneasiness about participating in these interviews along with her colleague, Minh.

¹ To ensure confidentiality, I use pseudonyms for all the names of people, institutions, and demographic regions in this dissertation.

And so, more and more Juan opened up about stereotypes and discriminations against marriage-labor immigrants that she had experienced, sharing her own stories about the challenges of working with marriage-labor immigrants. Juan's account of her journey in working with marriage-labor immigrants, as an immigrant to Korea herself, had served as an impetus for me to more fully understand the available discourses of marriage-labor immigrant mothers and the complexities of how marriage-labor immigrant families accept, resist, and transform these discourses about national cultural identity, gender, and mothering.

I opened with this poignant quote from a marriage-labor immigrant mother to illustrate the complexities of discourses about mothering a child and, as Juan makes clear, the larger discourses about mothering a nation that shape the lifeworlds of my key informants. When Juan talked about "raising Korea," I understood her to be saying how she saw herself as educating mainstream Korea about marriage-labor immigrants like herself. According to Juan, this was partly an appropriate interpretation, but, later in the interview, Juan also made it clear that this was an incomplete interpretation. Korean society has often been criticized for focusing on assimilating marriage-labor immigrants into what it means to be Korean, so that these parents can raise their children to be "Korean enough" (J. Kim, Yang, & Torneo, 2014; M. Lee, 2008). As I conducted interviews with Juan and other key informants, I have been struck by the complex ways in which marriage-labor immigration to Korea can serve as the locus for analyzing a host of discourses associated with mothering inside and outside Korea. The recent surge of marriage-labor immigration to Korea, which has complicated long-held discourses of Korean racial and ethnic homogeneity, is a phenomenon closely linked to patriarchal and hierarchal beliefs and practices in Korean families (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008).

Growing concerns about future generations in Korea have also intertwined with this marriage-labor immigration phenomenon, which includes social problems associated with low birth rates of native-born Koreans (Suzuki, 2003) and pressures to cultivate a citizenry that can

compete successfully in today's global marketplace (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

Since the late 1990s, marriage-labor immigration to Korea has paralleled Korea's booming economy (S. Kang, 2010; Kong, Yoon, & Yu, 2010). Marriage-labor immigration has become a popular and viable panacea for many stakeholders, such as Korean bachelors living in rural areas who desire a traditional wife who cares for family and extended kin. For marriage-labor immigrants, predominately women, this is often sold as the pursuit of the "Korean Dream" (J. Kim, Yang, & Torneo, 2012; Yang et al., 2012). Moreover, marriage-labor immigration has played a key role in the Korean government's aim to resolve social issues having to do with a shrinking and aging population, increasing costs of Korean laborers, and to offset the loss of eligible brides as more and more educated and career oriented women who do not conform to traditional Korean family roles (N. Y. Kim, 2006; Sumi Kim, 2009). There are over 200 registered support centers for marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea, and they offer programs for marriage-labor immigrant parents, including Korean language and cooking classes (Bélanger, Lee, & Wang, 2010). These classes are intended to help marriage-labor immigrant parents, especially mothers, assimilate to the Korean culture and perform their role as a Korean mother.

Through my personal experiences, I also came to recognize marriage-labor immigration as one of the key issues that complicates the discourses around Korean mothering in relation to discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomics, politics, economy, and culture. Being an insider and an outsider to the Korean culture, I could identify with some of the challenges marriage-labor immigrants were experiencing, navigating the space between various cultural discourses. As a Korean native and an immigrant to the United States, I am also connected to this phenomenon as I am one of the Korean women who are not partaking in the traditional cultural discourses about women.

Through a series of semi-structured ethnographic interviews, “go-along” interviews, and fieldwork in Korea in 2013, 2014, and 2015, I attempted to investigate the available discourses on mothering for marriage-labor immigrants in relation to the larger circulating discourses about marriage-labor immigration in Korean society. The conflicting and competing discourses that emerged from these interviews and my fieldwork suggest that discourses of mothering—embraced, rejected, and altered by marriage-labor immigrant families—must be examined not only in terms of the dynamics within the contemporary phenomenon of an increasing marriage-labor immigrant population, but also in relation to larger cultural and political discourses of mothering. These discourses about mothering also intersect with discourses about gender, race, national and cultural identity, and Korean childrearing practices as a form of cultural preservation and transmission (Korb, 2010; Ruddick, 1995). Walks and McPherson (2011) argue, in articulating an archeology of mothering, that discourses about mothers and mothering are discursively constructed. This is evidenced by the pervasiveness of popular and governmental discourses promulgating that Korean mothers are to not only raise their children, but are also responsible for raising Korean society as a whole. Critics are also concerned that widespread cultural beliefs and practices marginalize and position children from marriage-labor immigrant families as social outcasts who are not Korean enough. What would it mean to think about marriage-labor immigration to Korea as a typical phenomenon that demonstrates contesting cultural discourses of mothering in Korea? The tension between these multiple discourses is articulated in more depth later in this paper through accounts by immigrant parents living in Korea.

I recognized that it is crucial to examine the implications and effects of marriage-labor immigration in schools and on a child’s academic achievements. However, it is equally important, as my interview with Juan insists, to explore the discourses of mothering manifesting around marriage-labor immigrant families. And while there exists a growing body of scholarship

analyzing the academic aptitude, socialization, and language development of children of immigrant families (Youngdal Cho, 2006, 2011; B. S. Kim, 2008), we lack insider accounts about the discourses of mothering in the lifeworlds of marriage-labor immigrant parents.

Moreover, along with the rapid demographic changes in Korea, there have also been coalescing and contradictory responses to discourses of mothering by cultural institutions, such as schools, media, and government, ranging from assimilationist approaches to cultural pluralist approaches (J. Kim et al., 2012). Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to the tension between these coalescing and contradictory responses, and there has been a failure to acknowledge the complexities and significance of circulating discourses (Yuk, 2011). There is much to be done to challenge a privileged and static perspective on available discourses about marriage-labor immigration and mothering in Korea. To the extent that there continues to be a lack of scholarship in how a number of discourses relate to, interact with, and contest one another as they are positioned by marriage-labor immigrants, it would be difficult to imagine early childhood curriculum and policies not predicated on Koreanizing marriage-labor immigrant mothers and their children (M. Kim, 2008, 2013).

With the goal of exploring and understanding the discourses about the mothering that pertain to marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea, this dissertation examines the ways in which the discourses of mothering and discourses about marriage-labor immigrant families intersect, as well as how the entangled discourses are framed and reproduced in the complex historical, sociocultural, and political contexts. In particular, I examine the following research questions:

- What are the available discourses of mothering that marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea and how do my informants accept, resist, and transform these discourses?
- How do local, national, and international histories of race, gender, class, citizenship, nationality, and culture shape the discourses of mothering in Korea for marriage-labor

immigrant parents and their children?

This study draws from educational anthropology and reconceptualist scholarship in early childhood education to build a theoretical and methodological framework for examining discourses on mothering and mothers from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea.

Moreover, this study employs a Bakhtinian textual analysis of semi-structured ethnographic and “go-along” interviews for three case studies with my key informants Minh, Haejin, Gouba (Haejin’s husband), Sabai (Haejin’s sister-in-law), and Myungsoo. In my analysis of informant interviews, I attempt to draw out what discourses are absent and present, how they relate to one another, and the ways in which they function in the midst of much tension about Korean national identity and the country’s role in the global economy. By doing so, this dissertation aims to demonstrate the complexities and contradictions of intersecting discourses of mothering and of “Koreanness” as they relate to marriage-labor immigrant families to Korea.

This introduction provides a brief overview and history of marriage-labor immigration to Korea in the late 20th and 21st century. It then considers the cultural, political, and historical conditions that function as the foundation for how mainstream discourses of mothering are taken up in contemporary Korea. This historical overview is followed by a discussion about the use of the term “marriage-labor immigrant families” in this dissertation. Next, I elaborate upon the discourses of mothering and the Korean national cultural identity, and then show how the juncture between multiple major discourses, rooted in historical and cultural perspectives, demonstrates the transient quality of these circulating discourses. By exploring discourses of mothering, “Koreanness,” and the intersection between the two, I attempt to understand the cultural, historical, and political implications of the ways in which the image of marriage-labor immigrant mothers are constructed in Korean society.

Korea as a Country of Destination: The Emergence of the “Korean Dream”

The history of marriage-labor immigration to Korea is relatively recent, situated within the long history of marriage-labor immigration from Korea to other countries. Historically a country of origin, Korea had witnessed many citizens migrating out of the country for economic and political reasons for many centuries (Bélanger et al., 2010; T. Lim, 2010). In the shadow of these migratory precedents, Korea in the late 20th and early 21st century has witnessed the largest wave of marriage-labor immigration to Korea, becoming more ethnically heterogeneous and also transitioning from a country of origin to a country of destination (Bélanger et al., 2010). The period from the late 20th century and the 21st century is one during which a rapidly industrializing Korea produced cheap and flexible laborers and spouses through modifying immigration laws, immigration regulations, and the creation of governmental policies for “marriage-labor immigrants” (Kong et al., 2010).

Moon (2010) and Cho (2010) categorize the recent influx of immigration to Korea in three different groups: labor immigration, marriage immigration, and political asylum. In this paper, I focus on labor immigration and marriage immigration, blurring the boundary between the two by exploring the intersections connecting marriage-labor, and reflecting on the complexities of my key informants’ lives as described in the interviews. Labor immigration is defined as foreign workers legally or illegally moving to Korea to find employment. In this case, the word “labor” indicates an activity one engages in to earn an income. In the following section of the paper, I expand the use of labor to a broader sense, considering the ways in which immigrants labor to fulfill cultural, political, and familial needs.

Marriage immigration refers to a foreign man or woman moving to Korea after marrying a Korean national. I use the term marriage immigration over other possible terms including, international marriage, interracial marriage, and cross-border marriage, to highlight the

significance of the non-Korean spouse relocating and partaking in Korean society. Marriage immigration has provoked many discussions on beliefs and practices of mothering and national cultural identity, which demonstrates the complexities of the marriage immigration phenomenon within the sociocultural, historical, and political context of Korean society.

Labor immigration

Scholarship in immigration studies links the emergence of the need for cheap and disposable labor to the rapid increase of immigrant laborers in Korea (A. E. Kim, 2009). In the 1970s and 1980s, Korea experienced significant economic growth and became more visible to the international community via international events, such as the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Game (Kong et al., 2010). The low birth rate in the country, as well as the shortage of labor for low-end jobs such as manufacturing, construction, fishery, and service industries, produced a need for low-wage immigrant laborers who were in search of better paying jobs (Kong et al., 2010). As a solution to the labor shortage, the Korean government launched programs such as the Foreign Trainee Program for Overseas Firms (FTPOF), the Foreign Industrial Trainee Program (FITP), and the Employment Permit System (EPS) (Kong et al., 2010; T. C. Lim, 2008). By bringing non-Korean nationals into the country as immigrant laborers, these trainee programs led to unanticipated outcomes, including corruption in the process of selecting trainees, human rights violations at the workplace, and an increase in undocumented workers (N.-K. Kim, 2009). During the Korean economic crisis in the early 1990s, the number of temporary and part-time jobs also increased significantly through the neoliberal labor market reform (Koo, 2007). This change created an even greater need for and supply of cheap immigrant laborers from neighboring countries (S. Kang, 2010; Kong et al., 2010). As a result, in 2007, the

number of labor immigrants consisted of 60% of the entire foreign population in Korea (Kong et al., 2010).

In addition, a number of factors outside of Korea influenced the significant increase of the immigrant population in the country. The emergent need of the Korean labor market coincided with the increased social and spatial mobility of the minorities living in China, including Chinese people who are ethnically Korean, after the Chinese economic reform in the late 1970s (Freeman, 2011a). Regardless of the restrictions and discriminations that immigrants living in Korea face, which bring many challenges to their hope of achieving the “Korean dream,” Chinese people have been the largest immigrant ethnic group in Korea for many years (Freeman, 2011a; G. W. Jones & Miller-Chair, 2012; Kawaguchi & Lee, 2012). Not only Korean Chinese people, but also other ethnic Koreans, especially those who left the country due to political and economic hardship, were embraced in their return to Korea through more generous visa regulations, and they were allowed to restore their citizenship or granted permanent residency (Kong et al., 2010). The unprecedented 2,000 percent increase in the number of immigrants to Korea since the 1990s was caused by these changes in the labor market and the subsequent immigration policies (T. Lim, 2010).

Marriage immigration

At this contemporary moment, the most notable challenges to the traditional discourses of “Koreanness” as a national cultural identity and the discourses of mothering have come in the form of marriage immigration. As a solution to the plummeting fertility rate in the country, the unbalanced man-woman ratio, and the demographic disparities that exist between the urban and the rural areas (A. E. Kim, 2009; S. Park, 2011), the Korean government was actively involved in mediating marriage immigration in the beginning of the 21st century by sponsoring international

trips to look for spouses in China, Vietnam, and the Philippines as well as by easing the immigration policy (Freeman, 2011a). This effort to promote marriage immigration was later transformed into for-profit businesses, creating a neoliberal market for marriage immigration to Korea through marriage brokers and international marriage agencies (Freeman, 2011a; G. Jones & Shen, 2008; T. Lim, 2010; Oh & Lee, 2014). Religious and political influences, like the Blessing Ceremony of the Unification Church and the establishment of a diplomatic relationship with China in 1992, have also directly influenced the number of marriage immigrants in Korea (Kong et al., 2010). International marriages facilitated through marriage immigration accounted for less than four percent of total marriages in 2000, but surpassed eleven percent within five years (Kong et al., 2010). In fact, international marriages have consisted of more than 10 percent of the total number of marriages every year since 2004, with the highest being 13.5 percent in 2005 (Korea National Statistical Office, 2009).

This “marriage pipeline” initially created through government-sponsored programs and later promoted by matchmaking agencies significantly increased the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the rural areas, compared with Korea as a whole (Freeman, 2011a; T. Lim, 2010; S. Park, 2011). For instance, in 2010, about 40 percent of married couples in Korean rural areas were cases of marriage immigration, which is much higher than the 10 percent national average for marriage immigration (Korea National Statistical Office, 2009; S. Park, 2011). Because of these trends, by 2020 children from marriage immigrant families are expected to represent about 50 percent of the entire population of children in Korean rural areas (S. Park, 2011). In this regard, marriage immigration to Korea marks not only a striking disparity between rural and urban Korea, but also a surfacing transformation in beliefs, practices, and discourses about mothering children.

This dissertation builds on the premise that the rise of marriage-labor immigration in Korea creates a need to make explicit what is often perceived to be “natural” in discourses of

mothering and national cultural identity. In this regard, marriage-labor immigration in contemporary Korea marks not only a striking reversal of immigrant movement out of Korea, but also an emergent form of racial, cultural, and historical changes with considerable implications for Korean culture, politics, history, and community. Indeed, this transformation suggests not only that marriage-labor families must be considered an integral part of Korean society but also that the country has evolved to a point where a reconceptualizing of what it means to be “Korean” is becoming a hotly contested topic.

Why Marriage-labor Immigrant Families and Not Multicultural Families?

Here, it is important to emphasize that my choice of the term “marriage-labor immigrant families” is based on a number of critical considerations. The term “marriage-labor immigrant families” is introduced to investigate what might be gained by reconceptualizing the increasing population of immigrants in Korea not in conventional terms of country of origin, legal classification, and gender but rather in terms of relationships, functionality, and daily negotiations of cultural expectations. By doing so, marriage-labor immigration emerges as a concept that focuses on changes, muddled boundaries, and the heightened sense of tension brought to Korean society by marriage-labor immigration.

Not multicultural families, but marriage-labor immigrant families

So, what does “marriage-labor immigration” mean and how is it used in this dissertation? The choice of the term “marriage-labor immigration” is grounded in the decision to distance myself from the preconceptions associated with pre-existing terms that refer to marriage-labor immigrant families. “Multicultural families” is the archetypical term colloquially used by the

Korean policy documents and the scholarly literature pertaining to the contemporary demographic shift in Korea (N.-K. Kim et al., 2012; also see Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006; The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2006). The term “multicultural” derives from a translation of the Korean term “damunhwa,” which can literally be translated to “multiculture” (Y. Lee, 2013b). The notion of “multiculture” and the phrase “multicultural family” were first introduced in the early 2000s as a substitute for derogatory terms such as “mixed blood” and “mixed race,” then used to describe children from marriage-labor immigrant families (N.-K. Kim et al., 2012). Prior to this emergent discourse of multiculturalism, there was very little discussion about “multiculture” in Korean society (T. Lim, 2010). Emphasizing the multiplicity of cultures rather than the imagery of adulterating Korean purity through immigration, the term “multicultural families” was rapidly popularized.

Regardless of its initial intention to be non-discriminatory, however, the use of “multicultural families” in Korea has been criticized for being static and secluding the very people the term intended to include (Olneck, 2011). In other words, even though the discourses of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism have become more prevalent (T. Lim, 2010), the importance of assimilating marriage-labor immigrants into Korean culture has not necessarily diminished. Its use has contributed to categorizing and marginalizing the ethnic and national diversity of minority groups in Korea, rather than emphasizing different aspects of diversity in Korean society, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, and socioeconomics (Y. Lee, 2013).

For example, the term “multicultural families” has also been used to deliberately denote families with a Korean husband and a non-Korean wife, especially those with a lower socioeconomic standing (Olneck, 2011; The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2006). Korean feminist scholars have criticized this selective use of “multicultural families” in Korean government policy documents as targeting marriage immigrant women in order to assimilate

them to meet the needs based on hierarchal and patriarchal structure of a traditional Korean family (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008; Yuk, 2011). Functioning as a label for a particular type of marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea, the idea of “multicultural” has highlighted and stigmatized issues surrounding gender and socioeconomic standing in the context of the proliferating marriage-labor immigration to Korea.

Without taking into account the power relationships between cultural differences under the umbrella of multiculturalism, the discourse of “multicultural families” perpetuates underlying assumptions and beliefs about “others” and disregards the significance of historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts in which different cultures are situated (Olneck, 2001, 2011). How the discourse of “multicultural families” has functioned as a tool of marginalization is also reflected in the way in which marriage-labor immigrants are perceived to reside in an indeterminate state between Korean and “other,” never competent enough to achieve the status of being “Korean” (N. H.-J. Kim, 2009).

Simultaneously, when a marriage-labor immigrant crosses the Korean border, a host of discourses about a multicultural “other” erases the history, culture, and experiences of the person (M. Lee, 2008; Said, 1979). As if coming to Korea is the start of life that matters, personality, language, and any cultural preferences are considered to be insignificant, while there is an insistent demand to embrace Korean culture (Olneck, 2011). For example, marriage-labor immigrant mothers are habitually labeled as not having the “correct” knowledge and experience to care for their own children by being framed as “foreign” and “inadequate” (Yang et al., 2012). The success of Korean mothers’ performance is measured by how well they and their children assimilate to the dominant cultural discourse (You & McGraw, 2011). The stories about “successful” marriage-labor immigrants in Korea, who actively seek to be more like Korean, promote the assumption that nothing from the culture of origin can influence the Korean culture—the influence is only supposed to go in one direction—even if the “Koreanness” is

reserved only for “real” Koreans (Bélanger et al., 2010). The genealogy of the original meaning of “multicultural family” and its present use provides insights into cultural discourses and the tensions surrounding marriage-labor immigration in Korea.

Exoticizing the cultures of marriage-labor immigrants under the umbrella of “multiculture” is another preconception that haunts the use of “multicultural families.” The prevalent slogan of “multiculturalism” and “multicultural education” that emerged alongside the rampant growth of marriage-labor immigrant families to Korea is based on exoticism, rather than plurality and multiplicity (Olneck, 2011). Various educational policies in Korea have adopted a tourist approach of multiculturalism that focuses on artifacts such as food, clothing, and folk tales (Lee, 2013). Romanticizing the perception of the “multicultural,” this approach does not necessarily reflect the complexities of the lives of marriage-labor immigrants in Korea. Rather than integrating cultural diversity, critics argue that many of the Korean multicultural education policies and programs also make “foreign” culture exotic by displaying it in a self-contained setting, such as cultural festivals, focusing only on traditional culture using food, music, and fashion as mediums (Olneck, 2011).

Lee (2013) criticizes Korean multiculturalism by arguing that it solely frames non-Korean as “multicultural”: “[The notion of] multiculture refer[s] only to children from a mixed marriage and *multicultural education for Korean children* refers only to understanding ethnic and national diversity of the minority group living in Korea” (p. 105, emphasis in original). This Korean approach to multiculturalism creates a binary between “Korean” and an exotic “multicultural other,” confirming diversity as something other than “Korean” (Olneck, 2011). Multicultural education in Korea is based on the “one nation, one culture” approach, disregarding the regional and generational variations in the culture of a country (N. Park & Jung, 2009). Some scholars including Kim (2009) and Lim (2010) have even argued that the state-initiated implementation of the discourse of multiculturalism is merely a solution for the low birth rate and

labor shortage, rather than an effort to embrace the transformation brought about through the recent demographic changes.

Moreover, even though Korea is perpetually consigned to a virtuous status and considered homogenous, it has been argued that Korea as a nation is diverse in its traditions, languages, and communal practices. Considering how creating the discourse of a coherent national culture is a political process, disregarding diversity within the Korean people (Han, 2003), the predominant understanding of Korea as a racially, ethnically, and culturally homogenous country has been challenged by researchers (H.-R. Kim & Oh, 2012; Olneck, 2011). In particular, both immigrants and non-immigrants are enmeshed in the perspective that marriage-labor immigrants are the ones who have brought diversity, and its subsequent social problems, to the country. Juxtaposed with the image of Korea as a homogeneous nation is tension and uneasiness about the increasing marriage-labor immigration population, which is repeatedly problematized by various cultural institutions, including media, without critical consideration of the overlooked diversity within the country (Bélanger et al., 2010). While a community, a society, or a country has been and can be conceptualized as a research site with a sense of cultural coherency, the transient dimension of culture needs to be also taken into consideration, envisioning culture as a process reflecting changes over a period of time, rather than an unchanging product (Goodenough, 1976). These unquestioned assumptions of the Korean-multicultural binary, the essentialization of multicultural “others” (Said, 1979), and the national cultural singularity in Korea, reflected in the use of the term “multicultural,” are a crucial part of my decision to avoid using “multicultural family” as a key term in this dissertation.

Marriage-labor

The term “marriage-labor immigrant families” focuses on the significance of the labor that marriage-labor immigrants (and their children) perform to meet various needs in Korean society. Borrowing from David Eng’s work, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diaspora” (2003), this dissertation contextualizes the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants manage, facilitate, and fulfill discourses about mother, wife, and family in Korea by giving birth to and mothering young children and by maintaining relationships with Korean in-laws. This reproductive and affective labor of marriage-labor immigrants plays a key role in contemporary Korea by facilitating an economy of cultural discourses about gender, lineage, and national identity (Hosu Kim, 2007). Marriage-labor immigrants, especially women, in Korea contribute to the task of promoting the discourses that stem from values of a traditional Korean family based on Confucius virtues (Piper & Roces, 2004). In this sense, the term encompasses the idea that marriage immigration is a form of and a vehicle for labor, fulfilling the desire articulated by cultural discourses, such as a submissive wife and a filial daughter-in-law. Given that an increasing number of Korean women, more educated and career-oriented than in the past, refuse to partake in the patriarchal and hierarchal family structures, marriage-labor immigrants play a key role in meeting the needs created by these discourses (J. Hwang, 2009; Sumi Kim, 2009; S. Lee, 2012).

I also want to point out that the children from marriage-labor immigrant families meet various needs of Korean society and culture in significant ways, namely by: providing working hands during the era of low birth rate to support the elderly and social welfare system (A. E. Kim, 2009); serving in the military (Y.-S. Jung, 2014; Sun-Young Kim, 2014; M. Lim, 2012) maintaining kinship and lineage of a family (Yoo, 2006), and; diversifying the future Korean workforce, especially through language skills and heterogeneous cultural knowledge (Ministry of

Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). Even though children from marriage-labor immigrant families are sometimes perceived to be a menace that threatens the welfare of Korean society due to high school-dropout rates (S. Kang, 2010) and poor academic achievement (B. S. Kim, 2008; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006), children from marriage-labor immigrant families have also been portrayed as the key for obtaining a competitive-edge in the global economy on a national level by maximizing their access to multiple languages at home (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

Blurred boundary between marriage-labor

The term “marriage-labor immigrant families” also reflects the ambiguous relationship between marriage-labor. Even though the Korean government categorizes marriage-labor immigrants based on their initial entry record (Belanger, 2007), the scope of their life is not limited or regulated by such records. Regardless of the initial motivation for immigration, marriage immigrants frequently participate in the local economy, and immigrant laborers living in Korea also are provided with opportunities to meet a wide range of potential spouses in the country while working. Although this line between marriage and employment can be easily crossed in the Korean context, the Korean government has largely overlooked the implications of the fluid boundary between the categories of marriage-labor immigrants, especially the economic contributions marriage-labor immigrant women make (Bélanger et al., 2010). This lack of national interest in recognizing marriage-labor immigrants as laborers stems from an underlying assumption about where marriage-labor immigrants belong—at home, rather than at work (Bélanger et al., 2010). Specifically, the role that marriage-labor immigrants play in the socioeconomic development of the country of destination and the country of origin has been largely discounted (Bélanger, Linh, & Duong, 2011). Furthermore, taking into consideration how

marriage-labor are related and influence one another creates space for re-imagining marriage-labor immigrants beyond the simplistic spouse-worker binary. Exploring the intersections between and across the different roles that marriage-labor immigrants play challenges static assumptions about marriage-labor immigrants' role in the local, national, and international community and reflects the complexities of various discourses they navigate (Piper & Roces, 2003).

When I visited the Chungsun Multicultural Family Center to conduct initial interviews in 2013, I learned very quickly that about one half of the social workers at the center were marriage-labor immigrants themselves. Do they count as immigrant spouses, immigrant laborers, or both? Many of the marriage-labor immigrants working at the center have already obtained Korean citizenship. Now that they are naturalized Korean citizens, how are they perceived by the Korean government, neighbors, family members, and colleagues? Simplistic categorizations of immigrants in Korea—as either immigrant spouse or immigrant laborer—do not take into account the complexities of their world. Even though I am not suggesting that my term “marriage-labor immigrants” is a more accurate representation, I use it to call attention to the complexities of such lives. Just as the notion of international marriage has shifted due to changing rules and regulations concerning borders and immigration (G. W. Jones & Miller-Chair, 2012), the concept of marriage-labor immigrant families is shifting as well. These families can also be defined in various ways, and the divide between marriage immigrants and immigrant laborer families has become increasingly blurred and complicated.

In fact, due to the legal rights that marriage immigration provides for employment and for traveling to Korea, some people deliberately take advantage of marriage immigration for the purpose of seeking employment opportunities. For instance, a fake marriage between a Korean and a Korean Chinese produces much more than employment prospects for the immigrant spouse. An international marriage between a Korean and a Chinese who is ethnically Korean creates

travel and employment opportunities not only for the immigrant but also for the family members, whether legitimate or fake (Freeman, 2011b). Since the Korean immigration law allows a visitation visa for Korean Chinese parents to visit their married child for various life events, some people have abused the system by pursuing illegal employment opportunities (Freeman, 2011b). These emergent problems with immigrants taking advantage of marriage reflect the tension created between the underlying assumptions about race, ethnicity, and gender in Korean policies and the intensions of marriage-labor immigrants (T. Lim, 2010).

For these reasons, I use the term “marriage-labor immigrant families” unless “multicultural families” is used either in Korean or English as a proper noun, in a cited document, or by informants during interviews. As I explore how marriage-labor immigrants accept, resist, and negotiate discourses of mothering in Korea, an understanding of the reasons I use the term “marriage-labor immigrant families” situates this dissertation in multiple ways. The ways in which the interlocking elements of race, gender, socioeconomics, and nationality engage the marriage-labor immigrants, especially mothers, into “traditional” and conservative cultural beliefs and practices of a Korean family—into a patriarchal, hierarchal, and ethnocentric family structures—highlight the emergent tension and anxiety around the recent demographic changes in Korea and the subsequent implications.

Discourses of Mothering

I offer the following brief sketch of the available discourses of mothering, as it is crucial to link marriage-labor immigration to Korea not just to fulfilling narratives of mothers in a traditional Korean family and achieving the Korean dream but also to cultural discourses of mothering that have transformed over time, inadvertently contributing to the ways in which marriage-labor immigrant mothers are experienced in Korea.

Scholars in, for instance, anthropology, sociology, education, and nursing, who have investigated the idea of Korean mothering, have defined the term in multiple ways (Young-ee Cho, 2007; M. Kim, 2013; T. I. Kim, Kwon, & Kim, 2012; McLaren & Dyck, 2004). Underlying assumptions about mothering, including how instinctive and gender specific it is, have proliferated for many years, influencing the ways in which mothers should relate to children, other individuals, and society (Walks & McPherson, 2011). Compared to the static, institutionalized, and idealized notions of motherhood, mainly rooted in patriarchal perspectives, mothering is an open-ended, dynamic, practical, and relational process involving both nature and nurture, the biological and the social (Porter, 2010; Walks & McPherson, 2011). While motherhood is both limited and limiting in the ways in which it can be examined, mothering provides space for open exploration about what it can be in terms of who can practice it and its role. In fact, the daily acts of caring that are frequently perceived to involve preservative love, nurturance, and training today have transformed throughout history (Ruddick, 1995).

What is mothering and how is the term used in this dissertation? In this dissertation, I use the term mothering to indicate the relationships and the practices that are about caring for and nurturing children physically, emotionally, socially, and culturally. These activities are not only limited to explicit acts that are practiced daily, such as feeding a baby and getting to know a child's teacher. The use of mothering in this dissertation expands to (but is not limited to) providing financially for a child and fulfilling the cultural discourses of mothering which governs what mothers can and should be.

I use the term mothering with the assumption that mothering is practiced not only by biological mothers, but also by others, including fathers, step parents, adoptive parents, parents who identify themselves as queer, grandparents, and older brothers and sisters (Walks & McPherson, 2011). Even though the women's body and gender plays a significant role in some cultural contexts, including Korea, daily acts of caring for children are not exclusive to people

who are recognized as mothers (Ruddick, 1995). Ruddick (1995) emphasizes the role of mothering as to “protect, nurture, and train” (p. 26). The boundaries between discipline, care, and preservation are not necessarily static and unambiguous.

Another key supposition that frames my use of the term mothering is the role that cultural contexts play in positioning the perception of various discourses of mothering. For instance, a Western perspective on mothering is more individually oriented, seeing mothering a child as the responsibility of a mother, while in other cultures mothering is more communal and family focused (Walks & McPherson, 2011). Different cultural perceptions of mothering have co-existed and transformed over the years. Porter (2010) illustrates diachronic changes in the image of an “ideal mother” by examining historical shifts and movements around major events, such as World War II, the use of birth control methods, and the ideas popularized by John Bowlby’s attachment theory. Moreover, with rampant globalization, mothers and children from immigrant families do not necessarily share the same culture. If the difference between parents’ and children’s culture was not as notable previously, the difference is becoming increasingly prevalent due to the increasing immigrant population (Walks & McPherson, 2011). It is also important to note a newer discourse about mothering does not necessarily replace old ones. For instance, while mother’s responsibility to provide for children financially has become more accepted, it has been added on to the duty to provide care for children at home (Hays, 1998).

Mothering is situated never solely in relation to children, but also to other family members, social norms, values, beliefs, and practices of and about mothers. Cultural beliefs and values play a role in how discourses of mothering are imagined, practiced, and transformed, such as taking a part in maintaining a family hierarchy and pursuing opportunities to improve in doing assumed responsibilities, thus functioning as a gateway for examining mothering in contemporary Korea. The influence of mothering is not limited not only to individual families, but to local and national communities through care, teaching, and protecting children both implicitly and

explicitly (for example, through parental instructions, modeling, and relationships). In this sense, the way in which mothering is conceptualized in my research is social and relational in its foundation (Hays, 1998; Porter, 2010; Walks & McPherson, 2011).

The shifting demographic landscape of contemporary Korea due to the surge of immigration has transformed the ways in which different discourses of mothering have been manifested in policy documents, newspapers, television programs, advertisements, etc. As a bridge between home and society, marriage-labor immigrant mothers are under the pressure of fulfilling cultural expectations for both themselves and their children. Considering how mothering is culturally defined, dynamic, and specific to temporal and spatial contexts, marriage-labor immigrant mothers have faced challenges navigating the discourses of mothering they are familiar with, what is expected of them, and what they would like do as mothers (Yang et al., 2012).

In this dissertation, I specifically examine what is present, absent, and changed in the discourses of mothering that emerged during ethnographic interviews, “go-along” interviews, and fieldwork I conducted in Korea in 2013, 2014, and 2015. How informants understand and articulate various discourses of mothering during ethnographic interviews, “go-along” interviews, and fieldwork demonstrate a range of different discourses circulating in Korean society about mothering. This dissertation investigates the contested discourses of mothering from multiple perspectives by engaging marriage-labor immigrant parents, a social worker that works closely with the marriage-labor immigrant families, and a Korean spouse who married a marriage-labor immigrant. Addressing the tension between various discourses of mothering makes visible the ways in which marriage-labor immigrant mothers negotiate the pre-existing cultural discourses and the sociocultural pressure put on the marriage-labor immigrants as the “problems.” Before turning to a more detailed investigation of discourses of mothering within the context of contemporary Korea, I consider what kind of histories pertaining to the beliefs and practices of

the national cultural identity in Korea might inform the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate sociocultural norms as mothers in Korea.

Historical and Cultural Discourses about “Koreanness”

Given the long Korean history of immigration, especially as a country of origin rather than as a country of destination, and given the recent surge of marriage-labor immigration, I pause here to examine what roles “Koreanness” play in situating discourses of mothering. In the historical and political context influenced by Japanese colonialism, rapid industrialization, and the inflow of Western culture, the Korean government has emphasized Korean traditions in order to establish a sense of continuity in the national cultural identity. This has been going on since the formation of the first independent government in 1948 (Yim, 2002). Nationalism, especially, was implemented as a tool to bring the Korean people together against the “enemy” in the era of imperialism and colonialism (Kang, 2010). At the expense of dismissing the diversity that exists within the nation, the singular discourse of the national cultural identity in Korea has functioned to unite the Korean people together against the “cultural other” (Han, 2003, p. 25).

Simultaneously, the Korean national cultural identity has been also been constructed in relation to the association with influential countries, including China, Japan, and the United States, providing a point of reference to measure the political, economic, and cultural standing of the country (Han, 2003). Even though the Korean government’s plan to “Koreanize” the world by spreading Korean culture (Shim, 2006; G.-W. Shin, 2003) was disrupted by a perspective that acknowledged globalization as a necessary survival strategy for Korea, a nationalistic perspective on globalization has prevailed through the efforts to assimilate marriage-labor immigrants into the Korean culture (Sumi Kim, 2009). For instance, many publically funded activities and programs

under the slogan of multicultural education, during the era of globalization, have been criticized as nationalistic, mono-cultural, and discriminating with the goal of assimilation (Kang, 2010).

The traditional cultural values promoted under the umbrella of “Koreanness” highlight the gendered ideology ingrained in Korean nationalism by emphasizing the patrilineal associations (T. Lim, 2010). The Confucius ideology, an influential foundation of Korean culture, upholds patriarchal and hierarchal family structure and the value of honoring families (Ching & Louie, 1995). Specifically, the Confucius principles have emphasized a patriarchal and hierarchal relationship between a husband and a wife, which is reflected in a Korean proverb, “a husband is the sky, and a wife is the earth,” as well as filial piety, seniority, and ancestor worship (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008; Yoo, 2006). Under such Confucius influence, the male-oriented registration system that required a man to be the head of a household (called the “hoju” policy) prevailed until 2007. Children are also seen as a continuation of family lineage (Yoo, 2006), and the children functioned as a measure that determines whether a mother is “good” or not (You & McGraw, 2011). This notion, along with the expectation to put family needs before individual needs (Yoo, 2006), facilitated a discourse about maternal sacrifice for their children (Seongeun Kim, Conway-Turner, Sherif-Trask, & Woolfolk, 2006). Traditional Korean families with patriarchal and hierarchal values have become more and more nuclear, oriented around the married couple, creating a cultural gap between different generations (Yoo, 2006), but the question of “who counts as Korean?” is still reflected in the logic behind how families are structured and socially function in Korea.

Based on such virtue, the Korean national cultural identity has been used to repudiate the byproduct of the “unplanned and regrettable outcome of postwar politics” (M. Lee, 2008, p. 71). Namely, Korean women and their “impure” children at the intersection of “foreign domination, military occupation, and repression in Korean modern history” were scarred and silenced as illegitimate participants of the national cultural identity (Ching & Louie, 1995, p. 423). The

sentiment over the power relationship between Korea and the United States and other economically powerful nations influenced the perspective on the “mixed-blooded” children (Yuk, 2011). These children were denied their right to participate in the rites of Korean society, and were associated with shame that comes from “the West” exploiting Korean women for sexual pleasure. For example, men born between American soldiers and Korean women were banned from serving in the Korean military until 2006 (M. Lee, 2008). Children born between a Korean woman and an American soldier, categorized with children with disabilities, led to policies in Korea that made it the leading country for international adoption (Eng, 2003; M. Lee, 2008). Socio-historical and political events, such as the Japanese colonization of Korea, the Korean War, and the continued U.S. troop deployments in Korea, have generated strong social stigmas against marriage-labor immigrants living in the country. Under the rapid demographic transformations, children from marriage-labor immigrant families have also been perceived to upend the “virtue” of racial and ethnic homogeneity (M. Lee, 2008).

Legally, Korean citizenship is granted on the basis of descent, deriving from parent to child. Since the revision of the Nationality Act in 1997, only one parent must be a Korean citizen, rather than both, for a child to obtain Korean citizenship, and this is regarded as a result of a number of National Government Organizations (NGOs) and various ethnic communities actively advocating for the human rights of the marriage-labor immigrants and their children in Korea (N.-K. Kim, 2009). In contemporary Korean society, “Koreanness” as the national cultural identity is socially facilitated and regulated, in many cases, through the position of marriage-labor immigrant parents, especially mothers, and their vulnerability as a cultural outsider and preconceptions about marriage-labor immigration. In this regard, the pressure on marriage-labor immigrant mothers to mother their children to be Korean functions as a guarantee for failure to achieve fictive construction of “Koreanness” for themselves and their children. Indeed, given the

history of preceding events that set a hostile undertone against non-Koreans and children with a non-Korean parent, marriage-labor immigrant mothers are put up against an impossible task.

Marriage-labor Immigration and Discourses of Mothering

Paradoxically, to a striking extent, this cultural preconception about non-Korean others has given way to the desire for both the Korean government and individuals to seek out marriage-labor immigrants as the solution for various social issues. The desire for familyhood and motherhood that supports a particular vision of a family, considered a sociocultural necessity, seems to stem in large part from cultural beliefs and practices in the traditional ideas of the hierarchal and patriarchal family as a measure of social respectability and cultural identity (M. Lee, 2008). In traditional Korean culture, rooted in Confucianist values, a family serves as the basis for self-identity and relationships with others, and having a child is perceived a condition for the fulfillment of adulthood (U. Kim, Park, Kwon, & Koo, 2005). Most importantly, marriage-labor immigrant women have been perceived as assimilating easily into the Korean culture, thus being less threatening to the national cultural identity than marriage-labor immigrant men, who will generate non-Korean families (Abelmann & Kim, 2004). For this reason, since 1991 the gender of the non-Korean spouse has become predominantly female, reflecting the national effort to promote marriage for bachelors living in the rural area (Korea National Statistical Office, 2008; H.-K. Lee, 2007; T. Lim, 2010). This personal and institutional aspiration of having a “Korean” family that upholds traditional values is, of course, ghosted by prejudices against non-Korean others as foreigners, consigned to the outcast status and confined to the edges of Korean society because they are never “Korean” enough.

Cultural discourses of traditional womanhood, gender relationship, and family structure (Sumi Kim, 2009) impose a particular vision of motherhood, based on patriarchal and hierarchal

values. The presumption that marriage-labor immigrants are “marrying up” to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families, as cultural expectations on gender roles, places marriage-labor immigrants within the constraints and conflicts of cultural expectations.

Indeed, the social standing of the marriage-labor immigrants in Korean society, both as a solution to preexisting social problems and the cause of new set of problems, can be elaborated remarkably by examining the role gender plays in the demographic landscape of the marriage-labor immigrant population. The gender disparities between the roles marriage-labor immigrants play are also illustrated through statistical data about the marriage-labor immigrant population in Korea. The overwhelming majority—89.9 percent—of marriage-labor immigrants who received a pre-visa issued for Employment Permit System was men (T. Lim, 2010). This is even more puzzling considering marriage-labor immigrant women still dominate particular sectors of the workforce, including the entertainment and service industry, such as catering, cleaning, private nursing and domestic service, consisting of more than 80 percent of the workers (T. Lim, 2010). Similarly, it is not surprising that the number of female marriage-labor immigrants consists of two-thirds of the entire marriage-labor immigrant spouse population in Korea (Korean National Statistics Office, 2011). Considering that the marriage-labor immigrants who enter Korea as a spouse to a Korean are not taken into account since they are issued a different type of visa, the gender gap between the kinds of labor in which marriage-labor immigrants engage is even more significant. This gendered phenomenon illustrates the intimate relationship between discourses of mothering and marriage-labor immigration in Korea, demonstrating the type of labor in which marriage-labor immigrant women engage themselves.

Social issues that preceded and continued along with the surge of marriage-labor immigration, including the low birth rate and decreasing population, especially in rural areas, reflect the various ways in which discourses of mothering have been manifested on both local and national levels. Aggregated in the regions where there exist the most urgent sociocultural needs

for mothering, marriage-labor immigrants grapple with the challenges of mothering children to become citizens in Korean society. The immigrants also seek to adopt the values of Korean parents, desiring to be perceived as no less competent than “Korean” mothers. However, reaching this ideal is not an easy task, if not impossible.

Marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korea are also under pressure to perform alongside Korean parents who may mother their children in distinctively different ways. Especially considering how Korean parents are notorious for their enthusiasm for their children’s education (which is referred as *Gyoyungnyeol*, or “education fever;” Seth, 2012), immigrant parents that I interviewed also seem to feel compelled to think about what they “should” do for their children’s education. In Korean traditional society, mothers have even more responsibilities and pressure over children’s education, compared to the fathers, as someone who takes care of the household and all those who belong to the family (Min, 2001). As a well-established idiom, *Chimatbaram*, literally translated to “skirt wind,” implies, the mothers’ involvement in children’s education and social relationships can be quite excessive at times as well. Working in tandem with traditional Korean fathers’ main duty of meeting the family’s financial need, the virtue of “good” Korean mothers requires managing all the aspects of the family successfully, including children’s educational achievement. While this gender divide may have been obscured over time in some circles, the gender-bound roles of parents still arose during my conversations with a number of immigrant parents.

This dynamic can be examined from another angle, focusing on the discourse of mothering in policy documents. While a number of policy documents by government branches, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, have been criticized for being based on a cultural assimilationist perspective, marriage-labor immigrant mothers and their mothering are blamed for being incompetent mothers and their children’s perceived deficits (Y. Lee, 2013a). In

Educational Support for Children from Multicultural Backgrounds (2006), the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (currently the Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology) claims that children from marriage-labor immigrant families, especially those who are mothered by marriage-labor immigrant mothers, have learning disabilities and are academically deficient: “Naturally many students [from marriage-labor immigrant families] experience difficulties in keeping up with school studies, suffer from excessive emotional negativism, and even show signs of violence and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)” (p. 6). The discourse of inadequate marriage-labor immigrant mothers was also facilitated by the movement of highly educated and career oriented Korean women away from the traditional discourses of mothering and actualized through the pursuit of marriage-labor immigrants willing to fulfill the discourses. This drastic transformation in the population composition is projected to continue, due to the children born into labor and marriage immigrant families (N.-K. Kim, 2009).

The immigrants (both adults and children) are also criminalized through news reports that emphasize the immigrant status when an immigrant is arrested or found doing something wrong. Some scholars have argued that the overall public perception of marriage-labor immigrants, which had framed them as “dangerous social threats,” “illegitimate freeloaders,” “cultural pollutants,” and “undesirable invaders” has improved over time (T. Lim, 2010, p. 57). Nevertheless, a linear and developmental perspective on how the discourses about marriage-labor immigrants have been transformed needs to be examined with much caution. During the interview carried out in 2013, Juan shared her frustration about how immigrants are perceived in Korean society. Explaining the recent case of a multicultural festival, which attracted many people from the immigrant population, she articulated that the problems that emerged with the event, such as littering, were not because the attendees are immigrants. She said, “Just like any other events that host a lot of people, there can [be] people who throw away trash, etc., because a

lot of people come to the festival, not because the attendees are immigrants.” This experience of being blamed for social problems, or even treated like criminals that cause social problems, often minimize the significance of the complexities demonstrated in the disparities in discourses and attitudes towards marriage-labor immigrant parents living in Korea.

It is in this contested climate, which reflects both contempt and aspiration towards mothering children with both Korean and non-Korean lineage, that contemporary marriage-labor immigration to Korea must be thoroughly examined. The stories of Minh, Haejin, Gouba, Sabai, and Myungsoo elaborated in upcoming chapters illustrate a number of competing and coalescing discourses that promote idealized notions of mothering, family, and “Koreanness.” This dissertation is an attempt to make visible the insider stories that illustrate the complexities of marriage-labor immigrant parents’ lives in Korea. In doing so, this dissertation give us new perspectives to understand the ways in which the parents navigate and negotiate the cultural discourses of mothering.

Situating Myself

As a cultural in-betweeners who resides in the liminal spaces of different cultures (mainly Korean and American), I am invested in examining how multiple perspectives and relationships unfold in unexpected ways in the field. Borrowing from the works of Valente (2014) and Boldt and Valente (2014), I contextualize through the notion of interstices my position as in-betweeners and my experiences of revisiting Korea over the course of many years (as both a home and a field site). As I navigate the liminal space between Korea and the United States, interstices provide me with points of references through both the surplus and lack of sensations, emotions, and commotions in response to the field (Valente, 2014). According to Boldt and Valente (2014), interstices occur in transient moments when we find ourselves in the midst of examining our

familiar ways of making meaning. By critically examining interstices as the site where norms and desires are made visible, I blur the boundaries of common binaries embedded in ethnographic tools, such as emic/etic, participant/observer, researcher/informant, and insider/outsider. Furthermore, I muddle the divide between Korean/American by keeping track of how interstices materialize in my interviews, fieldwork, interpretation, and writing.

Here, in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I believe it is worthwhile to situate the study in relation to my personal and professional journey. Each year, when I go back “home” to visit my family in Korea, I remind myself to be a dedicated student and researcher, and relearn the familiar yet estranged cultural and social practices, as well as ubiquitous values penetrating media, schools, and other cultural institutions. As I immerse myself in the imponderabilia of everyday life, a sense of discomfort, impatience, and fear from intra-and intercultural experiences intensifies. I am frequently faced with the popular belief that being either “Korean” or “American” is a normative feature of having a cultural identity, exclusively based on individual “cultural orientation” and not contexts or relationships. Simply put, cultural difference does not have to be confined within the static experiences of an individual; it can be a constantly transforming and mutually transformative process. My own personal experiences navigating the cultural in-between space and discourses that nullify the existence of such space are key artifacts that situate me in relation to the prevalent beliefs of how to best educate and socialize children from marriage-labor immigrant families in mainstream Korean society.

My life story parallels the contemporary globalization movement in Korea, which has rapidly increased since the 1980s with the economic boom. I am part of the generation that marked the enhanced status of Korea in the international community, when the country hosted the Asian Games in 1986 and the Summer Olympics in 1988. These landmark international events showcased Korea’s economic growth, becoming role models for neighboring countries as part of the Four Dragons in Asia, the four countries with a highly developed economy through

industrialization—Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea. Prior to this international recognition, many countries experienced Korea through the Korean War and Korean immigrants who left their home to seek political asylum from the Japanese imperial colonial administration or to pursue economic opportunities in the 1960s.

My life path followed a decade of national-level family planning, especially endorsed by policies to promote the use of birth control, implement tax, health care, and housing benefits, and ameliorate legal and cultural inequality between men and women. I grew up hearing my mother talk about how she was excluded from promotion at her work because she refused to undergo a sterilization operation. My mom was reminded of her decision every day as she worked with her peers who became her superiors. From time to time, she reminisced about the pressure to have fewer children: “Back then, people who had three children were called savages.”

In spite of the significant decrease in the national birth rate (from 6.0 in 1960 to 2.1 in 1983), which was regarded as a foundation for economic growth, the country has experienced the long-term impact of the family planning (National Archives of Korea, 2014). Various problems in the demographic landscape emerged due to the ways in which family planning policies manifested themselves in the context of cultural preference for boys, leading to selective abortion and gender discriminatory practices.

The focus of the Korean national-level family planning has changed drastically in the last decade. This is because since 2001, the national birth rate has remained under 1.3 children per family. To boost the low childbirth rate, federal and local governments in Korea currently provide various types of subsidies for parents who have three or more children, including housing, cars, social security, tax, and childbirth expenses (Baek, 2006; K.-M. Kim et al., 2010). The new circulating discourse is that people who have more children are “patriots” rather than savages (Ahn, 2011; I.-H. Jung, 2011).

In this context, the number of children from marriage-labor immigrant families is steadily increasing. In 2012, one out every 20 newborn babies was from marriage-labor immigrant families (Y. Kim, 2012; Korean National Statistics Office, 2011), and more children are entering the public school system every year (N.-K. Kim et al., 2012). This change has implications on many other areas of Korean society. For example, school teachers are being trained how to work with children from marriage-labor immigrant families (K. J. Hwang, 2011), and nurses are learning how to say “push” in different languages (Fackler, 2009).

My research on marriage-labor immigrants is situated in this unique blend of personal journey, historical events, and government policies. The rapid demographic changes that took place over a couple of decades reflect the complexities of various discourses that influence not only Korean society but also individual families. My story as an individual is also intricately connected to marriage-labor immigration to Korea, as a part of my lifelong journey.

Korean Exodus

This dissertation is about marriage-labor immigrants immigrating to Korea, but it is also related to Korean women leaving the country and/or avoiding the Korean cultural discourses of mothering. My personal story as a Korean woman living in the United States positions me in a peculiar place, as a twisted irony to the stories about marriage-labor immigration to Korea. Having married an American man, I am also a part of the larger sociocultural phenomenon that necessitated the increase of marriage-labor immigration to Korea.

The exodus of Korean women from the cultural discourses rooted in hierarchal and patriarchal values creates intense needs in Korean society (Sumi Kim, 2009). Korean women moving away from the traditional ways of fulfilling the roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law also means that some Korean women are physically leaving the country through international

marriages, as in my case. An increasing number of Korean women are refusing to play the “traditional” role of a housewife, and more women are deciding to remain unmarried and/or deciding to have fewer children (J. Hwang, 2009; S. Lee, 2012).

This also implies that eligible Korean brides are looking for “modern husbands” (Constable, 2009, p. 52). Some Korean women turn to white Western men or those who do not enact the Korean cultural gender norms as the solution (N. Y. Kim, 2006). Generalizing Korean men as patriarchal and white Western men as more gender egalitarian poses its own problems, but the cultural discourse of white masculinity has been used to problematize Korean patriarchy (Kim, 2006). Since 2006, international marriage between Korean women and Japanese men decreased by 60%, and international marriage between Korean women and Chinese men decreased by 33% (Korea National Statistical Office, 2014). In contrast, since 2006 international marriage between Korean women and men from the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada has increased by 22%, 125%, 45%, and 55% respectively (Korea National Statistical Office, 2014). In 2013, marriage between Korean women and non-Korean men comprise almost 30% of all international marriages in Korea (Korea National Statistical Office, 2014). Marriages between Korean women and white Western men, from the United States and Canada for example, are considered to be hypergamy, “marrying up” for Korean women, similar to the cases of marriage-labor immigrant women marrying Korean men (A. E. Kim, 2009, p. 87).

There is precedence for Korean women marrying non-Korean men earlier in Korean history, including marriages during the American military occupation after 1945 (Abelmann & Kim, 2004). An international marriage indicated social mobility for Korean women, moving them upward in the socioeconomic ladder, even though “mixed-race” marriages was considered undesirable (Abelmann & Kim, 2004). International marriage between Korean women and American service men was regarded as discontinuing the Korean lineage (Abelmann & Kim, 2004). This was because of cultural discourses influenced by, first, values rooted in patrilineage

(T. Lim, 2010) and second, Korean women partaking as workers in the sex industry, thus tainting the cultural perception of “mixed-blood” children (Ching & Louie, 1995; M. Lee, 2008; Yuk, 2011). Even though the historical and political context has changed over the years, a number of Korean women continue to escape the cultural discourses rooted in patriarchal and hierarchal values.

These changes regarding what Korean women pursue through the exodus have been acknowledged in Korean society. While the Korean women’s improved level of education and economic independence has provided a ground for pursuing men with more privileges, they are also perceived to have discarded “true womanhood-piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Triece, 1999, p. 42). Korean women are also presumed to be “too liberated, demanding, or independent in their outlook” compared to their marriage-labor immigrant counterparts (Constable, 2003, p. 8).

The increase of marriage-labor immigrants in Korea, particularly women, is directly related to this Korean exodus in a sense that they fulfill the need, which had traditionally been met by Korean women. The feminization of marriage-labor immigration to Korea, filling the gap created partially by Korean women marrying non-Korean men, resonate with the situation in which many women from less economically developed countries immigrate and serve as caregivers in more economically affluent countries (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008).

Some of the Korean women who partake in the Korean exodus immigrate to other countries, opening up possibilities for examining the cross-cultural and international connections between marriage-labor immigration in Korea and the mothering discourses in various cultural settings. In particular, my perspective as an immigrant to the United States can function as a bridge connecting this dissertation to discourses about immigrants and early childhood education in the United States.

Mapping out the Steps Forward

This dissertation consists of total of six chapters. This introductory first chapter aimed to describe the rapidly transforming landscape of contemporary Korea and mothering discourses due to the record-breaking increases in the number of marriage-labor immigrants in the country. The second chapter will provide a sketch of the overall theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this dissertation, discussing the use of reconceptualist scholarship and Bakhtinian ideas to understand this phenomenon as well as the approaches to ethnographic interviews and fieldwork that guide this study. Chapters three, four, and five will investigate discourses about mothering children from marriage-labor immigrant families that emerged from fieldwork, “go-along” interviews, and ethnographic interviews with four key informants. Chapter three will discuss my interviews with Minh, an immigrant from Vietnam who is a mother of two young children aged seven and four. Chapter four will describe the stories of Gouba, an immigrant from Myanmar, Sabai, another immigrant from Myanmar who is Gouba’s sister, and Haejin, Gouba’s Korean wife. This chapter illustrates these three individuals’ experiences navigating relevant discourses as marriage-labor immigrants, parents, and a spouse of an immigrant. Additionally, chapter five will examine my interviews with Myungsoo, a Korean social worker who has been working with immigrant families at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center for the past five years.

Chapter six will include a comprehensive analysis of the major themes that emerged during the interviews and are discussed in chapters three, four, and five. The dissertation will also situate my own personal background as a Korean native living in the United States and the ways my own life story influenced my research on marriage-labor immigration in Korea. This conclusion chapter will also elaborate on implications of this dissertation for early childhood policy and possible new directions for research. In this process, I will situate this dissertation in

relation to other research projects that investigate discourses of parenting in different cultural settings.

Chapter 2

Theoretical, Methodological, and Analytical Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

In the process of working on this dissertation, I learned that my unique perspective as a cultural in-betweener provided insight as I examined the discourses of mothering marriage-labor immigrants navigate. More importantly, I discovered how much my own rather muddled cultural beliefs and practices contributed to what I was seeing in my research.

As a Korean native living abroad these past 11 years, I still struggle with the fact that Korean people back home in Korea and in the United States recognize and label me as “American” or “Americanized Korean.” Even now I am occasionally overcome by the strange feeling that somehow I betrayed my so-called “Korean destiny.” This guilt often makes me question who I am and who I want to become. As an anthropologist returning to learn more about my home country and my own complicated emergent self, I needed to face a series of questions that daze me: Am I an insider or an outsider to Korean culture? Is my Korean good enough to be seen as an insider? How would my informants see me? As a Korean? As an American? The more questions I ask myself, the more muddled become my “Korean” self and my researcher self, to the extent that I find myself feeling a sense of estrangement towards myself.

In this chapter, I elaborate on a theoretical framework for positioning my perspective in relation to the phenomenon of marriage-labor immigration to Korea. In particular, I have situated myself in the reconceptualist scholarship and Bakhtinian ideas. Informed by these two

underpinnings, this dissertation will explore the ways in which race, gender, class, citizenship, nationality, and culture intersect and interact in contemporary Korean society as elements as enmeshed in transforming temporal and spatial contexts.

Reconceptualist scholarship in early childhood education

As an early childhood educator and scholar, I ground my perspective in the works of the reconceptualists in the field of early childhood education, who challenge the authority of the singular “grand narrative” and the claims of the “best practice” (e.g. O’Loughlin, 1992). This dissertation particularly borrows this viewpoint to challenge cultural discourses of mothering that are taken for granted in Korean society.

The works of Bloch (1998), Swadner and Jagielo (1998), O’Brien and Swadener (2006), Polakow (1994, 2007), Bailey (2003) have also played a pivotal role in examining power and privilege embedded in beliefs, practices, and policies about mothering. Questioning the dominant preconceptions about mothers in various cultural communities, reconceptualist scholars have investigated the ways in which cultural discourses influence mothers and their children. In particular, I make use in my dissertation of the ways in which these scholars have deconstructed various boundaries that reify the dynamics and relationships within cultural norms.

The critical perspective on the role gender plays in discourses of mothering is one of the key ideas I borrow from the reconceptualists. Bloch (1998) shares her own personal struggles in the space between the public and the private parts of her lives. Through personal accounts and stories from the cultural contexts of different societies, as well as in light of her role as a mother, caregiver and academic, Bloch questions what counts as “legitimate” work by disrupting familiar cultural patterns around gender, work, and childcare. Problematizing the gender division of labor as the universal norm, she interrogates representations of mothers by examining the role cultural

contexts play in giving meaning to how beliefs and practices materialize in mothers' everyday lives.

Through the notion of "normalized motherhood," Polakow (1994) also problematizes the gender-based and biologically-based assumptions of mothering (p. 39). These assumptions construct mothering as natural and instinctive, positioning mothers against standards by which they need to abide (O'Brien & Swadener, 2006). Pointing out the absence of fathers in the history of the discourses of care, Polakow (1994) challenges the taken-for-granted mother-child connection and the sociocultural construction of "deviant mothers" (p.23).

Based on these ideas, I offer multiple interpretations of the roles gender plays in the discourses of mothering in contemporary Korea. By doing so, I challenge the normative perception about gender, embedded in cultural discourses about mothering in Korea. Examining the cultural construction of "normal" and "deviant" mothers in Korean society, this dissertation brings to the forefront the ways in which gender influences the discourses of mothering navigated by marriage-labor immigrant parents.

I also adapt the reconceptualists' perspective that acknowledges the danger of labeling the people who are traditionally perceived as vulnerable. Scholars such as Swadener and Jagielo (1998) and Polakow (1994) problematize the discourse of parents and children "at risk," while advocating the need to broaden our understanding of the lives of the marginalized. Making visible the issues of race, culture, gender, class, and socioeconomics embedded in the discourses of "other" at risk (Polakow, 1994, p. 43), Swadener and Jagielo (1998) and Polakow (1994) point out how the categorization of the marginalized group of people (e.g. single mothers) contributes to framing and blaming for their "inherent" depravity from a deficit perspective.

In a similar vein, O'Brien and Swadener (2006) raise concerns about constituting mothering through normalizing discourses and dominant cultural discourses. Using a narrow definition to confine what counts as mothering—through a paternalistic perspective, for

example—marginalizes the voices of women without critically examining the assumptions that inform such perspective. Considering women as a group of people whose stories have been trivialized or not been heard, O'Brien and Swadener (2006) advocate using women's voices to make visible multiplicities and complexities that go beyond cultural "labels" about mothers and mothering.

The works of Swadener and Jagielo (1998), Polakow (1994), and O'Brien and Swadener (2006) provide a critical viewpoint from which to examine the Korean cultural discourses that position marriage-labor immigrant parents and their children through a static cultural construction of who they are and even as "at risk." Making visible the dominant cultural discourse in Korean society about mothering, I not only challenge the "labels" imposed on the immigrant parents but also the assumptions that contribute to the cultural construction of such discourses. By situating dominant discourses about marriage-labor immigrants in particular contexts of contemporary Korea, this dissertation disrupts the "natural" connection between the stigma-filled labels and marriage-labor immigrant parents.

The myth of "always already failing" mothers and early childhood teachers that Bailey (2003) articulates is particularly useful for investigating how marriage-labor mothers are perceived as lacking. This means that regardless of how hard the mothers try, the outcome precedes them, and the mothers are positioned as "always already" deficient. Using this idea, I examine how falling short of the culturally constructed ideals of being "a good Korean mother" demonstrates implicit and explicit cultural discourses in Korean society. In particular, I highlight how marriage-labor immigrant mothers are culturally constructed in the context of the changing demographic landscape in Korea. By examining the underlying assumptions behind these unreachable ideals, I question the cultural discourses of a "good" mother.

I also problematize this deficit perspective by juxtaposing insider voices of marriage-labor immigrant parents with dominant cultural discourses in Korean society. This approach is

informed by a number of reconceptualist scholars including Polakow (2007). In her book, *Who Cares for our Children*, Polakow (2007) shares the stories of mothers perceived to be vulnerable in American society, including immigrant, poor, and single mothers. The voices of these mothers, who are stigmatized and threatened by the lack of childcare for their children, illustrate their daily struggles and distress. Particularly the stories of immigrant mothers illustrate how navigating the cultural discourses of mothering implicit in early childhood policy and programs in the United States is more challenging due to factors including educational level, household income and language skills (Polakow, 2007).

Borrowing from Polakow's approach that attends to the voices of people traditionally under-represented, I create room in this dissertation for marriage-labor immigrant parents' stories, which articulate how cultural discourses of mothering influence their daily lives. Telling personal stories provides opportunity for examining cross-sections between the intimate and the public, making meanings out of the mundane, and considering oneself in relation to the others (Sondel & Bloch, 2006). It also deconstructs the binary between self and society, as well as the maternal-personal and the professional (O'Brien & Swadener, 2006). The accounts that stem from individual lives also introduce multiple perspectives, making visible the way in which the stories influence and are influenced by the narratives of others.

Personal stories of marriage-labor immigrants, intertwined with the stories of other immigrants and Korean people, provide a gateway for understanding not only the intricacies of daily challenges the immigrants face around discourses of mothering, but also the complexities of the tension about marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korean society. The multiple voices also contribute to decentering the authority of the culturally dominant discourses about marriage-labor immigrants in Korea. By communicating the contradictions and the complexities, insider accounts challenge a linear and static understanding of how marriage-labor immigrants navigate discourses of mothering.

Understanding these ways in which reconceptualist scholars articulate their perspectives help me orient myself theoretically and make sense of data from ethnographic interviews, “go-along” interviews, and fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2015. The works mentioned above indicate that mothering is a cultural labor, and learning to mother is entangled with an array of discourses about race, social norms, gender, socioeconomics, culture, and legal status. Navigating and negotiating discourses of mothering brings together many complexities that go beyond a fixed set of skills and knowledge. The relationships constructed within these predisposed and powerful discourses are reflected and lived out in the material reality of the everyday lives of marriage-labor immigrant parent.

Bakhtinian ideas

In the previous section, I discussed the key ideas from reconceptualist scholarship that I borrow and expand on as a part of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. The other tool I use to theoretically situate myself is the ideas of Bakhtin. In the following sections, I articulate my use of the term “discourse” from a Bakhtinian perspective. Then, I explain how four key Bakhtinian ideas, including heteroglossia, polyvocality, authoritative discourse, and internally persuasive discourse, inform this dissertation.

Discourse

Rooted in the notion that a discourse “represents a view of the world” (Morris, 1995, p. 97), Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (and those in the Bakhtin circle, including Voloshinov and Medvedev) turned to the significance of acknowledging the contexts of discourses, relationships across discourses, and multiplicity embedded within discourses.

Necessarily biased and grounded in specific positions, a discourse represents the points of view from which individuals speak their minds (Morris, 1995). In this sense, “discourse” is not an abstract entity, but a concrete and “ideologically saturated” means through which people communicate (Morris, 1995, p. 74). Because meaning is contextual, discourses are borrowed and reappropriated continuously when put in new temporal and spatial contexts, taking up new meanings (Morris, 1995; J. Tobin, 2000). Bakhtin further characterizes the discourses within heteroglossia as “specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values” (Morris, 1995, p. 115). In a similar manner, scholars who have utilized Bakhtinian ideas, including Tobin (2000), Valente (2011), Powell (2012), and Dyson (2002), inform the analysis of my dissertation by articulating how discourses, as well as relationships between multiple discourses, are underwritten by the context within which discourses are situated—a Bakhtinian perspective establishing how “discourse cannot forget or ignore ... the heteroglossia that surrounds it” (Morris, 1995, p. 116).

Based on this Bakhtinian concept of discourse, this dissertation goes beyond simply pursuing a linear understanding of circulating discourses about marriage-labor immigration and mothering in Korea. Through the Bakhtinian idea of discourse as a socially and contextually constituted concept, I come to recognize marriage-labor immigration as a contested cultural phenomenon in Korean society, manifested in the ways in which individuals grapple with multiple competing points of views. I examine the contradictions and complexities by framing the use of cultural discourses as tools that my informants use to explain their thinking and experience in particular contexts, instead of permanently ascribing to the discourses. Grounded in this perception of discourses and the ways in which people use them, I particularly make use of polyvocality, heteroglossia, authoritative discourse, and internally persuasive discourse in this

dissertation. These four Bakhtinian ideas serve as a theoretical framework for multifarious and transient meaning making processes.

Polyvocality and heteroglossia

The juxtaposition of multiple voices of informants creates room to address the ways discourses relate to one another and move the focus away from my singular perspective as an author and researcher. This dissertation focuses on creating a polyvocal text, similarly to how Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1991) used a polyvocal approach to create space for the informants' voices in *Preschools in Three Cultures* (for additional examples of polyvocal texts, see Bloom & Munro, 1995; J. Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). By doing so, I include diverse perspectives and voices of key informants and decenter the focus of this dissertation away from my authoritative voice as a researcher.

Inspired by the polyvocality of a Rashomonian telling and retelling of an event from different perspectives and over time, I designed this dissertation to be an ongoing dialogue between informants and a researcher, insiders and outsiders with regard to "Koreanness," and people's experiences around marriage-labor immigration to Korea (Tobin, 1988). Different voices participating in the dialogues in this dissertation are based on experiences rooted in disparate worldviews, generating a sense of ambiguity from "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6; Barone, 2001). This principle of polyvocality was important to this dissertation as a strategy for exploring possibilities of going beyond the dominant cultural discourses about what counts as Korean as possible ways of understanding the discourses that emerged during the interviews and the fieldwork. This allowed for creating room for informants to exert multiple discourses in this dissertation as a site for continuing dialogues (Oliva, 2000).

On a micro level, a story represented in each chapter of this dissertation elucidates the multiple competing and coalescing discourses about mothering, immigration, and national cultural identity circulating in Korean society. By considering what informants shared during interviews and fieldwork as local manifestations of incongruent and conflicting social discourses, I take the position that discourses are intricately intertwined with the context within which they are situated (Morris, 1995). Borrowing from Tobin's (2000) work, I conceptualize informants' voices as expressions that serve pragmatic purposes of trying out and making sense of various related discourses over the course of interviews, rather than perceiving informants' words as a psychological reflection of ones' mind. In particular, the ways in which the data collection process developed through the course of my dissertation—revisiting and expanding the discourses that initially emerged during the 2013 interviews by conducting follow-up interviews in 2014 and 2015—allows room for both informants and me to benefit from multiple opportunities to engage and interpret discourses from different perspectives based on the shifting temporal and spatial contexts. What I am trying to capture here is “different descriptions” (Tobin, personal communication, February 18, 2015) that illustrate the complexities through this process, rather than “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973). In doing so, I problematize the assumption that revisiting informants a number of times will provide access to more accurate descriptions closer to the “truth” (Tobin, 2000).

The Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia foregrounds the tension between and within contradicting social discourses by juxtaposing different points of views and placing words from the past and the future alongside the present (Morris, 1995). Referring to heteroglossia as “a global condition” that makes the world uncertain and multivocal, Clifford (2006) articulates the impossibility of containing cultures within prescribed boundaries as autonomous entities. Conceptualizing language as inherently heteroglossic because it draws from other people's discourses (Kaomea, 2005), implicates that the focus of heteroglossia is on the social languages

rather than the individual voices found in discourses (Morris, 1995, p. 113). As “a perception of language as ideologically saturated and stratified” (Morris, 1995, p. 15), heteroglossia enables individuals the possibility of attaining an etic—outsider—perspective on familiar discourses by challenging the unquestioned connection between language and ideology (Bakhtin, 1981). In other words, speakers gain a relativized and defamiliarized perception of underlying ideologies of a discourse when multiple discourses are positioned in a contiguous relationship.

The Bakhtinian ways of conceptualizing discourses and heteroglossia are essential in this dissertation. The interviews and fieldwork conducted in 2013, 2014, and 2015 have functioned as the site for marriage-labor immigrant parents and social workers for working out a host of contradictions and ambiguities associated with marriage-labor immigration and discourses of mothering in Korea. Considering a heteroglossic authorship as a key component of ethnographic texts, I engaged and re-engaged my informants in the process of producing text through a series of ethnographic interviews that positioned both the informants and me as collaborating writers with different ideologies, rather than “independent enunciators” (Clifford, 2006, p. 140). The notion of heteroglossia also highlights the dissonances and inconsistencies of relevant discourses, reflecting not only local manifestations of marriage-labor immigration, but also national and international level discourses. As a phenomenon closely associated with the Korean national cultural identity, marriage-labor immigration in Korea has proliferated alongside similar cases of immigration in the neighboring Southeast Asian countries (Bélanger et al., 2010; G. W. Jones & Miller-Chair, 2012; Kawaguchi & Lee, 2012).

The notion of polyvocality differs from heteroglossia by emphasizing the plurality of multiple and equally powerful perspectives on the same plane, rather than the tension between them. Based on the idea of polyvocal texts telling multiple stories from multiple perspectives (Hatch, 2002), this dissertation is designed to create room for key informants’ voices. The Bakhtinian ideas of heteroglossia and polyvocality allows for acknowledging tensions between

different types of discourses. As the contextual basis of the ways in which we establish relationships with the world, disparate perspectives that reside in the circulating discourses generate tension, ambiguity, and uncertainties. In chapters three, four, and five, I focus on individual voices, articulating stories of Minh—a marriage-labor immigrant mother from Vietnam, Myungsoo—a Korean social worker who has worked with marriage-labor immigrant families for about five years, and Gouba, Haejin, and Sabai—a marriage-labor immigrant from Myanmar, his Korean wife, and his sister, who is also a marriage-labor immigrant to Korea. Replacing traditional authorial authority with the Bakhtinian idea of polyvocality, I decenter the text by shifting the focus to the reflexive understanding of key informants from the perceptions of the researcher (Tobin & Davidson, 1990, p. 272).

Authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses

I will also use the Bakhtinian ideas of authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses to explicate the dynamic interaction within and across discourses. As “the word of the fathers,” an authoritative discourse is acknowledged as commanding our indivisible allegiance to its entirety (Dentith, 1995; Morris, 1995, p. 78). The only two possibilities given regarding this discourse are to affirm it or discard it; it attempts to bind us by demanding that we make the discourse our own. Examples of authoritative discourses include not only religious, political, and moral discourses but also scientific truths and popular texts of the time (Morris, 1995, p. 78). This type of discourse strives to achieve an exclusive status, going beyond the possibility of being engaged in a dialogue (Dentith, 1995).

The Bakhtinian notion of authoritative discourse helps conceptualize the potency of culturally implicit discourses of mothering in Korean society. The discourses of mothering that marriage-labor immigrants contend with are powerful, demanding the immigrants to comply with

the discourses. As authoritative discourse requests unquestioned loyalty from people, the discourses of mothering ask for the immigrants' allegiance as cultural norms. In doing so, the discourses of mothering also position the immigrants within certain sociocultural expectations, while making visible how closely the immigrants adhere to the exigency of the cultural discourses. In other words, marriage-labor immigrants are commanded to accept and subscribe themselves to the discourses of mothering circulating in Korean society without any dispute.

As a dominant discourse with much history, authoritative discourse resembles the role a singular authorial voice plays in a text. When emphasizing the sovereignty of one legitimate narrative, the singularity of authorship risks the danger of disregarding the complexities of how other voices intersect and interact. Likewise, focusing on the authority of circulating discourses of mothering in Korea could cause one to overlook or even discount the intricate ways in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate and negotiate discourses of mothering in Korean society. With this in mind, this dissertation moves the attention away from my voice as an author and researcher by incorporating internally persuasive discourses of informants. Foregrounding the tension generated between multiple discourses, including the authoritative discourse of mothering in Korea, I investigate the contended discursive spaces where marriage-labor immigrants acknowledge, dispute, and alter the circulating discourses.

Internally persuasive discourses include authoritative discourses by being continuously shifted, reworked, and contested with other circulating discourses (Dentith, 1995). Structurally open-ended, internally persuasive discourses function as a site where new meanings are produced (Morris, 1995, p. 78). Bordering one's own discourses and another's discourse, internally persuasive discourses are double-voiced in a sense that they are partly owned by the self and partly controlled by outside influences (Dentith, 1995; Valente, 2011). Bakhtin describes this type of discourse as "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Starting out initially as the word that belongs to others, internally persuasive discourses are constantly

engaged in the process of establishing “the individual’s belief-system” by coming in contact with previously internalized discourses (Dentith, 1995, p. 54). Much tension is created between competing discourses in the process of being made one’s own.

I use the Bakhtinian idea of internally persuasive discourse to highlight insider accounts from marriage-labor immigrants, articulating how they work with the pressure from cultural expectations of mothering in Korea. Internally persuasive discourse creates space for taking into account the ways in which immigrants accept, resist, and transform the cultural discourses of mothering on a daily basis. Acknowledging what marriage-labor immigrants bring to discourses of mothering in Korean society, this type of discourse focuses on the process of how marriage-labor immigrants grapple with the authoritative discourses of mothering. Such accounts are inherently open-ended because the voices of marriage-labor immigrants play a key role in steering the direction of the journey they take. Situated in the periphery of discourses owned by oneself and someone else, internally persuasive discourse draws attention to the contiguous space between various discourses. These spaces of contention allow me to incorporate multiple perspectives in this dissertation, while decentering the authority of cultural discourses of mothering prevalent in Korean society.

Using the ideas of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourses, I will highlight the conflicting and coalescing discourses marriage-labor immigrants navigate in the course of mothering. The two ideas will function as analytical tools, drawing from and expanding on the notion of using theory as a tool in conjunction with heteroglossia and polyvocality (Tobin, 2000). Examining the dynamics and tension illustrated in discourses that emerged during ethnographic interviews and fieldwork, I employ these Bakhtinian ideas to engage the context in which the discourses are situated.

Methodological Framework

An overview

With multiple site visits for fieldwork and ethnographic interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Spradley, 1979), I examine the complexities of culturally implicit beliefs and practices manifested in the phenomenon of marriage-labor immigration in Korea. The goal of this dissertation is to understand the available discourses of mothering used and negotiated by marriage-labor immigrants as they make sense of their lifeworlds. Borrowing from the feminist interview strategy of the friendship model of interviewing (Oakley & Roberts, 1981), a style of interviewing that positions informants as intimate friends rather than objects of research, I use rapport building to shape both the process and the discourses that surface during the ethnographic interviews. The rapport between the researcher and the research participants is one of the factors that influence how the interviews are conducted, what emerges during the interviews, and how the interviews are experienced by the researcher and the informants (Pink, 2009).

While acknowledging the significance of relationships in interviews, a feminist approach to interviewing also allows for mutual conversational exchanges (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The rapport between the researcher and the informants in ethnographic interviews facilitate the open-ended and on-going exchange of different perspectives, functioning as the basis for interviewees exploring with the researcher the meanings they associate with their lifeworlds (Heyl, 2001). The changing understandings across multiple interviews over the years are highlighted in this dissertation to emphasize the ways in which my relationships with key informants contributed to the process of interpreting ethnographic interviews.

For the ethnographic interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014, I visited informants at their work place and/or met with them at places of their choosing in their neighborhoods (for instance,

a coffee shop and a multicultural family support center). I conducted the final follow up interviews in 2015 using a version of the “go-along” method to address the limitations of a sit-down interview that stems from the rigidity of the interview settings (Kusenbach, 2003). This methodological design provides informants with multiple opportunities not only to challenge my interpretations of earlier interviews, but also to provide possible multiple alternative explanations and to uncover richer descriptions of informants’ experiences.

Go-along interview

The goal of the go-along interview method is understanding how people “comprehend and engage their physical and social environments” on a daily basis, while specifically examining how lived experiences are founded in a sense of place (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 456). In my adoption of this method, I focus my efforts on comprehending the discourses of mothering that informants use in their everyday world by spending time together with them while occupying the same place. The elements of eating with and shadowing the informants were added to walking along them in order to maximize opportunities to engage in dialogues and observe how they navigate their daily lives.

I conceptualize the discourses that emerged during the go-along interviews in terms of lateral multiplicity rather than depth that reveals a better truth. While Kusenbach (2003) acknowledges the impossibility of regarding what the researcher observes as “natural,” the go-along method is based on the assumption of “uncovering” experiences that are difficult to access through participant observation and sit-down interviews (p. 464). Rather than accessing a more authentic truth, I use the go-along method in my study (combined with two interviews conducted prior in more traditional sit-down settings) to provide my informants with an alternative way to

engage, reflect, and question their experiences of grappling with discourses of mothering in interviews.

The go-along method blurs the boundary between interviews and participant observation. The two components of conducting fieldwork are not mutually exclusive, but rather they articulate one another (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; O'Reilly, 2005). Equipping a researcher with tools to navigate a continuum between an insider and an outsider perspective, interviews and participant observation also provide multiple ways for research participants to communicate their lifeworlds, including but not limited to words and action (Pink, 2009). The transitional space between interviews and participant observation provides informants opportunities to examine and interpret their own words and actions. This is because people usually do not explain the reasoning behind familiar activities in the midst of everyday experiences, and traditional sit-down interviews separate informants from interacting with the environment and daily routines (Kusenbach, 2003). This study engages contexts of the informants' verbal, corporeal, and situational accounts in the process of describing, analyzing, and interpreting to create room for informants' voices.

Interview questions

Carrying out ethnographic interviews, I asked a series of semi-structured interview questions to engage informants in the process of constructing the data (Heyl, 2001). My purpose of doing so was to remain sensitive to the culture of informants and learn about what kinds of questions are asked on every day basis in a hope to "discover" both questions and answers of the study (Spradley, 1979, p. 84). As the main tool to understand the cultural knowledge of informants, the semi-structured interview questions I used mainly consisted of three kinds: descriptive questions, compare-contrast questions, and structural questions (Spradley, 1979).

By posing descriptive questions, I asked informants to explain their lifeworlds and illustrate their experiences navigating various cultural discourses (Spradley, 1979). This type of question established the ground upon which I explored how my informants accepted, resisted, and transformed various discourses of mothering. Engaging informants in the process of describing how they make sense of their lifeworlds through various discourses introduced various points of inconsistencies that were investigated through other types of questions. Compare-contrast questions provided informants with room to articulate circulating discourses by putting them in contiguous relationships (Spradley, 1979). In particular, the act of juxtaposing various discourses that emerged during the interviews helped clarify how informants navigated conflicting discourses. Structural questions solicited informants' interpretation in their own words by asking them to make meaning out of what they have shared during the interviews (Spradley, 1979). By providing informants opportunities to organize their words and their understanding, I was able to expand my understanding on how they situate their lifeworlds in relation to others around them.

During the follow up "go-along" interview conducted in 2015, I introduced three additional types of questions: clarifying questions, curiosity questions, and early interpretation and assumption questions. First, clarifying questions focus on clarifying both "obvious" things and not so "obvious" things. These questions are organized around who, when, where, what, why, and how to inquire about undisputed facts. Second, curiosity questions investigate implicit values and daily experiences rooted in a set of discourses, relationships and social norms. From the perspectives of a cultural insider and outsider, curiosity questions attempt to make visible cultural beliefs and practices that informants may take for granted. Lastly, early interpretation and assumption questions serve the function of member checking while examining assumptions that stem from my own perspective as a researcher. This type of questions takes into account the inevitability of my personal experiences being reflected in the questions I ask and the ways in which I interpret informants' comments, while foregrounding the problems of interpretation (and

misinterpretation) of ethnographic accounts. Early interpretation and assumption questions that examine my initial analysis and understanding also provide a channel for facilitating different descriptions, rather than “thick descriptions” that aim to attain a sense of core essence in culture (Geertz, 1973). For a list of interview questions, see Appendix.

I recognize that my ethnographic interviews and fieldwork represent a particular set of discourses that may at first seem distant from the heterogeneous discourses of different marriage-labor immigrant parents and their families. Even before the beginning of the demographic shifts in Korea, there has been a contentious and long-standing debate concerning the politics of “Koreanness,” the arguably fictive national cultural identity (H.-J. Cho, 1998; Han, 2003). In comparison, little critical attention has been paid to the challenges marriage-labor immigrant mothers experience through cultural discourses of mothering, concerning multiple ways in which marriage-labor immigrant mothers are constructed in local and national communities in Korea. While discourses of mothering implicate some of our most deeply held beliefs and practices about family, community, and nation, there remains a dearth of available research as to how marriage-labor immigrant mothers embody, negotiate, and improvise available discourses at this critical juncture of marriage-labor immigration and the discourses of mothering.

Analytical Framework

Bakhtinian textual analysis

Conceptualizing interview transcripts and field notes as a form of texts (Tobin, 2000), I use Bakhtinian textual analysis to examine the meanings of what informants shared during the ethnographic interviews and what I observed during fieldwork. While this dissertation borrows from a number of ethnographic tools (including ethnographic interviews and fieldwork),

textualization of the dialogues between informants and me is also grounded in an ethnographic tradition. As a necessary step prior to interpretation, ethnographic accounts are produced in writing as a text through a process of “translation of experience into textual form” (Clifford, 2006, p. 478). This enables ethnographers to travel with emergent discourses for composition and interpretation: “Data constituted in discursive, dialogical conditions are appropriated only in textualized forms” (Clifford, 2006, p. 485).

When considering an ethnographic text as a negotiation and a dialogue situated in a particular context (Clifford, 2006), the notion of intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b; Tobin, 2000) plays a key role in making visible the way in which researchers with an outsider perspective are not the sole authoritative figures harvesting pre-constructed texts from the field (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Intertextuality, composed when a writer writes in relation to other writers, puts emphasis on how a context infiltrates and permeates into a text (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Taking the focus away from the conceptualization of textualized dialogues as an accurate representation of an informant’s mind (Tobin, 2000), intertextuality provides the basis for taking into account how informants borrow from discourses circulating in the local and national communities (Adair & Pastori, 2011). This position also requires researchers to examine the ways in which informants’ statements can be interpreted in multiple ways, cross-examining a text in relation to other texts.

Fairclough’s notion of intertextual analysis is a helpful tool in articulating the significance of attending to the relationship between text and context. Fairclough (1992a) identifies linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis as two types of textual analysis. While linguistic analysis draws upon linguistic systems, including sound, meaning, grammar, vocabulary, and turn-taking in a dialogue, intertextual analysis takes into account how text is pertinent to the social context, being situated in the social context (Fairclough, 1992a). Context exists in distinctive and material ways through text, not as a distant and abstract concept (Wood

& Kroger, 2000). Blurring the boundary between structure (form) and content, intertextual analysis, used together with linguistic analysis, mediates the connection between text and context (Fairclough, 1992a).

Instead of assuming that meanings behind informants' words are clear and determined, I examine the contexts of discourses that emerged during ethnographic interviews and fieldwork using a Bakhtinian textual analysis. This demonstrates how I as a researcher attempt to conceptualize the multiple and indeterminate ways of making sense of what informants shared, as well as examining the ways informants make sense of their own lifeworlds through the available discourses of mothering in the context of contemporary Korea. I look for "subtlety, contradictions, metaphors, redundancy and emotion" in these texts as a strategy to investigate various meanings of informants' words and avoid treating them as self-evident (Adair & Pastori, 2011, p. 33).

With the assumption that texts are heterogeneous, complex, and even contradictory, I use a version of Bakhtinian textual analysis to consider how varying discourses are recycled, reconstructed, and reappropriated within particular contexts. This perspective contributes to how I position and interpret texts produced during ethnographic interviews and fieldwork—not as an original statement that reflect the psychological consciousness of my informants, but rather as a collection of available discourses the informants utilized. Conceptualizing texts as evidence of the process of negotiating the individual and the social in relationships, knowledge, and beliefs (Fairclough, 1992a), I use Bakhtinian textual analysis to understand how informants situate themselves in a context, making use of various discourses.

This text-context relationship also implicates that texts can transform the social context (Fairclough, 1992a). In other words, the influence between text and social context is mutual. Similarly, producing texts is dependent on what kinds of discourses are available in the social context, pre-existing discourses are transformed through texts that reappropriate them in varying

contexts (Tobin, 2000). While focusing on the structure and the content of the text can limit the analysis by drawing attention only to what is in the text, considering the context makes visible what is included and what is excluded from the text (Fairclough, 1992a).

In Bakhtinian textual analysis, I use three of the key concepts elaborated in the theoretical framework, including heteroglossia, authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Unpacking various examples of what emerged from ethnographic interviews and fieldwork through the lens of the Bakhtinian ideas, I examine major discourses of mothering in Korean and the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate them. By doing so, the Bakhtinian textual analysis provides an examination of the multiplicities and dynamics of available discourses of mothering.

Iterative and diachronic

The terms “iterative” and “diachronic” play a significant role in Bakhtinian textual analysis. The ideas of iterative and diachronic foreground the problem of interpretation by facilitating opportunities to engage informants multiple times and providing space for decentering the authorial authority. The notion of iterative, adopted from Tobin’s video-cued multi-vocal ethnography, provides a methodological device to facilitate the implementation of multivocality in the level of data collection. In his work, Tobin et al. (1991 & 2009) revisited the same sets of video clips as cues for interviews with different groups of informants, including children, parents, teachers, administrators, and experts in the field of early childhood education. Using what emerged during ethnographic interviews and fieldwork as cues for follow-up interviews and fieldwork, I juxtapose different discourses across time, analyzing similarities, differences, contradictions, and tensions. The iterative element borrowed from the video ethnography method

provides me as a way to “self-correct,” by providing a researcher multiple opportunities to dialogue with the informants about the interpretation of data.

An iterative approach towards interpreting data makes emergent connections and revisits a pre-established understanding by balancing what transpires from the data (emic) with theories, literature, and interests of the field brought in to understand the data (etic) (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; Tracy, 2013). This iteration is not a monotonous repetition, but rather a process based on reflexivity and emergent insights in relation to what the researcher brings to the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). By revisiting the informants, I continuously adjusted my understanding and interpretation of what emerged during fieldwork and ethnographic interviews. During the follow up interviews, my informants also had opportunities to revisit what they had shared in the previous interviews, iteratively reengaging and possibly clarifying their own explanations. This iterative process has allowed me to continue to build a rapport with my informants, providing space for articulating and rearticulating my interpretation of data through my repeated interactions with informants.

Through the idea of diachronic, I reflect the changes of discourses that emerged in ethnographic interviews and fieldwork between 2013 and 2015. As Goodenough (1976) describes, culture itself is diachronic; temporal change is not only inevitable, but also crucial in the ways in which stakeholders of a culture accept, resist, and transform prevalent cultural beliefs and practices. This emphasis on that temporal comparison across cultures addresses the criticism on the genre of ethnography as being timeless and frozen, not taking into account the changes that occur over time (Bjork, 2009; Fabian, 1983; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

I use the idea of diachronic by juxtaposing the similarities and the differences across the data collected over two years. The danger and temptation to create a singular and static narrative about how marriage-labor immigrants participate in, grapple with, and question discourses of mothering are addressed by the renewed perspectives gained from reflecting on what

interpretations have changed and remained the same. As I am addressing this very issue, there still exists the risk of research data being viewed as static and permanent. I acknowledge and account for the issue in this dissertation by using the iterative procedure of data interpretation.

The diachronic methodological design illustrates the complexities of how marriage-labor immigrants navigate discourses of mothering in the contemporary context of proliferating marriage-labor immigration to Korea. In subsequent chapters articulating the stories of key informants, both ideas of iterative and diachronic will play a key role in the analysis of my ethnographic interviews and fieldwork.

Interpretation

One of the important questions frequently asked about the genre of ethnography pertains to whose meaning gets privileged because ethnography is an interpretive art (Geertz, 1973). Describing, comparing, and categorizing discourses that emerge during interviews and fieldwork is an interpretive act (Geertz, 1973; Adair & Pastori, 2011). So to me, trying to understand the ways in which marriage-labor immigrant mothers accept, resist, and transform discourses of mothering meant focusing on interpreting the intersection between discourses of mothering and the Korean national cultural identity within the context of marriage-labor immigration in Korea.

During the first round of my interpretation of discourses as texts, I read through the transcripts from 2013 and 2015 one by one, highlighted noticeable accounts by the informants, and thematically coded the transcripts. Then, I did a textual reading of each transcript, which is reflected in the final write-up of this dissertation. The process of thematic coding functioned as an initial way to analyze the big ideas that emerged from the text. The preliminary overarching themes provided a basis for establishing a sense of continuity across ethnographic interviews and fieldwork between 2013 and 2015. The initial thematic coding was followed by a revising

process, revisiting, and dialoguing with informants about the major themes during follow-up interviews carried out in 2014 and 2015. In this sense, my thematic coding was more than simply organizing the accounts shared during interviews; it was one of the steps I took to understand how my informants communicated their memories, emotions, and perceptions. In other words, both informants and researchers are contributing readers and writers of a text as a “cultural invention” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 116). My use of thematic coding was process-oriented rather than product-focused, contributing to the task of balancing insider-outsider perspectives in multivocal analysis.

Looking Ahead

Marriage-labor immigration is a cultural and material phenomenon of great significance not only in Korea, but also beyond. In unpacking its implications, and the effects of marriage-labor immigration to Korea as it concerns discourses of mothering, I do not want to be interpreted as either an advocate or an adversary of marriage-labor immigration to Korea, positioning immigrants as victims or cultural intruders. While their intentions can be influenced by cultural, political, and economic discourses circulating in Korean society, I acknowledge that marriage-labor immigrants have their own sense of purpose and desire, upon which their everyday decisions are made (T. Lim, 2010).

With this in mind, I argue that the pervasive single story that penetrates much of the contemporary Korean school system (Fackler, 2009; Y. Kim & Yang, 2012), media (A. E. Kim, 2009; Sumi Kim, 2009) and Korean government (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006)—of deficit, lacking “Koreanness,” and not Korean enough—must give way to a sustained discussion about marriage-labor immigration to Korea from multiple points of view. It is in this spirit that I offer a polyvocal analysis of discourses of mothering in my

dissertation (Hatch, 2002; J. Tobin & Davidson, 1990). Without such open-ended examination, emergent ways in which marriage-labor immigrants engage discourses about mothering go unrecognized. How might marriage-labor immigrant mothers come to position themselves in relation to available discourses and shape the discourses for mothering their own children? And what, in turn, would such an expansion of discourses of mothering mean for the cultural, racial, historical, and political domains of contemporary Korea as it pertains to the recent demographic changes?

This dissertation reconceptualizes prevalent discourses about mothering in Korea, going beyond the biologically and culturally “Korean” mothering (Walks & McPherson, 2011). Recognizing the complexities of mothering highlights the tensions between and within racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic borders. The significance of fulfilling the constructed discourses of “happy Korean families” reveals the pervasiveness of hierarchal, patriarchal, and ethnocentric discourses of mothering in Korea. As the emergence of marriage-labor immigration transforms the demographics of the Korean society, this phenomenon is making visible the discourses around mothering that people navigate and negotiate as a form of invisible knowledge. Bringing to our attention the various perspectives on childrearing, family, culture, and nation that permeate our lives, the phenomenon of marriage-labor immigration diversifies the understanding of mothering and a national cultural identity as a power structure that uniquely relates to the fantasy of “Koreanness.”

Chapter 3

Minh

A mother in her twenties with two young children, Minh never learned to be Korean. From my conversations with Minh, it was not evident exactly what she thought it would take for her to be accepted as Korean. She was aware that being Korean is much more than speaking fluent Korean. Minh herself was not sure what led her to make a life-changing decision to move to Korea from Vietnam, nor how she navigated her life in an unfamiliar culture in the past nine years. With bright eyes and a gentle smile, Minh sought out opportunities that would connect her to local communities and to Korean culture as a hard-working employee, devoted volunteer, and caring mother. Keeping herself busy with family, work, and study, she desired to be seen as capable or wise by her children. Though her Korean counterparts might seek a different path—as single career women living in urban areas—Minh pursued life in her own distinct ways. Minh married a Korean man whom she met through a matchmaking company about nine years ago, moved to Korea, and had two children in a cultural community far from where she grew up. Often Minh's day was busy, filled with many responsibilities. Other times she met with friends from different countries, her excitement showing that, though legally Korean, her heart still longed for a community where she belonged.

As children from marriage-labor immigrant families understand themselves in relation to others and the environment around them, family members play an enormous role as a part of the social relationship context that the children navigate (Y. Kim & Yang, 2012). Thus far, many policies and research efforts have focused on immigrant families with lower socioeconomic standing, especially families of which female marriage immigrants are a part, and the various social issues that have emerged as a result. However, there is little work that details the

complexity of lived experiences of marriage immigrants, acknowledging the mutually transformative impact their lives have on the local and national society, and vice versa.

Reflecting on the focus on relationships and multiple perspectives inherent in Minh's methods of navigating the norms and values, I used field notes, journal entries, news articles, and interviews with Minh, her former coworkers, and other marriage immigrants as the basis for analysis in this work. As I create my story of Minh using multiple accounts, I also acknowledge the limits of my perception as a single perspective bringing together a number of relevant discourses.

I met Minh when I was conducting preliminary research as part of my dissertation about children from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea. In 2013, I faced many difficulties gaining entrée and setting up interviews with members of marriage-labor immigrant families at a number of prospective field sites located throughout the nation. The Multicultural Family Support Center where Minh worked—the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center, housed on a university campus in Hamshin, South Korea—was the first place that agreed to let me interview some of their social workers who were immigrants themselves. As the only support center that sends social workers to remote areas across the province to provide programs for marriage-labor immigrant families, approximately one-third of the social workers at the center are themselves members of marriage-labor immigrant families. Initially employed at the provincial government building, Minh started working at the center in 2013, assisting with translation from Vietnamese to Korean, legal counseling, and mentoring other immigrants in the local community.

Minh and I spent about an hour together during our first interview on a rainy summer day at her workplace in 2013. Though I originally did not plan on conducting follow-up interviews, I revisited Minh two more times in 2014 and 2015, in order to elicit her insight on the interview from the previous year. All three of the ethnographic interviews were conducted in Korean. I sat down with Minh over a cup of tea in 2014, listened to her stories about what had happened since we met, and inquired about her perspectives on what she had shared with me during the previous

year's interview by asking questions and following up on my interpretations of her comments. For my last encounter with Minh, I was invited to talk at her workplace, which was followed by a walk on a trail in her neighborhood.

When we first met during my preliminary interview, she was working as a social worker. She brought me a cup of tea when I was setting up for a group interview in the empty director's office. Minh came across to me as personable, yet quiet. Compared to the other interview participant, who was outspoken and articulate, Minh spent more time listening, hesitant to share her thoughts unless the questions were addressed directly to her. However, the second interview completely changed my perception of Minh—she was chatty, cheerful, and confident.

This chapter reflects the dynamic liminal space created through multiple interviews. As I struggled to reconcile the two distinctively different ways I experienced and related to Minh, my perspective on making entrées, engaging informants, and carrying out interviews have been affected. Driven by this transformation, the chapter is guided by the research question, "How does Minh, a marriage immigrant mother with two young children, learn to navigate cultural norms and values within Korea?"

Making an Entrée through the Past

While exchanging emails and phone calls to set up interviews at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center in Hamshin in 2014, I was informed that Minh did not work at the center any more. When I heard the news, my heart sank, and I worried whether or not I would be able to get in touch with Minh and carry out a follow up interview. I shuffled through the paperwork from the last interview to find her phone number. I felt uncomfortable calling Minh on her personal cell phone instead of contacting her through her work, but I did not have an

alternative. I was concerned that she might not answer the call from a number she did not recognize or that she might not remember who I was.

“Hello?” When Minh answered the phone, my mind was going through possible scenarios. What am I going to say if she says she is too busy? What should I tell her to persuade her? The firm and indifferent voice of a Korean social worker I talked to in 2013 haunted me, “Immigrants that have good enough language skills to talk to you in Korean don’t have time for an interview because they have a job.” Despite my concerns, Minh was willing to spend an hour with me, even though her schedule sounded busier than last year. “I started studying at an online university, and I have a new job starting next week.” I felt relieved to know Minh was not lost forever and that she was willing to meet with me for another interview regardless of her busy schedule.

The café in which Minh and I decided to meet was located by a busy bus terminal in Hamshin and situated in the midst of a crowded business district. As the capital city of Chungshin province, Hamshin is located in the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula. After decades of development through national-level urban planning, Hamshin has been recast as an up and coming city as the result of a 2010 merger with two neighboring cities. Though the new municipality has established many plans to revive the economically declining areas of the city, including the area in which I was born and lived until I was 16 years old, many familiar things, including the noisy ambiance of the streets, remain the same.

Even though the grey sky filled with dark clouds dampened the liveliness of the streets, normally bustling with stores and street vendors, my mind felt frenzied with the anticipation of the interview. “This is just like last year,” I thought to myself, sensing the shadow of the previous year’s interview creeping over me. Walking to the café with an umbrella in one hand and a tripod in the other, I passed many people swept up by the hectic pace of life, perhaps too busy to glance at what was at their side. While waiting for Minh in the café filled with the aroma

of fresh baked goods, I noticed a customer breeze in and out, mindful of her car parked illegally on the street at a bus stop. Though the heavy traffic seemed a part of the usual daily routine, I felt uneasy. How do people put themselves through such stress? Does such a frantic pace of life cause marriage-labor immigrants to wonder about their decision to move to Korea? Asking myself these questions, I realized that this daily whirlwind might be the substance of what led to the rapid economic development of Korea, drawing many marriage-labor immigrants to the country to achieve their “Korean Dream.”

While these many thoughts buzzed around in my head, I looked down at my phone to check the time. I became increasingly self-conscious, wondering whether I should have dressed more formally and whether other customers were watching me search for seats with better lighting, to make sure I would have a decent quality video footage. After all, with a video camera and tripod, I stuck out from the ordinary. Having recognized my own discomfort and sense of being out of place, this led me to reflect on how the daily life of marriage-labor immigrant families might be affected by feeling displaced from their home countries. When do they sense their experiences from their home country resonate to the local Korean communities? In what ways do immigrants feel pressured to conform to the Korean ways of thinking, acting, and relating?

A couple minutes after 10 a.m., the time upon which we had agreed, I heard the door opening and the employees greeting a new guest. “Welcome to *Paris Baguette*.” I turned around to see the new guest who had just arrived at the cafe. It was Minh—I recognized the gentle smile on her round face. Her short pitch-black hair had grown since our last interview and it was now long enough to be tied into a ponytail. “Good to see you. Can I get you something to drink? Have you eaten breakfast yet?” Smiling, Minh reminded me gently, “Well, I usually eat breakfast early in the morning with the kids.”

Looking beyond the glimpses of Minh from last year, I detected enthusiastic liveliness that shone through her bright smile. Though we had not yet discussed what was going on in our lives, her facial expressions, body language, and attitude communicated the changes in her life that happened after our initial interview. These signs changed my impression of her—being quiet, reserved, and even a bit shy—from last year.

From The Korean Dream to a Personal Dream

“Tell me how you and your husband met.” Asking this question during our second meeting, I remembered that I did not feel comfortable asking her this question when we met last year. Being aware of the fact that many marriage-labor immigrants come to the country through a matchmaking company without getting to know their spouse over an extended period of time, I was afraid of making Minh feel vulnerable and judged had I asked the question. This time, however, even though it had been a year since I last saw Minh, the interview was foregrounded by an unexpected sense of familiarity and comfort, making me more comfortable in taking a risk to learn more about Minh’s story. Without hesitation, she explained:

Well, I met my husband and my mother-in-law in Vietnam for the first time through a matchmaking company in Hanoi. We got married in a week, went on a honeymoon, and my husband and my mother-in-law went back to Korea. Then I stayed at the matchmaking company for about three months. You need about three months or so to do all the necessary paperwork. You know, the husband needs to submit the paperwork for you to get the visa and come to Korea.

Minh’s story provides a typical example of how marriage-labor immigrants start their journey to Korea. Marriage-labor immigration as a solution to meet the need created by various cultural, historic, and economic factors is entangled in social stigmas against marriage-labor immigrants.

Even though marriage-labor immigrants play a crucial role in local and national communities, fulfilling cultural, emotional, and physical needs for having a spouse, children, and a family. Many Koreans have a set of assumptions that lead them to doubt the reason why the marriage-labor immigrants came to Korea. During the 2013 interview, for example, Minh shared how many Korean people had questioned her and other marriage-labor immigrants as to why they had moved to Korea, implying that the marriage-labor immigrants were being opportunistic:

I don't know about Chinese people. But Vietnamese people frequently told me that they were asked by Korean people, "Why did you come to a foreign country?" "Did you come because of money?" "Why did you come even though your [Korean] husband is a lot older than you?" Honestly, we all have different reasons that lead us here. Yes, there is the money aspect, but some come to pursue their dreams. Others come for their children, to raise them in a good country. For me, honestly, Korea has a better climate and better economy. Well, if you think about the economic aspect, some people might wonder, why go to Korea, not the United States? I can raise my children in a better environment [in Korea] because the [Korean and Vietnamese] cultures are similar; I can adapt more easily to the culture here. I have some expectations about how my children will be successful later even in Vietnam. So, you get married, children are growing up, two years, three years, then all of sudden a random person comes and asks me things like "did you come here for money?" "Are you going to send your children to Vietnam when they grow up?"

In a tone of discomfort and irritation, Minh noted how the line between Korean people and marriage-labor immigrants was easily drawn even in casual conversations. One of the things that dazed me from what Minh shared was the emphasis she put on the phrase "because of money." There are different types of "money" involved in marriage-labor immigration in Korea. In some cases, the immigrants' parents get paid in exchange for sending their child abroad through an international marriage (G. Park, 2008). By marrying a Korean, an immigrant spouse can gain

access to various employment opportunities to make money in Korea (G. W. Jones & Miller-Chair, 2012). Some immigrants also contribute financially to their parents' living conditions by sending allowances back to their parents' home (Bélanger et al., 2011).

At the same time, about 50% of marriage-labor immigrant families with immigrant wives are struggling financially and living below the poverty line (Y.-K. Choi et al., 2011; Youngdal Cho, 2006; Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008; Seol, 2006). Many of the Korean spouses of marriage-labor immigrants have a low socioeconomic status (N.-K. Kim, 2009; Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008), and the types of jobs the immigrants could find were also limited due to their language skills (G. W. Jones & Miller-Chair, 2012). For these reasons, many marriage-labor immigrant families are beneficiaries of the welfare programs in Korea (Y.-K. Choi et al., 2011).

During this 2013 interview, Minh dismissed the Korean people asking about her motivation for immigrating to Korea by saying that there are better places to be than Korea, such as the United States, if solely economic aspects were considered. She felt that the questions hurled at her disregarded the efforts she had made to live as an immigrant in Korea. From the tone of her voice, I could tell that Minh took it personally when she was questioned about her motivation to move to Korea, her plan for her children, and her relationship with her husband. By elaborating on how moving to Korea had helped in pursuing her "dream," she further disputed the assumptions behind the perspectives of Korean people who queried her decision to immigrate to Korea. Minh thought that compared to Vietnam, Korea was a more advantageous country to live in, considering it provided a better environment in which to have a family and raise children, a better climate and a similar culture to which she could more easily adopt. Minh's journey of bridging the Korean dream with a personal dream seemed to be an exhausting process, encumbered by biases and stereotypes that existed even before she decided to move to Korea.

While Minh acknowledged that money is an important factor in her decision to move to Korea, a lingering feeling told me that there was much more to be explored. During the follow-

up interview conducted in 2014, the topic of money emerged again as a crucial link between Minh and other immigrants from Vietnam. As Minh elaborated again during the follow-up interview in 2014, money was an important topic for Minh's fellow marriage-labor immigrants. Minh tried to share with other immigrants the lesson she had learned from her experience, namely, that some things are more important than money:

From my honest perspective as an immigrant who moved to Korea earlier, I tell them [newer marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam], "You need to invest some time in yourself. Learn as much as you can, and study as much as you need. Then think about money." But many of them say money is more important.

Minh shared that she advised newer immigrants to think about "what is necessary to live here [in Korea]," encouraging them to think beyond money. After living in Korea since 2006, she realized how important it was to invest time in learning. She put forth much effort to speak better Korean, learn more about Korean society, raise her children better, and manage money more effectively. Newer immigrants from Vietnam, however, was not so convinced that other things could be more important than earning money.

Minh's understanding of herself was also leveraged through money. Comparing herself to her immigrant friends from Vietnam, she reflected on the fact that the way she managed and spent money was more like a Korean woman:

Frankly, I take care of money pretty well maybe because I get a lot of help from my husband. As soon as my other Vietnamese friends receive their monthly wage, they say, "let's go shopping, let's go out and eat," things like that, or they send their parents money [back in Vietnam]. But because I manage the money, because I learned a lot from my husband, almost 50% of the income after paying the credit card bill goes towards our installment savings account, and the other 50% goes towards the living expenses. I buy my kids new clothes. I buy things we need at home. Usually Korean women do things

like that. They buy things like new pots and pans, or electronics. When I do that I feel, when I write in the household ledger, I feel like I may have become Korean.

While I don't necessarily believe that all Korean women manage and spent money the way Minh described, what caught my attention was how Minh experienced herself as more Korean through what she did with money. During the same interview, Minh also mentioned how "Korean people usually make money while young and spend it later after retirement," which contrasted with the situation in Vietnam, where "people spend the money they made when they were young to raise children, ... and there is no money left to spend after retirement." From these words, I interpret that the way Minh invested in her family, her children's education and her life after retirement, reminded her of being "Korean." Juxtaposing her lifestyle with other immigrants who focus on ephemeral pleasure, she positioned herself as a mother and wife who is concerned about the long-term well-being of her family. This experience contributed to Minh seeing herself as more "Korean" than Vietnamese.

The Better Immigrant

In contrast to her experience at home, where she felt competent about how she manages money, Minh experienced herself as a marriage-labor immigrant who fell short of "Koreanness" in the workplace. During my interview with Minh in 2014, it was only a few minutes into my interview when I learned that she was about to start training for a new job the next day, while taking online university classes. She explained that she wanted to consider her options after the fixed term position contract ended at the multicultural family support center. Reflecting on her time working at public institutions, such as the multicultural family support center and the provincial government building, Minh compared herself to other Korean employees. "I felt that foreigners needed to do better than Koreans at the workplace." When I asked Minh why she

thought foreigners needed to do better than Koreans, she responded, “More than the language aspect—I think there is something like, because I am not Korean, people don’t give me work because they think that I can’t do it because I am not Korean.” She continued sharing about why she thought she was treated this way at work:

They don’t teach you, and they don’t give you things to do. I think they have in mind, “of course you can’t do it, so don’t do it.” But honestly, from our [marriage-labor immigrants’] perspective, the better it is the more we learn. Our position [as marriage-labor immigrants] is that even if we can’t do it, we do it as much as we can. We do it until it doesn’t work out, and you can give up then. Other immigrants think that way as well. I think you should try hard when you are given a chance once or twice, and then give up if you can’t do it. But it doesn’t work that way [at work].

Based on her experience at her previous job, Minh shared that the reason why she was not given opportunities to do certain things at work was because Korean people thought she “can’t do” the required work. She was convinced that there was something else than her language skills that prevented her from being given responsibilities at work. Minh understood that this was because she was not Korean. Making her feel like she needed to be “better” than Korean people, this experience left a scar in her heart. She wanted to learn how to do new tasks and give them a try, and it was difficult for Minh to be deprived of opportunities to prove herself.

At the same time, if her old coworkers thought she was not capable of doing certain tasks simply because she was not Korean, as she mentioned, I am not sure whether “being better than Korean” is the solution to the difficulties she faced. While Minh felt the need to prove to others and to herself that she was capable, what she experienced at work seemed to be about more than the quality of work, ways of working, or perceived capacity of an employee. I interpret her words as meaning that “Korean” qualifies someone to be seen as a “better” worker than those who are

not “Korean.” It was not about what marriage-labor immigrants like Minh could do, but about who they were—foreigners.

Another factor to consider in interpreting what Minh shared is the types of job marriage-labor immigrants are offered. Minh’s contract at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center was a one-year fixed-term position, and she was not invited to extend her contract. According to Minh, there is “hardly any opportunity to become a regular employee [who is hired for long-term]” as a marriage-labor immigrant working at a public institution. If many marriage-labor immigrants cannot help but change jobs year after year, because they are only offered fixed term positions, is it even possible for marriage-labor immigrants to learn the work well enough to do it like a Korean would? As Minh was repeatedly telling me (and herself) that she wasn’t Korean, I tried to imagine different ways Minh embraced “Koreanness” everyday as a mother, wife, and employee. After all, she did tell me that she had obtained Korean citizenship in 2009.

As Minh pointed out during the interview, to some Korean people, marriage-labor immigrants are seen as simply “foreigners,” regardless of whether they are naturalized Korean citizens and/or have lived in Korea for an extended period of time. Her country of origin, language skills, and physical appearance functioned as markers that differentiated her from their Korean counterparts, both as an employee and a parent.

While Minh grappled with a sense of belonging at work as an immigrant employee, her role as a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law played no less a significant part in fulfilling the needs of her family and the local community. What does it mean to be a “foreigner” who is better than a Korean at work, home, and school? Linking marriage-labor immigrants’ lack of “Koreanness” to how they are positioned as parents in Korean society generates many questions about how the discourses of Korean national cultural identity are intertwined with the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants mother their children. The intimate relationship between marriage-labor, in and

outside of a home, contributes to this association, highlighting the role mothering plays by bridging a family, a local community, and a nation.

Learning to Mother and Mothering as Labor

As an intermediary space of negotiation, learning has become a substantial part of Minh's life. She has continued her study of the Korean language and culture since she arrived in Korea. Though it might have been a matter of survival in the beginning, she said she realized that she had "an aptitude for studying." Many marriage-labor immigrants participate in cooking classes and language programs that have been criticized for their underlying assimilationist purpose (Kang, 2010). Going beyond the level of learning practical skills to live in Korean society, she was now enrolled in an online university program as an undergraduate student studying business. Learning served as a platform whereby Minh positioned herself as a competent mother who was able to instruct her own children, while at the same time making her children a higher priority than earning an income. Not every marriage-labor immigrant, however, shared her values. During the interview conducted in 2014, she contrasted her desire for learning with the quite different attitude of Vietnamese women immigrating to Korea nowadays:

Friends that recently came from Vietnam told me, "Why do you study so hard? If you can communicate enough in Korean, you can just go to work. Why do you insist on studying so hard?" Honestly, ... I didn't live in Korea for 10-20 years. I don't think it would be a good idea to set money as the main objective when I just started my life here. If I don't learn now and work to make money, I can't teach my babies when I have babies. ... If your kids ask you, "other moms know how to do these things, but why don't you?" Words like that will break my heart.

The disparities between Minh and her friends' points of views demonstrate one of the significant ways in which marriage-labor immigrants negotiate the available cultural discourses about mothering around them. In Korean communities, there are a number of expectations and demands towards marriage-labor immigrant mothers, and many of them are rooted in patriarchal and hierarchal values of Confucianism. Such values require the mothers to fulfill the traditional discourses of mother and wife. Because of this, marriage-labor immigrants prioritizing work over other duties at home caused much tension in their families.

During the interview, Minh strongly voiced her thoughts about the necessity for marriage-labor immigrant mothers to study the Korean language and culture, even though she was fully aware that not every marriage immigrant would agree with her. Associating "learning" with "feeling competent as a marriage-labor immigrant mother living in Korea," she advocated for learning over working and contributing to the household economy. For Minh, learning functioned as a place for negotiation that helped her cope with inner anxiety about being an incompetent mother in Korean society. She was willing to do whatever necessary for her children, a part of her Korean dream, and learning contributed to her sense of competence, her knowledge of the Korean language and culture, and her position in the local community.

One of the things that struck me when Minh told of her conversation with her marriage-labor immigrant friends was the surprising similarities between Korean women, who are refusing to play a role in promoting values of a hierarchal and patriarchal family structure, and marriage-labor immigrant women, who used the emerging demand for fulfilling cultural needs as an opportunity to pursue their own financial, social, and personal needs. Even though marriage-labor immigrant women are expected and assumed to fill the gap created by changing values that Korean women hold and the decisions they make (Sumi Kim, 2009), marriage-labor immigrant women pursue ways to meet a separate set of needs. The dissonance between what Korean husbands and their families are looking for (a "traditional" wife who will uphold the values of a

hierarchal and patriarchal family structure) and what marriage-labor immigrant wives might have in mind (taking advantage of employment opportunities and making money, sending remittance to “the family back home”), which Minh spoke of, might explain the high divorce rate, domestic violence, and other social issues that have surfaced along with the increasing number of marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea.

This expectation of fulfilling the duties of a traditional mother and a wife seem to overshadow the child-rearing experiences of other marriage-labor immigrant mothers that I spoke with, which often conflicted with their desire to contribute to the family financially. This child-centered cultural discourse about mothering in relation to marriage-labor immigration in Korea positions the child’s interest as competing with or independent from the mothers,’ rather than being interdependent (Greaves et al., 2004). While mothers are implicitly pressured to be competent and autonomous for the sake of the child (Greaves et al., 2004), they are also subtly asked to channel and demonstrate their competency as a mother through their children because in Korean culture the idea of “good mothering” is associated with the performance of the child (You & McGraw, 2011).

Studying, Working, and Mothering

Balancing her studies, her work, and her responsibilities as a mother and wife, Minh identified and situated herself in multiple ways. During the interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015, the tone of her voice was filled with pride and excitement about the changes that had happened since I interviewed her in 2013. Her beaming expressions, as she shared how she hoped to serve one day as a mentor to children from marriage-labor immigrant families, like her own children, communicated a much different message compared with the initial interview. While she focused on sharing challenges, stereotypes, and concerns she experienced as a

marriage-labor immigrant in 2013, the second and the third interviews highlighted her strengths, plans, and desires for herself and her family.

Based on my interviews with Minh, it was clear that she was very interested in investing in herself as an individual. She spent much time studying the Korean language and culture, and she was enrolled in university courses as a college student majoring in business. After listening to Minh talking about herself, what concerns me is that how the discourses from the media and policy documents about the changing demographics in Korea solely focus on the role of marriage-labor immigrants as spouses and parents (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008; Yuk, 2011). I don't mean to suggest that I think the part marriage-labor immigrants play in their home is insignificant. As mentioned earlier, the marriage-labor immigrants' role as a mother constitutes a substantial part of how they understand themselves in relation to their children, the desire for a family, and the need for workers for the nation. The discourses marriage-labor immigrants fulfill as spouses, parents, and in-laws are a crucial form of labor, influencing both marriage-labor immigrants and their Korean family members physically, culturally, financially, and emotionally (M. Kim, 2010; Sumi Kim, 2009). What I would like to introduce here is the possibility of imagining marriage-labor immigrants as someone other than spouses and parents within the confines of a family and what may be produced from such re-envisioning.

The risk of considering the individual roles Minh played as a mother, a student, and an employee, is overlooking the interrelationship between and across these roles. While naming her roles one at a time allows us to acknowledge the multiplicity of different roles she plays, let us not imply that she was limited to these three roles or that the roles were disconnected from one another.

Minh's role as a mother has also changed over time not only in relation to her children, but also with respect to her job and her study. For example, the way in which Minh transitioned from one job to another over the course of the three years provided an opportunity for her to

reflect on what the change did to her as a mother and a student. My last interview with Minh in 2015 took place about seven months after she started her new job in the service industry (I am not revealing the specifics of her new position to protect her anonymity). Minh shared that meeting new people everyday through her job changed how she carried herself, leading to bright smiles and a positive attitude. Even her mother-in-law noticed and asked, “Is there something wrong with you?” Minh, as a mother, also directly benefitted from flexible hours at the new job, for she is now able to spend more time with her children. And because she was majoring in business administration at an online university, she added, the work experience helped her understand what she was studying. She acknowledged that the way in which her current work was received in Korean society was drastically different from when she worked at the multicultural family support center in 2013:

You know, people say that being a government employee is a great occupation. The pay is higher and you look more intelligent. People look up to you. People think jobs in the service industry are hard because you are always in the position to put others’ needs first. But honestly, when I worked the office job, it was a good job, and the pay was higher, but I had a hard time because there were areas that I could not improve by making more efforts.

What I think Minh said is she acknowledged the different positions the two jobs provided, and the sociocultural context played a key role in how she experienced herself and related to others, as well as how others perceived her. What I am also hearing here is how various roles influence one another in a contiguous relationship. When Minh said, “there were things that she could not improve” by trying harder, I understood her to be referring to the challenges she faced at work because she was a “marriage-labor immigrant” and as such Korean people had preconceptions about her. This also resonated with her earlier comments from the 2014 interview, when she said that she needed to be “better than Koreans” at work because she was not given tasks to do simply

due to her marriage-labor immigrant background. Her marriage-labor immigrant status was not something she could overcome simply by trying harder.

In this sense, to position Minh as a mother means that is not a neatly packaged task. Out of the various roles Minh plays, I interpret that mothering is one of the more dominant roles endorsed by Korean society, considering the cultural, historical, and political contexts that led to the drastic increase of the marriage-labor immigrant population. There are certainly consequences of failing to conform to the cultural norms of ideal mothering, saturated in stigma and preconceptions about foreign “others.” Restricting marriage-labor immigrants to a singular perspective on their role, however, neither demonstrates who they are as parents nor limits the complexities of discourses marriage-labor immigrants use in their lifeworlds.

“Multicultural” Children and “Failing” Mothers

“My daughter is in the first grade.” When I asked Minh about her children in 2014—a 7-year-old girl and a 4-year-old boy—she expressed some of her fears and concerns about her children’s experiences at school. She was especially worried about what her children might have to face beyond the safe boundaries of her home. The experience of motherhood in Korea was more complicated for Minh than other Korean moms, because she needed to navigate an educational system she never experienced. This in-between space filled with uncertainties and anxieties made Minh nervous, trying to reconcile the memories of her school life in Vietnam and what her children might experience in Korea.

MinSoo: So far, you shared a lot about work-related things. You also told me about how you are studying. Are there any particular difficulties you face as you raise your two children?

Minh: I don't think there is anything difficult about raising my kids. Now it is quite fun.

The kids and my husband help me a lot. Honestly, they embrace me well within the boundaries of home. My family, my children, my wife. My husband is very kind. But because I need to send children to school—there were no “multicultural families” in school before—but there are more nowadays. There are maybe five kids [from marriage-labor immigrant families]? Less than 10 kids per school. What I realized is, if you tell the teacher, “Please let me know if there is any problem communicating with my child, or if there is any good information because my child is ‘multicultural’”—I told a teacher things like that. Then, what the difference is—when you say “multicultural” children compared with Korean children, you say “multicultural” children but actually they are Korean children. So, what I thought was, I made a mistake. When I said that [my children are from marriage-labor immigrant families], I felt like I was drawing a line between my children and other children, rather than making the situation better. Maybe it's better if I don't say anything—I thought about that, too.

Minh started articulating her thoughts by sharing how she felt safe and comfortable at home thanks to supportive family members. This sense of belonging and satisfaction was challenged by the fear of what was going to happen to her children at school because they are a minority, even though the number of children from marriage-labor immigrants was slowly growing. Her effort to be the “bridge” between the child and the teacher left Minh with many regrets, for she realized that what she did might have labeled her children. Her children were born and raised in Korea, and their father was Korean. Was Minh being a naturalized Korean citizen, originally from Vietnam, enough to categorize her children “multicultural?” This led to the questions of, are her children “multicultural” or “Korean” and what makes them one or the other, both, and/or neither? The conflict between different perspectives on how to identify her children took the

conversation in a different direction. As if she was confessing something or sharing thoughts from deep down in her heart, Minh added:

Honestly, when it comes to “multicultural” children, the moms are rather lacking, in terms of the language and the social relationships. Then I wish that people shared information so that the other side [marriage-labor immigrants] can do things [by themselves], instead of just helping out [to the extent that marriage-labor immigrants are dependent on the help]. Unfortunately, teachers don’t think that way. This is because for “multicultural” children, there are support centers for “multicultural” families, there is the Ministry of Family and Gender Equality, so the teachers assume that there is a lot of help, so they ignore you.

Minh’s comment about how marriage-labor immigrants fall short compared to Korean mothers surprised me. Based on the assumption that she was lacking in the areas of “language and social relationship,” Minh explained how she was seen as someone who was in need. This particular perspective on marriage-labor immigrant mothering, positioning marriage-labor immigrants as not “Korean” enough, therefore not competent enough, is one of the most pervasive discourses on local and national levels (N. H.-J. Kim, 2009). Due to this preconception, marriage-labor immigrants are frequently blamed as the reason why their children were “deficient” in terms of their academic achievement, language skills, and emotional stability (e.g. see Cho, 2011; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

Nevertheless, I had not envisioned how marriage-labor immigrants would subscribe to this discourse. What are some contributing factors that influence how Minh perceives herself as a mother? Could it be argued that she is more talented linguistically than Korean mothers because she is bilingual? Wrestling with the tension between too much help and too little help, Minh also articulated her frustration at being treated as helpless and not being offered adequate assistance. Minh desired to be more autonomous, doing things by herself with acquired information, but she

sensed that the kinds of help offered to marriage-labor immigrants made them rely on such assistance. Caught between the risk of labeling her own children and the desire to be competent, Minh as a marriage-labor immigrant mother could not win either way.

Throughout the interviews, Minh continued to explore the in-between space that her children and she had been navigating. When she contemplated whether her children were “Korean” or “multicultural” or somewhere in between, and expressed her confusion and frustration, I was not sure how to respond. Her two children, born in Korea, had Korean citizenship because their father was Korean, based on the Korean nationality law, but what made them “Korean?” Have her children been identified as Vietnamese, or some other ethnicity, by others? In what ways do the children experience themselves—Korean, Vietnamese, both, or neither?

Throughout the ethnographic interviews, Minh was figuring out the commonalities and disparities between “Korean” and “multicultural,” as well as “Korean” and “Vietnamese.” Rather than positioning what it means to be Korean and “multicultural” as the two extremes, Minh seemed to instinctively perceive, from a marriage labor immigrant mother’s perspective, how the two overlap and interrelate. She was able to envision an in-between space for her children. As a bridge between her children and the outside world, such as schools, Minh struggled with what would be best for her children and who she was as a marriage-labor immigrant mother in Korean society.

Names, Labels, and Discourses

The late 20th and early 21st Century has witnessed not only the proliferation of marriage-labor immigrant families across the country, but also the expansion of discourses that reflect the demographic changes. In particular, Minh’s inquiry about whether her children are

“multicultural” and/or “Korean” stems from discussions about a distinct set of vocabularies that have arisen in Korean society to describe the demographic and cultural shifts. For instance, “Kosian,” a compound word of Korean and Asian, is one of the more significant terms associated with the disdainful cultural overtone regarding marriage-labor immigration in Korea.

When I asked Minh about her thoughts about various terms that distinguish those who are native to Korea and others who are not, such as “multicultural families” and Kosian, she began to point out that marriage-labor immigrants were still labeled with these terms, even after they become naturalized Korean citizens:

Honestly, the terms people use to differentiate others are based on the differences in thought people have. Even after marriage immigrants, foreigners, or labor immigrants came to Korea and become naturalized citizens, they are called “foreign residents.” ... If marriage immigrants came here, we will live here and we will obtain it [a Korean citizenship], and when I obtain the citizenship, my children are Korean. But ... I don't want to be asked about whether we are marriage immigrants or foreigners. ... I wish that people would be more considerate when they describe you.

Her words demonstrate the complexity of the social acceptance and rejection of the racial, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity in Korean society, based on gender, nationality, and social status. Connected to the rise of the marriage-labor immigrant population in Korea, the rise of these vocabularies and the inconsistency between and across their use and their meanings indicate the tension around the recent demographic changes in Korea. Pointing out how various labels referring to marriage-labor immigrants and their children were only a matter of differences in thought or opinion, Minh expressed that it made her feel uncomfortable when she was asked to differentiate herself as an immigrant or a foreigner. She pointed out that marriage-labor immigrants are called “foreign” regardless of the current citizenship they hold. Minh saw becoming a naturalized Korean citizen as an ordinary step marriage-labor immigrants would go

through, for as she asserted, “we [marriage-labor immigrants] will obtain citizenship.” She was also firm in stating that her children “are” Korean, without any room for dispute, because she was a Korean citizen.

I interpret her words as illustrating instances in which prejudice about marriage-labor immigrants is made visible. When she was asked whether she was a marriage-labor immigrant or not, even if the question might have stemmed from personal judgments, the experience pained her. As much as Minh felt sensitive about this issue, she did not think Korean people were as attentive to how hurtful it could feel to be pointed out as a “foreigner.” This was because the names and labels marked her as “one of them” rather than “one of us,” even after she immigrated to live in Korea and became a Korean citizen.

Regardless of her legal citizenship, Minh, along with other marriage-labor immigrants, were seen as outsiders and “foreigners.” Minh’s statement exemplifies the impact the perception of racial and ethnic homogeneity has on determining who belongs to Korean society. I also interpret her to be saying that she experienced how the national cultural identity of “Koreanness” differed from legal citizenship in Korean society. Even though Korean citizenship entitled marriage-labor immigrants the same rights as native Koreans, the sociocultural discourses positioned the immigrants, as well as their children, to be apart from the true “Koreans.”

“Son of a Blackie”

Throughout my ethnographic interviews and fieldwork in Korea, I was puzzled by the conflicting discourses regarding children from marriage-labor immigrant families that I heard from my informants. Some informants shared that the children from marriage-labor immigrant families they knew excelled academically in school, and these children would serve as a bridge between Korea and their marriage-labor immigrant parent’s (often the mother’s) country. In

contrast, I was also cautioned that children from marriage-labor immigrants have poor language skills and learning disabilities because they are not provided with adequate attention and support at home. I started wondering, how discourses of mothering relate to the conflicting discourses about children from marriage-labor immigrant families, and what role these discourses play in Korean society?

Making visible the sociocultural prejudice against children from marriage-labor immigrant families, as well as the power dynamics within Korean society, the discourses of mothering navigated by marriage-labor immigrants on a daily basis involve the sociocultural perception of their children. When I met with Minh in 2013, one of the concerns she raised was about her children being ostracized at school, especially because of their physical appearance.

Chinese or Japanese people don't have much impact [in their daily experience living as immigrants] because of physical appearance [because they look similar to Korean], but [people from] Vietnam, Cambodia, or other country look definitely different. Wherever you go, everyone knows that [you are a] foreigner; my child also looks different with double eyelids. So what I worry about is, whether my children would be mistaken and whether they would be ostracized by her peers—I worry about things like that. At first, I was very scared and lonely, and I did not want to talk with other people.

Based on the interviews I had with her, I interpret that Minh was fully aware of a hostile Korean cultural atmosphere towards people who are perceived to be different and how this could impact the daily experiences of children from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea. I recognize that it could be disputed in what ways her children were Korean and in what ways they were Vietnamese. Nevertheless, her use of the word “mistaken,” describing her worries about how her children would be perceived by others, hinted to me that she saw her children as fully Korean but that their physical appearance could send the “wrong” message. How her children and she were “read” by Korean people as foreigners concerned her, especially because she recognized the

threat of her children being marginalized in school. Not being able to “blend in,” unlike Chinese or Japanese people, was a significant disadvantage that meant not having a choice of deciding whether or not to disclose their marriage-labor immigrant status.

As Minh shared her worries as a mother, I am also concerned whenever I come across news articles or survey data that iterate how children from marriage-labor immigrant families are labeled and socially ostracized. Numerous news articles have continuously reported multiple cases of children from marriage-labor immigrant families being marginalized at school.

The physical appearance, functioning as a marker for “other,” often leads to marginalization of children from marriage-labor immigrant families (S. Kang, 2010). On the other hand, my sense of discomfort and uncertainty is also deeply rooted in what is commonly understood as physical manifestation of “Koreanness,” a fictive construction of what counts as Korean. Double eyelids and “darker” skin color are perceived as “not Korean enough,” and such physical characteristics functioned as the grounds for social discrimination. Meanwhile, the popularity of cosmetic surgeries in Korea, including surgeries to artificially create double eyelids that Minh recognized as a marker of “non-Koreanness,” demonstrate another side of “the Korean appearance” as a moving target, and its perplexing paradox.

Good Enough Mothers

Minh’s concerns as a mother, reasonable considering the disconcerting reports in the media, seemed to be closely associated with being a “Korean” enough mother according to the standard of Korean society. In this sense, Minh as a marriage-labor immigrant mother is up against a difficult situation because regardless of the efforts she make, or how she identifies herself, or how long she has lived in Korea, or whether she has obtained Korean citizenship, her

marriage-labor immigrant status serves as a marker that indicates her lack of genuine “Koreanness.”

The myth of an ideal mother, whether it is a Korean version or not, is impossible to achieve for most women, yet it imparts a sense of much guilt and anxiety (O’Reilly, 2005). The crucial question is, can even Korean women achieve this image of an idealized “Korean” motherhood? As “failing” mothers, marriage-labor immigrant mothers frequently find themselves and their mothering “under public scrutiny and surveillance” through media and policies (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 16). The point I want to emphasize here is that marriage-labor immigrants are frequently perceived as a threat to the local and national communities (M. Lee, 2008), even though the origin of the guilt associated with motherhood often goes unchallenged (Eyer, 1996; Guendouzi, 2006). Blaming mothers and avoiding social responsibility are intimately associated with promoting the values of an individual society (Horwitz & Long, 2005). Rather than addressing some structural challenges marriage-labor immigrant parents face, including the difficulties of securing jobs and the over representation in the welfare system, the discourses of “failing” or “bad” mothers haunt marriage-labor immigrant mothers and families (Chaze, 2009).

In their study with mothers under duress in a Canadian context, Greaves et al. (2004) states how mothers in crisis situations are erased and subsumed, while the focus is given to the rights and safety of children. This erasure of personal history, rights, and desire of mothers in order to give priority to children resonates with marriage-labor immigrant experiences and discourses in Korea (M. Lee, 2008). The cultural discourse of an ideal Korean mother puts many marriage-labor immigrant mothers under much pressure, putting them in a vulnerable position. While the division between what is Korean enough and what is not is arguably fictive, constructed, and permeable, the social and material implications of conforming to or resisting the

ideals of “Koreanness” as a mother seems to be rather grave and expansive, having substantial influences on their children’s ways of experiencing themselves and relating to others.

Visibility

Framed as “not good enough” and “not Korean enough” mothers, marriage-labor immigrants are made visible to the local and national communities. Not only had Minh pointed out how “the mother of ‘multicultural’ children is lacking,” compared to Korean moms, but she also shared her experience of feeling like a needy person, and standing out like the proverbial sore thumb:

There is a mentoring program—if there is a “multicultural” child at school, they send a college student mentor there, and the child can ask the mentor if there is anything the child doesn’t know. The [immigrant] parent could also have a conversation [with the mentor]. You know the children like to talk with Korean sisters and brothers, rather than taking to the mom. ... You should be able to request that your child participate in the program, but the teachers don’t give you the information. ... I felt like I was being needy. Honestly, you should be able to just request the program, but I couldn’t when I tried to, and when I asked about it, I was told, “No, you can’t do it. Do it next year.” So I got the impression that I became the person that received help.

Sharing about the difficulties she experienced in trying to apply for an existing mentor-mentee program, Minh could not understand why her she and her child were denied something to which they should have had access. Minh expressed that she did not feel comfortable being framed as “the person that needs help,” even though she actually spent a lot of time helping others out:

Even though I quit my job as an interpreter and a translator, I am continuing to help out at an immigration office through a multicultural support center. I volunteer frequently at

places like community centers, helping out senior citizens, whenever I have time. . . . But when other people see me, they put me in a weird position saying, “I am going to help this person [Minh].”

Standing out as the cultural abnormality that requires special assistance, the presence of marriage-labor immigrant mothers is evident in various popular media, news reports, and policy documents (Olneck, 2011). This visibility has been received in different lights, with some arguing that marriage-labor immigrant families have benefited from it, and others disagreeing by claiming that stereotypes about marriage-labor immigrants have only been reinforced (Bélanger et al., 2010; Epstein, 2008; N.-K. Kim, 2009; Sumi Kim, 2009; T. Lim, 2010).

Minh’s differing responses about how she is perceived in the community complicate the politics of visibility—with its inevitable focus on the exotic, unfamiliar, “other,” and foreign—and invisibility—with its inclination toward family, belonging, “Korean”, and natural. During the initial interview in 2013, Minh communicated her frustration about how she was recognized in the local community in which her family lived: “Even though I have lived in Korea for a long time, I am always seen as a newly wedded foreign wife.” As a mother of two children, she shared her wish to be seen as Korean, especially after almost eight years of living in the country and obtaining Korean citizenship. Pointing out how the social label of a “foreigner” is inescapable, Minh articulated how being socially included in the local community was not a matter of obtaining a legal citizenship in Korea: “Even after marriage immigrants, foreigners, or [immigrant] workers obtain Korean citizenship, [people] still call them foreign residents.” This compelling example of sociocultural boundaries that separate “us and them” is a cultural symptom of constructing what it means to be Korean in relation to “cultural others,” precipitated by the discourse of the Korean national cultural identity rooted in patriarchal lineage. Specifically, Minh’s comments embody the perspective that “Koreanness” does not depend on legal citizenship or the length of time marriage-labor immigrants live in Korea.

This visibility of marriage-labor immigrants became even more complicated by Minh's competing story about how she was able to "pass as Korean," which was told during the 2014 interview. Specifying her language as the marker that gave away her "foreign" status, contrasting with her physical appearance, Minh shared that she was no longer seen as a newly wedded wife:

Honestly, people don't see me as a newly wedded wife. When it comes to the physical appearance, I don't look too Vietnamese, so people don't know I am a foreigner. When I talk, people know that something is a bit off, but no one asks me about the physical appearance. They don't know whether I am a foreigner. Since I realize that, I feel like the more I live diligently, the more I will resemble Korean people without me even noticing it. So, I don't get together with Vietnamese friends that much because our personalities are different. I don't meet with foreigners that much. I just study like Korean people, I go to private schools to take lessons, and I do what I want to do. I think that would be more helpful. If I hang out with Vietnamese friends, I only get to talk in Vietnamese, and there is a strong image of us out there. People look at us—I sense that. I would rather hang out with Korean people, so such an image can disappear.

When I first heard Minh contradicting what she said a year ago, I was intrigued by the stark disparity between how she positioned herself in the two interviews. Even though she specifically pointed out during the 2013 interview that physical appearance set marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam and Cambodia apart in Korean society, she articulated during the follow-up interview in 2014 that Korean people do not immediately suspect she is a "foreigner" because she "[doesn't] look too Vietnamese." She went on to elaborate that she chose to spend more time with Korean people, rather than other marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam, because she came to realize that being with other Vietnamese people attracted attention she did not want. She pointed this out as a "strong image of us [Vietnamese people]." Through her decisions to "live diligently" and "study like Korean people," she wanted to mitigate others' perception of her as an

“other.” Based on this desire, I interpret the distance she felt from other Vietnamese people living in Korea as reflecting that she desired to be seen apart from preconceptions about “foreigners” held by Korean people.

While my impression was that Minh positioned herself apart from “the Korean people” during the first interview, she seemed to be parceling out the different ways in which she negotiated being “Korean” and “Vietnamese” during the second interview. Cognizant of how she was observed by “people,” presumably Korean people, Minh pointed out various attributes that influence her everyday interaction in her local community, including physical appearance, language, social relationships, and time management.

During the last interview conducted in 2015, a few months after Minh started her new job in the service industry, she shared an experience where her marriage-labor immigrant status was made visible through her Korean language skills:

Something funny happened after I started working here. You know, when I talk, I can't pronounce words the same way as Korean people. People that hear me think that I am Chinese, or they feel that I am someone from North Korea. When you start working here, you always call your customers and visit them. So, I called them. Hi, this is Minh from [the name of the company]. I told them, “I will visit you for a routine check-up.” The other person [the customer on the phone] misunderstood me, thinking that this person is a foreigner. So, the customer called my Korean coworker, saying that I don't want to receive the service from a foreigner. The customer said that. Not because I offended the person, but because the intonation was different when I talked and because I am a foreigner, the customer must have thought, “I don't want to receive the service from a foreigner.”

Using the word “misunderstanding,” Minh explained that one of her customers discriminated against her. It seemed clear that the customer did not want to face Minh, considering that the

customer expressed his preferences to Minh's Korean coworker, instead of talking to Minh directly. As Minh pointed out, the "verbal cues" giving away the fact that Minh was not Korean are rather vague, if not inaccurate, thus causing her to be mistaken as Chinese or North Korean. Even though this might have been discouraging, especially having this experience soon after she started her new job, Minh decided not to let this down:

After I heard that I called the customer. "Dear customer, I originally came from Vietnam. I got to work here because of these reasons. If there is anything that you find uncomfortable, I don't have to go. But I have never seen you yet. If you want to change to another person after I visit, I will talk to people at work and send somebody else." I said that. So the customer told me to come for now. ... I explained everything, I said good-bye, and I asked right before I headed out, "Would you like another person to come next time?" The customer said, "Well, there was nothing uncomfortable in particular. You can come again. It's okay." What came to my mind that moment is, if I did not contact the person for the second time. ... The customer will continue to think, "Because she is a foreigner, she doesn't have to come here to my house to do her job." ... If I didn't visit, the customer could have thought badly about me.

Voicing herself and confronting stereotypes, Minh made efforts to make herself known. After hearing what happened from her coworker, she decided to face the preconceptions her customer had and demonstrate how she could do her job. Her courage sent a message to the customer that "because she is a foreigner" was not an adequate reason to deprive her of opportunities to prove herself. Through the experience, Minh's customer had a change of mind. What surprised me in Minh's comments was that she was willing to let the situation go, if seeing the customer face to face did not help change the situation. I read her words as saying, "I did what I could do, and if the customer is still biased against me, it is not within my control."

The ostracizing gaze Minh experienced in various circumstances, while it could be interpreted in different ways, suggests that “coming out of the closet” as a marriage-labor immigrant parent (this is only if they can go “undercover” and pass as Korean) could still place marriage-labor immigrants at risk of being socially marginalized in the local and national communities. At the same time, marriage-labor immigrants are gradually inhabiting structures of family and discourses of mothering not only in growing numbers but also in increasingly public and visible ways through cultural institutions such as media, schools, and marriage-labor immigrant support centers (T. Lim, 2010). While it is arguable whether such change is beneficial or harmful to marriage-labor immigrants, my focus is on the productive space created by the tension between the politics of visibility and invisibility. The continuing interests, media coverage, and policy changes on marriage-labor immigration have generated a number of nationwide discussions about discourses of “Koreanness” and of mothering, constructing the discourses as a contested cultural site (M. Kim, 2013; M. Lee, 2008).

If marriage-labor immigrant parents and children are no longer an oddity in the family structures of Korea due to the increased sense of their presence through prevalent discourses about them, we need to consider the ways in which discourses of mothering constrain marriage-labor immigrant parents to assimilate to the dominant cultural beliefs and practices. What are the contemporary political, economic, and cultural conditions that allow for this reinhabitation of family and mothering through marriage-labor immigration? The anxiety around the historical development and public visibility of marriage-labor immigration in Korea demands a concerted analysis of how contemporary discourses of mothering, national cultural identity, and global economy might inform the beliefs, practices, and policies in the field of early childhood education.

Mothering like Korean Parents

When Minh got together with her friends, how to mother in Korean society was one of the key topics they discussed. Minh actively searched for information about children's education, just as many Korean mothers did. During the interview in 2014, Minh discussed a number of competing discourses about mothering that she grappled with as a marriage-labor immigrant mother in Korea:

Minh: How you raise your children, how you send them to school, how you prepare for it—the knowledge like that is absolutely necessary. My child is in first grade, and maybe because I look up information on my own, I don't ask other people very much. But other friends ask, always. To their mother-in-law, their husband, their mother-in-law, how do you do this? They worry a lot. Especially in Korea, children are “taught” a lot. There is a tendency that moms spend all day, taking them to private schools and bring them back. Whatever the case may be, when I see beginner moms, I feel nervous since it is about raising children. If you do it wrong in education, it is difficult to go the direction you intended. So I think you need to learn well [how to raise the children].

MinSoo: People also say that Korean mothers are kind of intense.

Minh: Yes. If kids in the neighborhood do well, then you think, “If I do more, I can do well as well,” I think. In Vietnam, since I went through the schooling there, I feel that, there are many students in Vietnam, so students split into morning class and afternoon class. From nine to twelve, and from one to four, or five, you study like that. Then if you study during the day, and go home in the afternoon, you help out at home with housework. If mom tells you to do something, you do that, or you go and

play. It used to be like that. But when I came to Korea, from nine in the morning until four or five in the afternoon—

MinSoo: All day.

Minh: You study all day! And until seven or eight in the evening for middle school, and high school students? They go out in the morning and come back close to seven. That's too much for your children—this is not having them study, you don't "develop" people like that. People have their own talents within, and it seems like studying interferes with that. Studying is good, but I think you need to give babies some time to find their own talent. But people say you need to send them to private schools at all cost. Since you are not good with languages, you need to learn English. Also, these days you also need to speak good Japanese and Chinese besides English. There are many dancing and singing programs on TV lately—the programs that air on the weekend are very popular. Then many dance schools appear all of sudden. Korean parents make children learn things based on the trend. "Hey, dance is popular these days. Why don't you try it?" But it costs a lot of money.

In this conversation, Minh expressed her opinions about how to mother children in Korea, by contrasting the Korean and Vietnamese educational systems, mentioning the ways in which children spend their days, and describing how social discourses influence decisions parents make. It seemed to have shocked Minh that Korean students spent so much time of their day at school and taking extra lessons. The focus Korean education puts on accumulating knowledge demands investing substantial amount of time and money from both parents and children. While acknowledging the pressure that came from Korean society about what is popular and considered important to learn, Minh disapproved of how Korean parents focused on their children "studying" or attending private schools rather than paying attention to their children's innate interests and talents. She pointed out how teaching children to dance, for example, seemed to be in fashion,

but she was not sure whether she could afford it, nor whether it would be helpful to her children. She pointed out how Korean mothers “spend all day” driving the children around to different lessons, compared to how Vietnamese mothers engage children in housework and let them play. From Minh’s perspective, the Korean approach to mothering hinders children from discovering their own talents, because it imposes on them what is trendy and socially acknowledged at that time.

At the same time, Minh recognized the importance of “learning how to raise children well.” She pointed out the influence mothering has on children, acknowledging the danger in making mistakes while mothering. She felt nervous about novice moms, because she was fully aware of how much went into mothering in Korea. Minh experienced the complexities of mothering through gathering information about children’s education, hearing how Korean parents sacrifice their day, and making decisions about investing financial resources for her children’s education.

As Minh continued sharing her perspective on mothering, she described what she perceived as “head knowledge” that does not help children be good employees in the future. She feels it is important to foster the innate talent with which children are born. Based on what she shared, I interpreted during this 2014 interview that Minh as a mother put forth the effort to protect her children from the pressure she felt by telling her children that they were not ready yet to take on the load of extra lessons. She believed that it would be better not to overwhelm her children with “studying.”

It [sending children to extra lessons outside of school] is costly. In my opinion, I think it might be better if you give children some room. Younger children study even more [in Korea]. Of course, their heads would become smart. They will have better academic record. But there is nothing that will be helpful later. Math, history, or Korean history, later if you go to work, there is nothing that’s helpful. Then why from middle school and

high school, parents send children [to] math, English, and Korean history private schools, or hire a tutor for college entrance exam—how difficult would that be, I sense that.

Minh noted that young children are not exceptions to extensive studying in Korea. “Younger children study even more,” she said. She did not think it was a good idea to invest so much in gaining book knowledge, which might later have no use in lives. Recognizing the value of practical knowledge that could help her children at their job, she articulated her own philosophy of mothering, as opposed to the prevalent practices in Korean society. Then, she went on to tell me what her own children did:

Honestly, my children leave home at nine in the morning and come back at five since I work. But for private schools—since they are young, they don’t know much about numbers. For math, they go to an afterschool lesson at school, they only do that one afterschool class offered by the school, and for everything else, they go to a care teachers [from a government welfare program for working parents and families with lower socioeconomics] and study and play there. But my children see other friends. ‘Mom, other friends go to an art lesson. They go to this, and why you don’t send me there?’ When they say that, I tell them, ‘since you are so young, it is hard to study. Mommy will think about it.’ When you are in second grade or third grade, I will consider whether you can do it. But when they see other kids, ‘mom, I want to do this, I want to do that.’ They say like that. ‘Okay. It is good that you have things you want to do, but if you do too much, it will be difficult on you. Since it would be hard, I will think about it.’ I told them like that.

While Minh shared that her children also come home in the evening, she explained that the reason why they came home late was not because she sent them off to many extra lessons, but because she worked. What I found interesting was that her daughter saw their friends going to different lessons and wanted to do as her friends did, but Minh tried to persuade them that she was too

young to “study.” The type of learning Minh was familiar with and desired for her daughter was different than how children’s education was carried out in Korea. Minh seemed to regard as unhealthy for the children’s development the social pressure Korean parents feel about sending their children to extra lessons, and even her own children wanting to take more lessons like their friends.

Minh’s explanations about her philosophy, experience, and strategies for mothering reminded me of the long-lasting nature-nurture debate in the field of early childhood education. The Korean mothering Minh observed emphasized the outside influence, even causing her children to aspire to take more classes as her friends do. Comparing oneself to others in the community could provide both a sense of motivation, wanting to do better, and the pressure to conform to the sociocultural demands. While Minh acknowledges the importance of information and training in mothering children, specifically in light of the Korean mother’s fervent involvement in children’s education, she was not sure whether it was healthy for children to be put under the pressure derived from the information mothers collected. In this interview, Minh affirmed a philosophy of education that promotes children exploring their own interests and aptitudes.

The social structure that separates “native” Koreans and “immigrant” Koreans in terms of their employment prospects also partly shapes the ways in which marriage-labor immigrant parents provide educational opportunities for their children, as it affects the financial foundation of the family. This financial issue is also the reason why employment difficulties, such as not having a consistent job, frequently being a “temporary hire,” and needing to re-learn how to do tasks in every new position, influence the mothering of marriage-labor immigrants. The difficulties they face in being a good worker make it challenging for marriage-labor immigrant mothers to gather the financial means to invest in their children’s education as Korean mothers do.

The intersection between mothering and socioeconomics—both needs and limitations—influence marriage-labor immigrants like Minh in the way they mother their children.

A particular practice of Korean mothering Minh did not feel comfortable with was how Korean mothers give up their everyday life to provide a support for their children's education. My understanding of this example Minh pointed out pertains to the discourse of maternal love and sacrifice in Korea (Seongeun Kim et al., 2006). Perceived as a reflection of a mother's devotion, the accomplishments of Korean children function as the yardstick that measures how "good" a mother is in Korean society (You & McGraw, 2011). Due to such cultural perceptions, Korean mothers are actively involved in how their children spend the day, and are heavily invested financially and emotionally. Here, I am neither suggesting that one cultural discourse of mothering is superior to others, nor that mothers who do not conform to this discourse are any less devoted to their children's well-being. What I focus on in this section is the tension generated within Minh (and arguably between Minh and others over the issue of mothering), and what it does to her.

I find Minh's statements about mothering her children fascinating because it implies the need to look at marriage-labor immigrants and their beliefs and practices on mothering from different perspectives. The public discourse on what marriage-labor immigrants can and should do as parents emphasizes improving language skills, building social relationships, and gaining knowledge about child rearing practices (Y.-K. Choi et al., 2011; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). While these areas certainly play important roles in how marriage-labor immigrants mother, Minh's disagreement with the ways in which Korean mothers raise their children makes visible the existence of different types of discourses of mothering. Even though she recognized the significance of having the "know-how" as a mother in Korean society, Minh grappled with multiple discourses of mothering to decide what worked for her children and her family. This suggests to me that the tension between multiple cultural discourses

of mothering should be more widely acknowledged, in order to help marriage-labor immigrants better navigate these multiple discourses of mothering. Such effort also allows for critical consideration of the complexity marriage-labor immigrants are grappling with, rather than solely focusing on what marriage-labor immigrants as individuals bring (or do not bring) to Korean society.

Mutual Transformations

When she came to Korea, she felt frightened during the time of transition, but over time Minh transformed herself and those around her:

I came to Korea when I was 21, and I had my first baby when I was 22. The most difficult thing was the language. ... Since I moved far away after getting married, my parents are also far away. ... When I was delivering the baby, the most difficult thing was because my mom was not there. There was no one that could help me. The only person I could lean on was my husband. Because the men from Chungsun Province are not very talkative or expressive, I spent a lot of time feeling lonely. ... After the baby was born, as I raise the baby, I felt people's eyes. ... At first, I was very scared and lonely, and I didn't want to talk with others. But after five to six years, I thought, "I can't continue on like this." My children needed to socialize, and they needed to adjust well to the school life.

She pointed out different reasons why she felt the way she did during her first few years in Korea. Starting off with the communication barrier due to the language difference, she articulated how an array of factors influenced her, including living far away from her parents, not having her own mother to lean on throughout the process of giving birth and caring for her children, her quiet husband, and the public gaze towards her and her children. It seemed that having children and

becoming a mother, however, changed her and her attitude toward what was around her. As a mother, she became more courageous to engage the world around her, and this influenced her relationship with her family.

Indeed, the positive experiences Minh's immediate and extended family in Korea had with Minh as a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law seemed to inspire those around her, as well as her husband. Minh shared, "Honestly, there are many people who want me to play the role of a matchmaker." Though when asked to play this role, Minh is hesitant to introduce Vietnamese people as possible marriage immigration partners. "Someone may seem nice," she says, "but you never know until you live together." She was, however, helping a friend of her husband who recently married a Vietnamese woman by translating immigration paperwork. It seemed like many people need Minh in various capacities, leading her to meet other people's emergent needs beyond the boundary of her family.

Though in 2014 she was about to start a new job at a private company, she understood that her work as a social worker meant much more than long commutes, legal counseling and translation. The relationships with immigrants begun at her old job continued even after she left the position. Though she recommended other resources or social workers, the marriage-labor immigrants she had worked with told her that they could not get the help, and they needed "sister" Minh to help. She had developed relationships of trust with fellow marriage-labor immigrants, and she could not be replaced by another social worker. As a friend and mentor in her professional and personal life, Minh helped others navigate a Korean community.

Not afraid of being transformed, Minh immersed herself in new roles, communities, and cultures. Minh engaged herself in new experiences and relationships, influencing those around her, including me. Interviews with Minh inspired me to reflect on my experiences of residing in a cultural in-between space, relating it back to the experiences Minh has had over the years. Living in-between is not necessarily being one or the other. Rather, the in-between space requires a

constant assessment and reassessment of norms, languages, and relationships, as seen through multiple perspectives.

The dissonances and similarities between the ways I experienced conversations with Minh in 2013, 2014, and 2015 reflect not only the evolving relationships between Minh and me, but also the significance of taking into account the multiple perspectives facilitated by the temporal gap between the two interviews. The time lapse allowed me to gain sufficient amount of distance to experience Minh in multiple contexts. As I got to know her through our conversations, I also sensed that Minh started relating to me as MinSoo, rather than a researcher interested in learning more about her personal stories. She shared, “I did an interview with you last year because I was working at the multicultural family support center. But I was really surprised and grateful when I got a phone call from you for the second interview.” At the end of the first interview, Minh mentioned that the center had turned down other similar requests for interviews. As we were saying good-byes at the end of the last interview in 2015, Minh invited me to have a meal at her home when I come visit her next time.

I began to marvel at Minh’s ability to influence her immediate family, members of local communities, and her family in Vietnam. As she learned about Korea through the needs in society that she was learning to fulfill, Minh situated herself in relation to the labor of a traditional Korean wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. As a student and an employee, she also transformed and was transformed by cultural discourses to meet her own changing needs. Nine years after immigrating to Korea and six years after becoming a naturalized Korean citizen, her presence, as well as her children’s, in the local and national community continued to question and challenge the virtue of the nation’s homogeneous cultural identity. Minh enjoyed the process of learning the Korean language and culture, and of her personal transformation as a wife, mother, worker, and student, establishing relationships and building a community with those around her. Living in a society entrenched in discourses that often perceive differences as deficiencies, she

also struggled to make her own voice heard. As a place where many discourses and intentions coalesce, Minh navigated her lifeworld with courage, anxieties, and hope.

Chapter 4

Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai

Pyeongju

Pyeongju, an industrialized city, is about an hour subway ride away from Seoul, one of the most populated cities in the world. Located adjacent to the Yellow Sea, on the west side of the Korean peninsula, Pyeongju is a city with a large marriage-labor immigrant population working for factories in industrial complexes. Due to the increasing number of marriage-labor immigrants living in the city, in 2009 a part of the city was designated by the Korean government as a “multicultural special area,” allowing the city to implement government support policies for marriage-labor immigrants ahead of any other city and to liven up the city by attracting tourists (D.-Y. Kim, 2009). The influences of the demographic changes, however, seem to be deeper and wider than the administrative boundaries drawn by such designation or categorization.

All over Korea, marriage-labor immigrants have functioned as a catalyst that has brought about many changes and challenges. Marriage-labor immigration has served as a site of contention and negotiation, influencing the everyday lives of many people—both Korean and immigrant—in the local and national communities. Marriage-labor immigrants are quickly becoming the majority, and outnumbering Korean natives, in the rural areas (S. Park, 2011), leading to identity politics around conservative and traditional values of Korean nationalism. Additionally, in cities like Pyeongju, where large industrial complexes attract many immigrant workers and their families, the local community is significantly influenced by the culture of the immigrants. Often times, the hope that stemmed from the “Korean dream” is confronted with the challenges of living as an immigrant in a foreign land.

Three of my key informants, Gouba, Haejin, and Sabai, lived in Pyeongju. Gouba, who originally came from Myanmar 15 years ago, had married Haejin, a Korean native. As mother of a 5th grade daughter, Haejin had worked at a preschool until the summer of 2014, when she quit her job. Some of Haejin's in-laws are also living in Korea, for two of her sisters-in-law including Gouba's sister Sabai, are married to Korean men.

Sitting, Eating, and Walking: Transitioning from 2013 to 2015

Over the course of nearly two years, from the summer of 2013 until the spring of 2015, my interviews with key informants changed in a number of ways. Above all, each year the length of the interviews was gradually extended. While my interview with Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai had lasted just over an hour in 2013, the interview conducted in 2014 with Haejin and Gouba lasted more than two hours. The last interview, carried out in 2015 with Haejin, was much longer, lasting about four hours. This increase in the overall length of the interviews was also echoed in the interviews I conducted with the other key informants, Minh and Myungsoo. The first interview with them in 2013 was the shortest, and the last interview in 2015 was the longest.

The shifting relationship between the informants and me also influenced the tone and interaction during the interviews. At the end of the second interview in 2014 for example, Gouba playfully told me how "scared" he was during our first meeting because of the recording devices. What I am not suggesting here is that the first interview was any less "correct" than the two follow-up interviews. As Møhl (2011) points out, cameras and other recording devices function as a tool that opens up alternative ways to understand various discourses manifested in informants' lifeworlds, rather than providing an accurate representation closer to the "truth." I am more concerned with how Gouba felt more comfortable pointing out the pressure of being

recorded, because the on-going nature of the rapport between us provided him with a greater sense of security, compared to the previous year.

I also became increasingly aware of the influence of events that happened prior to the interview, and how that influence came through the dialogues. When the experiences from each interview are placed side by side, the differences between the three interviews were more noticeable. The altered relationship between Haejin and Gouba's family, and Sabai's family, was one of the changes across the interviews. Compared with the overall lively dynamics during our first encounter in 2013, when Haejin, Gouba and Sabai met together, I noticed that both Haejin and Gouba seemed significantly more tired and even troubled during the second interview. The physical absence of Sabai, whose relationship with Haejin and Gouba had been deteriorating, was strongly present as the undertone of the overall interview. Sabai was hardly mentioned during the final interview, except when Haejin briefly shared some news about difficulties Sabai's family was facing, which Haejin seemed to have heard from someone.

In addition, during the 2014 interview, Gouba dominated the first half of the interview discussing what had happened earlier that day at work. Listening to her husband, Haejin occasionally chimed in to provide more explanations and clarifications. This contrasted with our initial interview, in which Haejin had spent more time talking than Gouba and Sabai. Based on what unfolded in the course of the three interviews, I could not think of the emotions Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai brought with them in isolation from other elements of my conversations with them. Whether it was a series of events unfolding over months, or what had happened during the day of the interview, the informants brought memories and emotions with them, grappling with unresolved tension in the process of dialogues with each other and with me. The events that preceded my interview with them led the conversations in the ways I could not have predicted, creating emergent room for examining the complexity of discourses in marriage-labor immigrants' lifeworlds.

Lastly, the interview method I employed for this dissertation gradually changed from a traditional sit-down interview to an interview format that requires more participation, such as a go-along method (Kusenbach, 2003). This was especially so during the last interview I had with Haejin. Gouba could not join the interview due to his work schedule, so I we ate lunch and carried out the interview at a restaurant where Haejin and her daughter Sumi occasionally go together. Haejin and I also walked in her neighborhood, which provided an opportunity for us to talk about the neighborhood, the school district, and the places Haejin used for mothering.

Haejin and Gouba

When I asked Haejin and Gouba how they met, Haejin shared that they had first met in 1998, when she was on a mission trip to Myanmar. Sharing their story, Haejin reminisced when she saw Gouba for the first time: “Gouba was a part of the worship team, and I saw him singing on the stage.” “I could feel that you were looking at me!” Gouba added teasingly. They stayed in touch as pen pals until they finally got married in Myanmar. Haejin wrestled with paperwork for months, and Gouba was finally able to come to Korea in 2000. “Back then, there weren’t that many people who married foreigners. Even people working at government offices didn’t know what to do.”

Unlike the majority of marriage immigration families, which consist of a non-Korean bride and a Korean groom, in this case Haejin, the wife, is the Korean spouse, while Gouba, the husband, is the marriage-labor immigrant spouse. Haejin and Gouba met through opportunities provided by a religious organization, while the majority of marriage immigrants go through a commercial matchmaking company, similar to Minh’s case. Because of this reason, Haejin and Gouba’s case may seem “atypical” to some people. Nevertheless, Gouba has had experiences similar to those of immigrant laborers in Korea, who immigrated to Korea looking for a better

employment opportunity. Many of Gouba's coworkers are labor immigrants, and Gouba has been serving as a mentor for many immigrant workers from Myanmar. After over a decade of living in Korea, Gouba had many stories to share about his journey as a marriage-labor immigrant.

Family Portrait Episode

Out of many stories Haejin and Gouba shared, a story from the 2013 interview about a family portrait that made when Sumi was in the first grade was especially memorable to me. Haejin and Gouba's family portrait served as a prompt for making visible the cultural discourses about "foreigners" in Sumi's class.

The family portrait, a still image that was familiar to Haejin and Gouba's family, was an artifact that introduced a sense of estrangement between Sumi and her classmates when Sumi was in first grade. Recounting what Sumi had shared with her, Haejin commented on how Sumi's classmates doubled over with laughter when they saw Sumi's family portrait. "Hahahaha, look at her father's hair! He looks like a woman!" A family picture Sumi brought to school triggered some responses that neither she nor her mom Haejin anticipated. "Why are they laughing?" Sumi didn't understand," Haejin explained. Gouba always had long hair as long as Sumi could remember. The long hair was one of the ways Sumi knew her dad, and nothing in the picture was out of the ordinary. Gouba laughed bashfully as Haejin described to me the hairstyle Gouba had in the family picture, how he had long hair with perms. Considering many Korean guys keep their hair short (in fact, in the 80s the police enforced the length of men's hair and women's skirts), I could imagine how many of Sumi's friends might not be familiar with the image of a father being associated with long hair. "When Sumi talked [about what happened] after coming back from school, I couldn't tell everything to Sumi's dad. I talked to her to see how she felt at school and how she was doing." Haejin was concerned that the experience Sumi had about the

family portrait would negatively affect the ways she experienced “foreigners” and marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea, including her own family.

This tells us about various cultural discourses marriage-labor immigrant families navigate, demonstrating where mothering intersects with the lifeworld of the child. Reflecting the emergent encounters children bring home with them from outside, a classroom in this case, the family portrait episode raises the question of whose responsibility is it to raise children from marriage-labor immigrants, and navigate the intricate web of conflicting cultural discourses? The complexity of how discourses of mothering unfold in marriage-labor immigrants’ lives is made visible through how their children interact with the circulating discourses. Mothering, as a multi-dimensional conglomeration of sociocultural beliefs and practices, is not solely under parents’ control. In this sense, the ways in which children from marriage-labor immigrant families negotiate different sets of values illustrate a number of challenges marriage-labor immigrant parents contend with in their mothering.

Heajin expressed her gratitude towards Sumi’s second grade teacher for stepping into what was going on in the classroom, which altered the tone of the discussion about the family portrait: “She was a very wise person.” Haejin believed that this episode could have been an upsetting experience for Sumi, but the way that her teacher publicly recognized what she thought about Sumi’s family portrait, specifically about Sumi’s father’s appearance, changed Sumi and her classmates’ perception: “She [Sumi’s teacher] said out loud, ‘Sumi’s dad looks really cool—he looks like a celebrity, doesn’t he?’ That entirely changed how Sumi felt about her dad.” As a person of authority, the teacher provided another way to “read” the family portrait, specifically what may have been considered “unfamiliar” or even “strange.” If Sumi’s classmates’ first response to Sumi’s family picture exhibited how mainstream Korean culture would have reacted and disapproved of differences, Sumi’s teacher provided a counter perspective that served as an alternative.

Regardless of her earlier concerns about the family portrait episode, Haejin was soon relieved during the interview to talk about Sumi's pride and respect towards her father and the diversity within her family: "Sumi told me that she thinks "multiculture" is a good thing. I asked her—why do you say that? Then she said, 'other kids don't even know their dad's country's language. I know two languages, including Dad's. And I think my dad is really cool.'" Considering that is something that a mother would like to hear from her daughter, it could be interpreted that Sumi gave an answer that would comfort her mother. It is also possible that this was a way Sumi worked through the tension she experienced around her family portrait.

With many questions remaining in my mind, I wanted to learn more about what this episode might have produced in family conversations. When I asked Haejin about this episode during the second interview in 2014, and whether Sumi and she had talked any more about this, Haejin said Sumi didn't talk about the family portrait episode any more. She also added how such things did not happen in school:

I don't think there is something like that in school these days. Because the teacher is very wise, I think her homeroom teacher this year is very wise. A lot of things like that come up during history classes, you know. A lot of things come up during social studies classes. If Myanmar, my husband's country, comes up during classes like that, Sumi raises hand with confidence and says, 'This is my dad's country. My dad's country has a lot of gold.' When she shares what she heard from her dad with confidence, she says her friends envy her. 'Wow, it must be great that your dad speaks English well. I wish my dad spoke English well like your dad. Hey, can I visit your dad's country? You can go there, right? I want to travel on an airplane.' You know how children can have a tendency to be quite envious. In the old days, I don't know, the environment has changed a lot, and within schools there is a lot of education to accept things like "multiculture" as

something more general. I don't know whether this is because of things like that, but also socially it got a lot better."

Knowing that English is not the official language of Myanmar, I was intrigued how the language was brought up as an instrument that Sumi used to navigate her relationship with her classmates. Haejin also pointed to Sumi's confidence, Sumi's classmates' fantasy about traveling overseas, and the change in the sociocultural environment as probable factors that contributed to how Sumi made sense of the discourses about marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea. As Haejin and Gouba further discussed how Sumi negotiated the cultural climate in the classroom, the list of possible explanations for why Sumi might be open to her father's position in Korean society expanded even more:

Haejin: Curious and interested [about "foreigners"], I think Sumi accepts it as something positive at school—a sense of pride about your country, about Dad's country, about foreign countries.

Gouba: It is all because of school education.

Haejin: No, I, her mom, talked to her openly about things like that! I haven't hid things like that since she was a baby. ... She teaches her classmates. She expresses what she thinks, and her teacher gives Sumi opportunities so that she can openly share when her father's country being mentioned in class. So she participates in class. She now shares things she knows. I think the environment is encouraging her to. In terms of school, I think Sumi is doing well because her teachers lead her well. I think these days that teachers have a lot of influence on children—whatever children think, of course parents have influence on the child, but because they spend half of a day at school. This is what I pray for. I want my daughter to have a good teacher who looks at her without stereotypes in mind,

like a normal child, bringing out her strength. There are many “multicultural” children with low self-esteem.

The ways in which Haejin and Gouba made sense of how Sumi positioned herself in school was not linear or clear-cut. Adding school education, parental influence, and teacher’s insight to possible explanations of how Sumi negotiated various discourses in her classroom, the only evident insight was that there were multiple explanations for how children from marriage-labor immigrant families navigate the local and national communities of which they are part.

Throughout her comment, Haejin emphasized that this was at school, which prompted me to think about what goes on outside of school.

In this particular episode that happened in Sumi’s first grade classroom, the focal point of attention was how Gouba stood out amongst all the parents in the family pictures brought to class by Sumi’s classmates. It is easy to assume that Gouba being different was the “problem,” but I am curious to examine further what this episode reveals to us in relation to discourses of mothering and Korean national cultural identity. While our attention is easily drawn to marriage-labor immigrants as being atypical members of Korean society, on both local and national levels it is necessary to examine the cultural discourses that make marriage-labor immigrants highly visible and suspect.

Visibility and Invisibility in Korean Society: Navigating Contested Lives

Even though talking to classmates about Myanmar brings attention to her, Sumi is “proud to share about her dad’s country,” Haejin said. Over the years, Haejin has made some deliberate choices to conceal or disclose the fact that her daughter is from a marriage-labor immigrant family. In between the intricate balance between “fitting in” and “standing out,” Haejin’s family has taken multiple stances towards discourses that position them as different.

In the course of explaining her experience as a parent raising a daughter, Haejin pointed out during the 2013 interview that “Sumi looks almost Asian and people can’t tell whether she is ‘multicultural’ or not based on physical appearance, unless it is explained.” Including Haejin, the mothers from marriage-labor immigrant families I interviewed between 2013 and 2015 were especially sensitive to how their children’s physical appearance might influence the children’s experiences in school and the local community. Many of my informants’ minds were organized around how visible and/or invisible their children are in Korean society.

What surprised me from what Haejin said was how mindful she was helping about Sumi become more “invisible” and aware of the possible implications of becoming “visible” in school and in the local community. Even though she thought, “Sumi looked almost Asian,” Haejin was concerned about Sumi being ostracized by her peers, just as Minh from chapter two was about her children. Because she was worried that her daughter might not “blend in,” Haejin employed different strategies to conceal how Sumi was from a marriage-labor immigrant family. For example, Haejin shared with me that she had asked her husband to change his last name so that her daughter would not “have problems in school.”

Haejin: I asked my husband for a favor. I asked him to change his family name. ‘Honey, [do it] for Sumi, even though I feel sorry for you,’ to me, it doesn’t matter that I live with a foreigner. ... [But] the surrounding environment doesn’t change no matter how you try. ... So I wanted to get it done [change the family name] before the child went to the elementary school. ... I felt bad, but the family name—it is throwing away your name. Honestly, I was really sorry. I was.

Gouba: Hey, when it comes to things like that—

Haejin: (Interrupting) Lay down one’s own [name], because we need to raise a child Korean society from a parent’s perspective, so we created a new family name.

Haejin referred to a sense of difference that her daughter might have felt compared to her peers as

the reason behind the family's decision to create a new family name that would allow family members to avoid being labeled as immigrants. Conceptualizing the act of giving up the last name as a necessary sacrifice as parents in Korean society, Haejin saw Sumi's need as a priority over her own sense of guilt in asking Gouba to let go of his last name.

Haejin also explained that she used to tell her daughter's teachers in the beginning of the school year that the family is a "multicultural family," but she was not so sure whether it was necessary any more to do so. Even though Haejin thought Sumi might be well cared for if her teacher was aware of the family background, Haejin could not shake off the feeling that she was impeding Sumi's freedom at school not to be associated with such a preconception. Similar to Haejin, Juan, the marriage-labor immigrant social worker who worked with Minh, also said that she used to share with other people, such as parents of her children's friends, the fact that her family is a marriage-labor immigrant family, but she stopped doing this:

We used to, but there were instances that really scarred us. Now, after maybe six months, when we become closer, we e tell others [that her family is a marriage-labor immigrant family]. In the case of China, there is little difference in physical appearance, and this is possible [to wait to share the fact that she is an immigrant].

To avoid any difficulties and disadvantages that come from being labeled as different, the marriage-labor immigrant parents have made various decisions over time that helped them and their children to be integrated with the local communities when possible. While comparing what might be similar and different between Juan's case and Haejin's situation, I am unsettled by what these efforts might indicate. The concerns about physical appearance, last name, and disclosure of marriage-labor immigrant status communicate the array of difficulties marriage-labor immigrants experienced as an "other" in Korea society.

Oscillating between visible and invisible, marriage-labor immigrants in Korea and their children navigate the sociocultural strata in order to maintain a range of possibilities of how they

may be perceived by others. Preconceptions about marriage-labor immigrants prevalent in Korean society affect their everyday experiences, and many marriage-labor immigrant parents that I interviewed chose to be strategic in order to avoid a quick “reading” of who they are by Korean people. As parents of young children, marriage-labor immigrants and their spouses also sensed the need to put on their Korean façade when needed and possible, and assimilate to the norms of Korean society to the best of their abilities for the benefit of their children. To alleviate the weight of the circulating discourses about children from marriage-labor immigrant families, the parents were sensitive to the contexts and the social relationships of which they were a part. Various factors, such as physical appearance, family name, family background, and financial support, are intricately associated with the web of multiple discourses circulating at the local and national levels about marriage-labor immigrant families. Exploring the possibility of tapping onto various consequences attached to multiple discourses, marriage-labor immigrant parents ceaselessly assess and reassess relationships of which they are a part. These parents were especially sensitive about the perception of their children, and trying to prevent their children from being labeled for as long as possible.

Cultural Stigma and Discrimination in Korea: Gouba’s Story

During the interview in 2013, Gouba referred to working as the hardest part of living in Korea. Even though he acknowledged that the living situation in Korea is much better than that of Myanmar, he attested to the difficulties he experienced and how much Korean society has changed its attitude toward immigrant laborers like him over the years. Throughout his comments, he was very clear in positioning himself as a marriage-labor immigrant man, apart from marriage-labor immigrant women such as her sister Sabai:

Gouba: Because I am a guy, there was nothing that was particularly difficult, except for looking for a job. For me, the cultural difference wasn't an issue. I think getting a job was the most difficult thing because I was a foreigner in Korea. There was no one from Myanmar in Korea [around the time Gouba came to Korea]. So at work, Korean people were very "particular"—they did not treat me like a human, but like an animal. Their greeting was swear words. Making a living in Korea now, there are still many difficult things, personally, but working was particularly difficult. I think Korea is a good place to live, compared to my country [Myanmar].”

MinSoo: Compared to back then, are there many things that changed?

Gouba: You can't even compare now and then. Back then—right now, I work, and I don't hear swear words at work all that much. Speaking of swearing, there are all kinds of people out there. When it comes to living style or things like that, Korea has grown a lot. How people talk to me might depend on how hard I work, but also there are no bad people at work. You know there are a lot of news reports [about marriage-labor immigrants]. There are a lot about immigrant laborers. Because the law is strict nowadays, I don't think there is room for treating immigrant labors badly, compared to when I came [to Korea] first.

Throughout the interviews over the two years, both Gouba and Haejin viewed Gouba's time in Korea as a marriage-labor immigrant through the lens of his work experience. In the early days, especially, Gouba experienced himself as vulnerable while working and providing for his family as a marriage-labor immigrant. Noting the immense difference between now and 15 years ago, Gouba calmly recounted how people would swear at him and treat him "like an animal." While Korean society had drastically changed over the years he had lived in Korea, Gouba's comment about the current situation at work, "I don't hear swear words at work all that much," implied that

there still might be some traces of verbal violence. Even though he was legally permitted to live and work in Korea, and he became a naturalized Korean citizen, living as a marriage-labor immigrant in Korea demanded he cope with much more than legal status alone. As Gouba pointed out, multiple factors contributed to this, including gender, discrimination, personal efforts, media reports, a growing immigrant laborer population, and changes in the law. What I am picking up here is the complexity and the rapidity of the changes that took place in the last 15 years while Gouba lived in Korea as a marriage-labor immigrant.

Haejin also noted how Gouba changed jobs many times in the beginning. In 2013, Haejin had mentioned that Gouba as an immigrant worker “has tried so hard to find a foothold he can stand on” at the workplace. The markers that identify him as a marriage-labor immigrant, such as language skills, skin color, name, and even the color of his passport, limited Gouba in terms of the types of jobs he can hold, limiting the income he can provide for his family. Gouba shared that even though he can “get by” and even “pass” as Korean using language skills, he witnessed Korean people’s attitudes changing when they found out about his country of origin. These difficulties, and the frustration Gouba experienced at work, seemed to weigh on both Haejin and him because they have a child to support.

Hostility towards Differences and the Culture of Labor

The demographics in Korea have changed tremendously in the past two decades. From 1990 to 2007, Korea experienced an unprecedented 2,000% increase in foreign residents as immigrants sought economic opportunities in achieving the “Korean dream.” To many people in Southeast Asia, Korea is “the land of opportunities” (T. Lim, 2010). In the 1970s and 1980s, Korea experienced significant economic growth, and the low birth rate coupled with the shortage of labor for low-end jobs created a need for cheap immigrant laborers (Kong et al., 2010).

The normalized cultural discourses that favor Korean cultural solidarity do not lend themselves to accepting the notion of difference. This is evidenced by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2006 recommending that Korea adopt an anti-discrimination law. The committee denounced the prevalent use of terms such as “pure blood” and “mixed blood,” and encouraged the Korean government to challenge calls for making the country ethnically homogeneous (Choe, 2009; UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2006). Amnesty International (2009) also issued reports criticizing discrimination against immigrant workers, citing cases of unequal and suspended pay, sexual harassment and exploitation, and fatal accidents due to a lack of safety training on jobs that are often regarded as dirty, difficult, and dangerous. Even though the Employment Permit System (EPS) was implemented in 2004 as an effort to protect the rights of immigrant laborers, many continued to experience abuse and hardship in the workplace (Amnesty International, 2009). Multiple media sources have reported that many marriage-labor immigrants are treated unfairly at the workplace, and described how they have even become victims of crime through violation of their rights and through verbal, physical, and even sexual abuse (Hong, 2014; Ok, 2014). Working as manual laborers, often in an inadequate environment, marriage-labor immigrants have been involved in accidents, some of which have been fatal (H.-S. Kang, 2014). While immigrant workers have made efforts to portray themselves as victims, and highlight their rights as human beings rather than threats to Korean society (Lim, 2010), the cultural atmosphere is still hostile to people perceived to be different, and affects the daily experiences of marriage-labor immigrant parents and children in Korea (Hong, 2014; Kwak & Kim, 2012).

The long work hours, a part of the Korean national work culture, are another challenge faced by marriage-labor immigrants. Among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Korea has been ranked second for the number of work hours per day since 2008, following Mexico (S.-D. Park, 2014). Many immigrant laborers in Korea may

not be familiar with the fact that an extended workday is perceived to be a norm in Korean culture, thus leading to tension at home and work. For example, learning to labor in Korea was a particularly challenging task for Gouba. Haejin explained that the concept of overtime work does not exist in Myanmar. “He [Gouba] really had a hard time. Working late at night and over the weekends—you can’t even imagine that in Myanmar. But he is doing better now.” Being Korean, Haejin of course understood and accepted the long hours of work. She could help her husband understand as well. But when the marriage immigrant was a woman, she might have a harder time understanding why her husband was always at work, and this might lead to tension in the marriage.

Mothers and wives from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea are expected to learn and fulfill the beliefs and practices of hierarchal and patriarchal family structures. Similarly, the work of immigrant laborers satisfies the need in the discourses of labor in Korea. In other words, immigrant workers learn to partake in the culture of the particular group in the labor force that does kinds of work Korean people avoid doing—dangerous, dirty, and difficult jobs. In this sense, the way the marriage-labor immigrants learn to labor to meet the need in Korean society goes beyond tasks required in their job or learning the Korean language to improve communication. The Korean need for cheap labor and the corresponding cultural expectations about those who do such work make it more demanding for immigrant laborers to transition into their lives in Korea.

Balancing Work and Home: Haejin and Mothering

As a working mother, Haejin oscillated between work and home for many years. Even though Haejin had a full-time job, as did Gouba, she carried most of the responsibilities of mothering Sumi, their only daughter. Watching her daughter getting older and going through

puberty, Haejin increasingly felt the need to spend more time with Sumi rather than being at work. So in 2014 she decided to make her daughter a priority and quit her job, even though a better financial situation could open up opportunities to assist her daughter with her education. Haejin felt guilty about not spending enough time with Sumi:

Sumi is now in the fifth grade. 12 years old. She is in the fifth grade now, and I think she is going through puberty. She pays a lot of attention to her physical appearance, things like that. I see in her a lot of tendency that could lead her astray. So, more than financial, everyday living related things, if I don't spend time with the child at this point, I thought Sumi's relationship with parents, with the mother, would become antagonistic, and the emotional gap would become worse. ... Over ten years I worked to help my husband to settle down, I supported him on his side, even though the amount I was making was small. You know, women make a lot less than men in Korea. But I supported him thinking that he might have difficult time if he was the only one making money in the family. I have thought so far that it would be less difficult for him if I endured [and continued working] as much as I could. I thought like that, and looking back at this point—the child, that weighed on my heart. So I thought that I needed to put things down decisively and spend time with her. ... Because I had no time with the child, because the relationship shattered, the problem got worse—compared to what I felt before, the depth of the seriousness was much worse.

At first, I understood what Haejin said as she was torn between balancing responsibilities at home and at work, and how the need to pay attention to two different things simultaneously provided her with unique challenges of its own. In other words, she grappled with conflicting discourses of mothering that exist in Korean society. The traditional responsibilities of mothers as homemakers and caretakers, added to responsibilities as a financial provider (including the pursuit of career options), make the ideal discourse of “good mother” more difficult to achieve (Porter, 2010).

This means that the newer discourses of mothering do not necessarily replace the older discourse. Rather, the newly emerging discourses supplement the pre-existing discourses.

My conversations with other marriage-labor immigrants and social workers that work closely with marriage-labor immigrant families seemed to describe home and work as a binary, having to choose between two, and it is not easy to maintain both responsibilities. The pressure that working mothers like Haejin experience as a primary caregiver becomes even stronger in Korea, because they are culturally demanded to be selfless and totally child-centered while simultaneously providing for their children (Hays, 1998; Son, 2015).

As I revisited this transcript at different times, I came to realize how Haejin being at work was also a way to support her family, by assisting her husband who was under pressure to provide as the breadwinner. As a marriage-labor immigrant, Gouba would have had even more difficulties compared to his Korean counterparts. Haejin contributed to creating a financially stable environment to raise Sumi, which was no small task. Had Haejin not been attentive to Sumi's need, I am not so certain whether Haejin would have recognized the changes her daughter was going through, as well as the changing relationship between her and Sumi.

Another way to look at Haejin's words is through an examination of the relationship between socioeconomic standing of a family and what is perceived to be "good mothering" in Korea. Many marriage-labor immigrants, especially mothers, strongly desired opportunities to contribute to the family finances, and many informants with whom I have spoken seem to associate their ability to help out economically with being good parents, allowing them to provide "like other Korean parents." Considering that Korea as a country with a stronger economy than the countries in which they were born, a majority of marriage-labor immigrant parents frequently associated a high level of socioeconomics with "Koreanness." During the interview, Haejin also compared what her she and her husband can do for their children to what "Korean" parents

usually do: “Because the living expenses take up too much [of what my husband and I make], it is not easy to send my child to a private school for supplementary lessons like Korean parents.”

As Haejin noted, Korean parents are notorious for the amount of financial resources they spend for their children’s education. Considering the prevalence of “shadow education” in Korea, where each family spends 75 cents to every dollar the government invests in education (Baker & LeTendre, 2005), it seems that spending a substantial amount of income so that children can take extra lessons at private schools is part of the “norm” of a Korean parenthood. Compared to families with two Korean parents who highly invest in their children's education, Haejin fell short of the norm, though she shared that they were doing all they could. With the financial support Haejin’s income provided, Haejin and Gouba were able to subscribe Sumi to a service that periodically sent home some supplementary study materials. During the interview in 2014, Haejin was concerned about that having to rely on Gouba’s income alone would limit educational opportunities for their daughter even more, especially because they could not afford paying for the study materials with one income. In this sense, I suggest that Haejin as a working mom played a key role in pursuing beliefs and practices of mothering according to the cultural discourses within the context of Korean society.

In spite of the way Haejin contributed to mothering Sumi, Haejin blamed herself for the difficulty she was having with her daughter. Interestingly, even though Haejin was experiencing the guilt of being a “bad” mother who had neglected her child, how Gouba perceived Haejin as a mother was considerably different. For instance, what Gouba shared during the interview in 2013 provided another possible perspective from which to understand the discourses which were a part of Haejin’s mothering:

For me, I have a lot of thoughts. But since Sumi’s mom is a Korean woman, because also what she does now is related to teaching children, she looks for information here and there for Sumi, wondering whether there is good information out there. Sumi’s mom

made a lot of efforts. Really. ... For Sumi, for Sumi's family, going between home and work, whenever she has time she invests the time [in Sumi] even though she is physically exhausted. I honestly don't think I can help much. ... She [Haejin] is really stressed, to raise Sumi. She needs to do both work and housework. For Sumi, she needs to inquire about her [Sumi's] study. Because we can't send Sumi to private schools for extra lessons, Haejin herself needs to check Sumi's homework one by one, helping her out one by one. Because I can rely on Sumi's mom, it helps me. I think people like my sister [Sabai] would pass out right away. I don't think it is doable. So I am really thankful for Sumi's mom. I have nothing to say to Sumi's mom, because there is nothing I do for Sumi. I am like a fool. What I can do is to do my best in making money. When I give Sumi's mom the money, she takes care of it.

I understand Gouba's words in three different ways. First, Gouba acknowledged a number of ways in which Haejin dedicated her time and energy in mothering Sumi. Haejin checked Sumi's homework, researched helpful information for Sumi's study, took care of the housework, and worked as a teacher at a preschool. Gouba was appreciative and even reliant on the ways Haejin mothered Sumi, claiming that he did not do anything to help care for their daughter. Because Haejin put Sumi and the family before herself, Gouba knew that his wife was a capable, diligent, and sacrificial mother. It was clear that Gouba relied on Haejin.

Second, contrasting Haejin and Sabai, Gouba's statement implicated how Haejin contended with a wide range of responsibilities as a Korean mother. Based on the level of intensity in the way Gouba described what Haejin did as a mother and how his sister could not do what Haejin was doing, I read Gouba's words as saying, "Haejin is doing all these things because she is Korean. Marriage-labor immigrant mothers like my sister Sabai cannot do this." I do not necessarily think that all Korean mothers can do what Haejin did, or that all marriage-labor immigrants cannot do what she did for her family. Korean mothers and marriage-labor

immigrant mothers could have different cultural understandings about their roles as mothers, leading them to making varying choices about what they do as mothers. Taking these things into consideration, I find it fascinating that Gouba used the discourses of “capable Korean mother” and “inept marriage-labor immigrant mother” to make sense of all the things Haejin did as a mom. Gouba was explicitly articulating how marriage-labor immigrant mothers, including Sabai, would not be able to endure the intensity of what it takes to be a “Korean” mom.

Lastly, Gouba emphasized his role as a breadwinner for the family. He made it explicit how the gender of marriage-labor immigrants positions him and Haejin differently as parents and spouses in Korean society. Even though this could be because Haejin was Korean and took responsibility for mothering since they live in Korea, I sensed that there was much more to Gouba’s statement. Pointing out “making money” as one way he could contribute to the family, Gouba was clear in drawing a boundary between his work and Haejin’s work. He also specified that managing the money he earned was Haejin’s job. This reflects how he subscribes to the discourse about the gender division of labor in order to understand his role as a father.

If I Were a Wife: Exploring Gender Disparities and Cultural Labor

Back in 2013, when I first asked my five marriage-labor immigrant parent informants about their experience raising children, all four mothers shared lengthy stories about various difficulties they have experienced as a parent in Korean society. While the only father, Gouba, expressed his contentment and gratitude towards his (Korean) wife, because “[she] does it [make decisions about their daughter’s education] well all by herself,” the stories that Haejin recounted accentuated the challenges of navigating social relationships that may affect the family, especially Sumi.

During the interview carried out the following year, Gouba explained how things would

have been drastically different had he been a marriage-labor immigrant wife and Haejin the Korean husband: “Sumi’s mom takes care of me like a baby. Because I am a husband and a foreigner, communication doesn’t work. So my responsibility is to work and make money. There is not a single thing I touch at home.” Haejin is not only a mother to her daughter, Sumi, but also to her husband, Gouba. Mentioning the differences between the kinds of work done by Haejin and himself, Gouba imagined how different things it could have been had he been a marriage-labor immigrant woman. Then Haejin gently complained to Gouba: “You know, the world changed. Husbands help out at home these days.” Haejin did not seem to be as content with all of her responsibilities at home.

The gender disparities embedded in the cultural discourses of labor, as exemplified in the interview with Haejin and Gouba and Korean policy documents, prevail strongly in marriage-labor immigrant families. As Myungsoo, the key informant whose story is elaborated in chapter five, points out, the irony of the prominent relationship between gender and labor in marriage-labor immigrant families is that Korean women are not necessarily under the same cultural expectations as marriage-labor immigrant women. An increasing number of Korean women, particularly those with a higher level of education, refuse to comply with the cultural demands of their family members and Korean society, remaining single or having fewer children (J. Hwang, 2009; S. Lee, 2012). The discourse of a “good wife,” which positions marriage-labor immigrant women within the confines of a family, stems from the traditional hierarchal and patriarchal family culture in Korea (S.-Y. Kim, Chang, & Kim, 2008, p. 10). To fulfill the needs created by the discourse, many support programs focus primarily on providing educational programs to facilitate adjustment and assimilation to Korean culture and society, including Korean language, cooking, and manners classes (Bélanger et al., 2010). While these classes would be helpful in partly fulfilling the marriage-labor immigrants desire partake in local communities, what I find

problematic is the lack of consideration for ways society could incorporate the backgrounds and experiences of marriage-labor immigrants, and take their needs into account.

The Korea National Statistics Office (2014) reports that 70% of all international marriages are between Korean men and non-Korea women in 2013. In a number of policy documents, these marriage-labor immigrant women are frequently identified as “wives” and/or “mothers,” rather than as individual members of local and national communities (W. Choi, 2007). In contrast, marriage-labor immigrant men are often absent from the policy discourses (Yuk, 2011). Questioning the assumption that the influence of support policies, programs, and other pertinent legislation is gender-free, Kim et al. (2008) critiqued the Multi-cultural Family Support Act of 2008 by saying that discussion of important issues, including diversity within the marriage-labor immigrant population, employment opportunities for marriage-labor immigrants, and problems of the current international marriage market, have been excluded. Kim et al. (2008) further point out that the Korean government fails to reflect women’s voices and recognize through its policies the role that gender plays in the lives of marriage-labor immigrants in Korea, even though gender carries immense significance in contemporary Korea. Even though many Korean government reports use data based on gender, the significance of gender disparity in the marriage-labor immigrant population still remains unaddressed.

Differing expectations of the types of labor in which men and women engage are particularly noticeable in what is required of marriage-labor immigrant women. Nevertheless, the rapidly increasing marriage-labor immigrant population still influences the cultural discourses through their every day negotiations.

Walking and Talking about Mothering

Walking with me in the neighborhood as a part of the 2015 interview provided opportunities for Haejin to talk about her beliefs and practices of mothering in relation to where her family lived. As I listened to Haejin, I contemplated the relationship between walking, place, and mothering through implicit and explicit decisions Haejin had made raising Sumi.

While I was well aware of Pyeongju being a city densely populated by immigrant workers, and with a higher crime rate than the rest of Korea, what Haejin shared altered my perspective on the city. During our walk, she talked about how parts of Pyeongju with more “foreign” residents had a higher crime rate. But where Haejin and Gouba’s family lives in Pyeongju was safer, she said, because it was formed as a satellite city for people who commute to Seoul. Even though the circulating stereotypes of Pyeongju pictured the image of the city in one generic way, navigating Pyeongju was much more complex when seen from an insider’s perspective. By deliberately choosing to live in a safer part of Pyeongju, Haejin and Gouba wanted to be in a more secure environment to raise Sumi.

Haejin also mentioned that her older sister was “freaked out” when Haejin’s family moved to Pyeongju. Haejin explained why: “You know, Korean moms are concerned about school districts, things like that.” Even without her sister reminding her, Haejin seemed to be aware that moving closer to Seoul might have provided opportunities for Sumi to attend a better school. As a Korean mother, Haejin was familiar with other mothers dedicating their time, energy, and resources to their children, and making choices that will benefit their children’s education.

This led me to reflect on how marriage-labor immigrant parents living in the rural areas might be less advantaged in terms of access to school districts with more resources. Even though marriage-labor immigrants moving to Korea might have opened up different options for mothering their children (either unborn or from previous marriage), I am not certain about what resources might be available to marriage-labor immigrant parents that can help them navigate

educational disparities within Korea. While marriage-labor immigrant informants were deeply concerned about the possibility that their children might be ostracized by Korean peers, in two years of interviews none of my informants had said anything about choosing a better school district for their children, which is a common discourse among Korean mothers (Y.-J. Cho, 2014; S.-H. Jung, 2015). I interpret this to mean that there are Korean discourses of mothering with which marriage-labor immigrant parents are unfamiliar.

As we were walking in the neighborhood, Haejin shared that she would take Sumi out for a walk to spend time together. Since I was aware that Haejin quit her job so that she could dedicate more time to her daughter, this idea of purposeful walking as an approach to mothering intrigued me. Even though it is not my intention to provide “right” answers for how walking influenced the relationship between Haejin and Sumi, what I would like to bring to attention is walking as a possible mothering strategy. Borrowing from walking as an interview method that engages multiple senses to obtain a holistic perspective of informants’ lifeworld (Ingold, 2004), what might be some potential ways that marriage-labor immigrants can benefit from walking with their children? As Pink (2009) points out, walking provides opportunities for the researcher to inhabit the same space as informants, providing a gateway for non-discursive elements of people’s lives. What might emerge if marriage-labor immigrants use walking as a place of communication with their children through both verbal and non-verbal elements? Since marriage-labor immigrants are frequently noted for their lack of Korean language skills, my conversation with Haejin about walking prompted me to reflect on how a language is only a small part of the mothering in which marriage-labor immigrants engage on a daily basis.

Navigating Relationships

For the initial interview conducted in 2013, I had met with Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai, one of Gouba's older sisters, but during the interview carried out the following year, Haejin shared that she and her husband were not in touch with Sabai's family as much as they had been earlier. This was because Haejin and Gouba's efforts to help improve Sabai's relationship with her husband had caused a conflict between Sabai's husband and Gouba, as well as Haejin.

The troubles that initially came up in a husband-wife relationship in Sabai's family, intertwined with the brother-sister relationship between Gouba and Sabai, led to tension between the two families. Sabai's discontent had been building up over time because her husband came home late at night, did not help take care of their children, and put his personal needs before the family's. In this situation, Sabai and her husband had an argument over his cell phone, which he kept locked using a couple layers of password protection. After the quarrel over privacy and mistrust, Sabai ended up walking out of her home late at night by herself. Her husband threatened Sabai saying that he "would leave and take the children" if she did not leave. This conflict was heightened because Gouba wanted to talk with his brother-in-law as man to man, but Sabai's husband preferred expressing his thoughts to Haejin between Korean people. While Sabai asked for Gouba's help, explaining her position, her husband did not want Gouba to interfere, saying that it was a problem between a husband and a wife. Gouba doubted whether his brother-in-law treated Sabai the way he did because she was a marriage-labor immigrant: "You know, if you don't do anything, Korean people think that foreigners are simple-minded. ... In this situation, when I see what Sabai is going through, I think my sister is being ignored because she is a foreigner." In the context of Korea as a society with a strict social hierarchy based on age difference and relationships, the discourses of "Koreanness" entrenched in a marriage-labor immigration family became even more distinct in the midst of this family struggle.

A story Myungsoo shared during the 2014 interview provided another perspective on the challenges Sabai's family and Haejin and Gouba's family were experiencing. Based on his experience working at the multicultural family support center in Hamshin, Myungsoo mentioned that when difficulties between a husband and a wife arise in marriage-labor immigrant families, other family members often get involved to help resolve the problem. Myungsoo also shared how he had often seen the issues that couples need to work through turn into a violent "whirlpool," swallowing the entire extended family. I am not suggesting here whether one way is better than the other. Rather, I am pointing out that marriage-labor immigration is a context in which it is inevitable that various stakeholders in marriage-labor immigrant families will grapple with the tension generated between various relationships.

A manifold of relationships, particularly the tension voiced through Haejin and Gouba during the 2014 interview, highlighted the clash between various discourses, tracing the dynamics of the relational liminal space where expectations are negotiated. A number of different relationships, reflecting various discourses, were at work during both interviews, and the sense of unease that emerged during the 2014 interview was enveloped in multiple layers of relationships. The absence of Sabai, as well as Sabai's husband whom I never met, ironically made their presence in the conversation even more clear through the dynamics across the relationships articulated and rearticulated throughout the interviews.

An Unexpected Dialogue

During the 2013 interview with Haejin, Gouba and Sabai in Pyeongju, I sensed that the tempo of the interview was slowing down after about an hour of conversation. Hoping to revitalize the dialogue, I shared about my marriage to a non-Korean person and some of my experiences of feeling like an "other" when I see different ways in which Korean people respond

to the fact that I am married to a “foreigner.” While this remark stemmed from my hope to revitalize the dynamics of the interview, the comments that followed my words surprised me. Haejin told me that she thought I must have married a non-Korean person because she saw my picture with my husband through the text message that I sent her to set up the time and the place for the interview. While I was not so sure how she found out about my marriage being an international marriage before I told her, she explained with a smile on her face that the text messages that I sent her through my mom’s phone were received through the messenger program that both she and my mom had (called Kakao Talk), and this allowed her to see my mom’s profile picture. When this interview was conducted, my mom had set her profile picture as a picture of me and my husband, Jeremy, at our wedding, which had taken place two months prior to my initial encounter with Haejin, Gouba and Sabai.

I am not certain in what ways this may have opened up new possibilities and closed others during the interview. Also, it is not the intention of this dissertation to investigate and provide “answers” to all the different ways in which this unexpected occurrence influenced my interview with these three informants. This dialogue that came to my surprise, however, sparked the conversation about the relationship between an individual and a nation. Following Haejin’s explanation about how she got to know about my personal information before I shared it, Gouba started to talk about how my case was different, compared to theirs. He explained: “I can proudly tell my friends in Myanmar that I married a Korean women. ... It is okay for me if Haejin doesn’t say she married a guy from Myanmar. She might be looked down upon by others because my country is not wealthy.” He also tried to further demonstrate his point by describing how international marriages could change someone’s social status: “In Myanmar, if a woman marries an American or Korean man, her social standing changes drastically.”

Here, Gouba was pointing to an idea that there was an intimate relationship between individuals and the socioeconomic standing of their home country. In other words, I read

Gouba's words as saying that marriage-labor immigrants' social status, associated with the economic power of their country of origin, influenced how they are positioned in Korean society. In conjunction with Gouba's difficult experiences at work because he was a "foreigner" from Myanmar, as he put it, I started considering what this individual-nation connection might produce in marriage-labor immigrants' relationships with their Korean family members.

Family Relationships and Power Dynamics:

The Relationship between Individuals and Nations

To understand the ways in which the association between an individual social status and a national economic standing manifests itself in the homes of marriage-labor immigrant families, I revisited this discourse during the interview carried out in 2014. Particularly in the context of the challenges Sabai was having with her Korean husband, I tested my hypothesis by asking Gouba and Haejin whether the difficulties Sabai and her husband were having might be because Korean people had a tendency of looking down on marriage-labor immigrants from countries with lower socioeconomic status, such as Myanmar:

MinSoo: Among the things you [Gouba] told me last year—you shared that if your passport was a different color or of a different nationality, maybe you would have been treated differently. Do you think things might be different in your sister's case as well?

Haejin: Not from Myanmar, but from another developed country—

MinSoo: Yes, what if she was American or Japanese, for example.

Haejin: If your brother-in-law, your sister was American—

Gouba: You can look at it this way. I have a lot of [Korean] friends. Someone married a woman from Vietnam, and others married women from the Philippines and Thailand. I know a lot of people from Southeast Asia. Women are foreigners, and their husbands are Korean. The age gap is like between a daughter and a father. When I look at the women, I honestly feel bad for them. ... They are with old middle-aged men, while they are 20 years old. You can have a lot of fun when you are in your twenties. In those situations, your husband is like your father.

Haejin: Well, that's that, but the question is—you know there were some problems between your sister and her husband. If your sister had a Myanmar citizenship, even though she is a naturalized Korean citizen now. In this circumstance, if she was from a developed country, like the United States or Japan, maybe the problem would have been different.

MinSoo: Maybe attitudes?

Haejin: Attitudes or behaviors.

Gouba: If you look at it that way, I don't think my brother-in-law would have done that.

I am sure he would talk with my sister so nicely if that were the case. Myanmar is looked down upon all the time. Company owners asked me, how many people are holding cell phones outside of this company? They don't know about my country that much. ... They don't know. They don't know Burma. ... My sister and I came from the lower level. You know, ... the attitude changes.

I find it interesting how Gouba named “women from Southeast Asia” as the population associated with marriage-labor immigration to Korea because it suggests that Gouba, as a marriage-labor immigrant himself, was fully aware of the circulating discourses about the demographic changes in contemporary Korea. Gouba quickly slipped into talking about Southeast Asian people he

knew, marriage-labor immigrant women as he implied. Then, he voiced his discomfort about their families because the marriage-labor immigrant wives were significantly younger than their Korean husbands.

Even though Haejin redirected Gouba's comments soon after he started responding to my question, I believe that what Gouba shared about the age gap was highly relevant to the question about how marriage-labor immigrants are implicated in the status of their home country at home and in the local communities. When Gouba talked about how he felt bad for marriage-labor immigrant wives he knew, I understood Gouba's words to imply that when nationality is not a strength or an attractive attribute, the large age gap is used as leverage for marriage.

After Haejin asked my question again, Gouba shared more directly how his sister would have been treated differently by her husband. Acknowledging Korean people's lack of knowledge about Myanmar, he implied that if Myanmar were a more powerful and well-known country, Korean people's attitude towards him would also have been different. Compared to Korea, Myanmar meant a "lower level" country.

My understanding here is that the pervasive cultural discourse of "Koreanness," which marginalizes those who come from a lesser-known country with lower socioeconomics, is intimately entangled with the rapid increase of the marriage-labor immigrant population in Korea. Namely, discourses about the Korean national cultural identity demote the position of marriage-labor immigrants in Korean society by associating them with the economic standing of their home country.

Haejin, who was listening to her husband intently, followed up Gouba's words by approaching my question from a different perspective. Haejin's perspective further complicated my interpretation of Gouba's words by providing an alternative viewpoint:

It's not communicated explicitly, but I saw many times how Korean people looked down on Sabai, in how they acted and things like that. They just look down on her. If I see

how a conversation goes on [between Sabai and others]—she is not an active person.

Because of her personal traits, maybe others have even more tendency to neglect her—I am not sure how you can judge that, but I think this is kind of complicated. Rather than treating someone differently because of where he or she is from, in my brother-in-law's eyes, as a man, he wants her to take care of the children well and nurture them, but the situation was that she could not do that well. If she is compared with others these days, well, even at that time, even if someone is a foreigner, you don't just do nothing while saying, 'Well, I am someone that needs help.' Things have changed a lot these days. Even in Korea, there are a lot of opportunities for learning and guidance through human resources agencies for women, family support centers, and multicultural support center—systems like that. But when I see Sabai, I feel sad because you can use those opportunities well, but she has a tendency of wanting to stay home. If we keep telling her, that sounds like nagging. When Gouba talks to her, since they can talk in the same language, he put it “hey sister, you need to learn” like that. Indirectly. Today's society requires learning.

As Haejin herself pointed out, navigating the relationship between an individual and a country is certainly a difficult one to decipher. Having witnessed how Gouba and Sabai were treated by Korean people, Haejin identified with Gouba in one hand, mentioning how the country of origin can be a label that worked against marriage-labor immigrants. She had noticed implicit signs that communicated to her that Korean people did not respect Sabai.

On the other hand, Haejin thought that who Sabai was as a person had contributed to the difficulties she was having with her husband. Even though Haejin acknowledged that she had seen discrimination towards marriage-labor immigrants because of their nationalities, she pointed out simultaneously how Sabai might not have met her Korean husband's expectations of being a “good wife,” and this was a contributing factor:

Everyone wants the house kept clean, things like that, you know? But she would pile up dirty dishes. In a situation where she needed to feed her children, but she would say, 'I can't cook.' It's not 'I can't do it'—there are a lot of places that teach her how to do things if she wants to learn.

As Haejin shared, I have no doubt that individual traits significantly influence the relationship between a husband and a wife. Nevertheless, based on what Haejin and Gouba shared throughout the interviews, I interpret that the role that the nationality of the marriage-labor immigrant plays is still significant. Gouba acknowledged how his brother-in-law would have spoken to his sister Sabai nicely if she had come from a different country than Myanmar. Haejin saw Korean people neglecting Sabai and looking down on her, even though the bias was not explicitly communicated. The perceived inferiority of Gouba and Sabai as marriage-labor immigrants from Myanmar influenced their daily lives in many significant ways (Freeman, 2005). The husband-wife relationship and the social interaction in the local community were two concrete examples that demonstrate the challenges Gouba and Sabai face on a daily basis.

Walking Back

In 2015, as Haejin and I were talking, walking, and eating together in the neighborhood, we spent a substantial part of a day together. Because this last interview went beyond merely talking while sitting at a table across from one another, as in a traditional interview setting, this particular encounter might have differently influenced our rapport. Compared to the previous two interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014, the boundary between a researcher-informant relationship and a friendship felt much more blurred in the last interview. Over the course of four hours, I unceasingly moved back and forth on a relational continuum between being a researcher and a friend. After hearing how Haejin and Sumi would walk together at a playing field of a

nearby school as a part of their relationship building activities, I thought that walking down busy streets together on a windy afternoon might have been more than my seeking out opportunities to hear Haejin's stories in another context.

At the end of the interview, Haejin walked me back to the subway station as Gouba and she had done the year before. Walking with Haejin towards the subway station after re-experiencing a part of Pyeongju, I noticed that the neighborhood seemed different than what I remembered. After dusk in 2014, the lights from moving cars and open shops came across as busy and hectic. Unfamiliar roads and street signs dazed me even more. When I walked with Haejin the following year, the neighborhood still felt vibrant, but not as frenzied. The trust in my companion, who was familiar with the surroundings, and my continuing relationship with her might have given me another perspective from which to experience the city.

Some of the stories told during the interviews also affected how I perceived marriage-labor immigrant parents. Since I started my research about marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea a few years ago, I have repeatedly heard from news coverage, television programs, and interviews that I conducted with Korean natives that the marriage-labor immigrant population in Korea is disadvantaged, vulnerable, and even threatening. Yet the stories from the perspectives of marriage-labor immigrant parents, who were also exposed to the daunting discourses that portray a partial account of their lives, allowed me to broaden my view of how marriage-labor immigrants might understand and interpret their own experiences.

The sense of pride that marriage-labor immigrants have concerning their journey in Korea as a land of opportunity has changed how I relate to them. Some of the marriage-labor immigrant parents I spoke with were not afraid to challenge the preconceptions of Korean people by initiating personal relationships with the Koreans. Others refused to partake in events that might reinforce stereotypes about marriage-labor immigrants in Korea. Navigating various discourses in Korea that were simultaneously intimate to and distant from their everyday life

experiences, marriage-labor immigrant parents defamiliarized the cultural discourses that were familiar to many Korean people through our shared time, space, and conversations.

Gouba and Sabai, as marriage-labor immigrant parents, and Haejin, as a Korean spouse to a marriage-labor immigrant, shared with me the complexities of the discourses they navigated on a daily basis over the course of the two years. Their insider perspectives provided a new insight onto the dominant discourses about marriage-labor immigration in Korea. Experiencing preconceptions about marriage-labor immigrants at work, home, and school, Haejin and Gouba's family negotiated their everyday lives with much fervor. The ways in which they navigated the tension between multiple conflicting and contradictory discourses did not necessarily replace the pre-existing discourses. Their stories, however, made visible how marriage-labor immigrant families made sense of cultural discourses of mothering.

Chapter 5

Myungsoo

Entering into Echoing Voices

In 2015, as I walked down the hallway to the Chungsun multicultural family support center offices, I heard two voices echoing in the empty hallway from the director's office—it was my informant Myungsoo talking with the director of the center. The closer I drew to the center's offices, the stronger became the memory of the first interview, conducted in 2013. Curious as to what had changed and had remained the same, I reviewed the questions asked in the initial interview a year ago. How did you start working at the center? What kinds of programs do you offer at the center? What are some of the programs you provide for children from marriage-labor immigrant families? As I was approaching the main office door, I continued going through the potential questions that I had brought with me in my mind.

When I walked into the main office of the center, someone asked me what had brought me to the office. "I am here to see Myungsoo. I will wait for him since I don't want to interrupt the meeting he is having." About 10 minutes passed, and Myungsoo walked into the main office in hasty steps. "Oh, hi. Could you wait for a minute?" He continued walking to his desk with a small pile of paperwork in his hand. Just as in the first encounter in 2013, Myungsoo seemed very busy. Making a phone call and looking through a pile of paperwork simultaneously, he was juggling many tasks. "How many voices, stories, and relationships does Myungsoo manage each day?" I thought.

Myungsoo's Story

Myungsoo works at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center in Hamshin, South Korea. This support center is different from other support centers in that the social workers from this center travel to the remote regions where immigrant families in need live. The employees at the center are mostly women, including the director, and Myungsoo is one of the few male employees. This positioned him as an “expert” father or mentor at times, providing opportunities to share his experiences in efforts to support fathers from marriage-labor immigrant families.

When I visited the center for the first time in 2013 to interview Minh and Juan, neither of whom worked at the center in 2015, I interviewed Myungsoo, chief of staff, as the center director was away on a business trip. As a father of two, Myungsoo has worked at the multicultural family support center since the center opened in 2010. “I had worked at a large company for about 10 years, but didn’t adapt to it very well. Then, I heard that they were recruiting staff for this center, and so I applied for it. Because there is ‘multicultural’ family within my extended family, I had a good overall understanding about the issue [around marriage-labor immigrant families].” During my second interview with Myungsoo, I learned that his cousin married a Vietnamese woman.

The complexity of the ways in which marriage-labor immigrant parents, especially mothers, negotiate discourses of mothering affect those around them—both Koreans and immigrants—in multifaceted ways. Myungsoo’s story, from the perspective of a Korean social worker who worked closely with marriage-labor immigrant families, provided another way to approach and understand how marriage-labor immigrant parents accept, resist, and transform discourses of mothering to navigate their lifeworlds. Besides his professional experience,

Myungsoo was also uniquely positioned due to a personal connection with his cousin, and the cousin's marriage-labor immigrant wife from Vietnam.

Looking for Marriage-labor Immigrant Men in Policies

Whether Korean people appreciate the change or not, it is indisputable that the marriage-labor immigrant population increased exponentially in the past two decades, becoming a permanent part of Korean society (Lim, 2010). The traditional cultural values that affirm the Korean national cultural identity are increasingly contested by the actual demographic landscape of contemporary Korea (Lim, 2010). In particular, the Korean government has been grappling with various disparities in its policies towards marriage-labor immigrant families.

One of the discrepancies illustrated in the policies is associated with the gender of marriage-labor immigrants. During the interview conducted in 2013, I inquired about whether there were men who came to Korea as marriage-labor immigrants, noting that throughout the interview Myungsoo was focusing on immigrant women without my asking him to do so. He responded:

The percentage [of marriage-labor immigrant men] is very low [compared to that of marriage-labor immigrant women]. In cases like that [when the husband is a marriage-labor immigrant], there are a lot of high-income families. Because those families are almost in or beyond middle class, they are not included in the marriage-labor immigrants with whom we usually work. Once in a while, there are cases where two foreign laborers meet, get married, and live together. In cases like that, they have legal difficulties. If they have a baby in a situation where one of the parents is undocumented, the baby becomes stateless. Because the Korean law decides someone's nationality based on people [the nationality of parents], there is the difficulty that needs to be resolved.

While Myungsoo said the percentage of marriage-labor immigrant men is “very low,” they actually consist of about a third of the entire marriage-labor immigrant population (Korea National Statistical Office, 2014). Based on Myungsoo’s words, I understood that he rarely worked with marriage-labor immigrant men. The smaller number of the immigrant men and the higher income level of their families made them less likely to become the recipients of the services offered by the Multicultural Family Support Center for which Myungsoo worked.

Resonating with Myungsoo’s words, Kong et al. (2010) criticize the policies implemented by the Korean government as being need-based and ethnicity-based, only providing a temporary remedy to surfacing problems. One of the concerns that emerged from this criticism is how some of the non-Korean population gets left out in the government policies, including marriage-labor immigrant men. In fact, most of what was discussed during my interviews with Myungsoo over the two years pertained to marriage-labor immigrant women, especially mothers. At times, Myungsoo specified that he was talking about “immigrant women,” but it was very rare that he discussed “immigrant men.” As if the term “marriage-labor immigration” in Korea became synonymous with “marriage-labor immigrant women,” the men brought up during the interviews were almost always Korean husbands.

Even though marriage-labor immigrant women were incorporated through a discursive shift within the boundary of “us” and “a family” starting in 2006, “foreign” men were left out in various government policies (Seol, 2008). The current Korean government policies for supporting “multicultural families” do not take into account immigrant laborers, most of whom are men (Hye-young Kim, 2014). Many “foreign” men in Korea are neglected through the dichotomous categorization of marriage-labor immigrants and immigrant laborers, and consequently are being excluded from support policies and programs for marriage-labor immigrants. For instance, the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare entirely excluded immigrant workers and their families in

discussions and negotiations that led to the Support for Multicultural Families Act in 2008 (Yuk, 2011).

In the context of cultural beliefs about patriarchal lineage founded in Confucius traditions, the exclusion of “foreign” men can be seen as purposeful and even intentional. Rather than trying to promote the diversity that already exists in the country, government policies selectively focus on Korean ethnic ties and family-oriented approaches, risking the possibility of overlooking the benefits that non-Korean people bring to Korea. The tension demonstrated in the existing disparities within policies and programs for the immigrant population in Korea makes visible the ethnicity-based approach the Korean government is taking on policy legislation and implementation. The limits of identifying different types of immigrants to Korea also necessitate an explicit acknowledgement of the roles gender and socioeconomics play in the phenomenon, while intersecting with race and ethnicity. This will create room for considering not who and what the immigrants are, but in what ways they influence and transform Korean society.

A Sense of Autonomy

During the interview carried out in 2014, Myungsoo discussed that the multicultural family support center he worked for was implementing new programs to help immigrant women become more autonomous in their own neighborhoods. The year before, Myungsoo shared his opinion about the need for a centralized policy and support system to avoid wasting resources by having multiple institutions offer the same type of assistance for marriage-labor immigrant families. Since then, the need to support local voices had been newly recognized by the Korean government. He explained that as the national policies were moving away from an assimilationist approach to a more diversity embracing approach, there were increasingly more efforts to empower the marriage-labor immigrants, especially women, to become independent by bringing

them up as leaders in local communities. With the goal of giving a sense of autonomy, Myungsoo and his coworkers organized opportunities for marriage-labor immigrants to volunteer for the local community, engage in discussions, and report discriminatory aspects in Korean society.

Interestingly, the goal of the new programs to promote marriage-labor immigrants' autonomy contrasted drastically with how they and their spouses were portrayed during other parts of the same interview and the follow up interview. Perceived as a purchased commodity by Korean family members from the "international marriage market," marriage-labor immigrants are positioned under the expectations to "pay back," by fulfilling cultural expectations of being a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Myungsoo explained how this deprived marriage-labor immigrants of their sense of autonomy over their own lives:

In the cases [of marriage-labor immigration] where money is involved, there is the monetary calculation behind [a Korean man's] decision [to get married to a marriage-labor immigrant], taking into account how he, his parents and his friends have invested their money in the marriage. Then there are only two things [that are expected by the Korean family]. The marriage-labor immigrant needs to pay it back. The marriage-labor immigrant, as a part of the family, lives together with the family, provides a good support, makes good food, works on the farm together, and takes care of house chores. There are these kinds of basic expectations.

The phrases Myungsoo used, such as "monetary calculation" and "the need to pay the money back," complicate the ways marriage-labor immigrant families are perceived as a "family." What Myungsoo was explaining resembled a monetary transaction, purchasing goods and expecting them to fulfill the expectations the buyers had before the purchase, rather than a family relationship. This makes it easy for marriage-labor immigrants to be in a position where they have to "offer" products or services in exchange for the money in which the Korean family

invested. In this sense, it is even debatable whether the immigrants can be seen as “a part of the family,” or whether they perceive themselves to belong to the family. This expectation to “pay back” also makes it difficult for the immigrants to be autonomous, voice their feelings or pursue independence, for they feel indebted to their Korean family.

Marriage-labor immigration to Korea involves a monetary means when matchmaking companies are involved in mitigating the process. For instance, the International Organization for Migration reported that Korean men who wanted to marry a Cambodian woman pay up to 20,000 dollars to a matchmaking company, and about 1,000 dollars go to the family of their Cambodian bride (G. Park, 2008). When money is involved, Korean family members expect that in return for their payment, their needs will be fulfilled. This positions marriage-labor immigrant women from so called “third world countries” as commodities, similar to natural resources like gold, ivory, and rubber (Constable, 2009; Hochschild, 2003).

Myungsoo explained the desire of Korean family members to see their marriage-labor immigrant family member become Korean quickly as a means to overcome one’s sense of vulnerability. Having had to turn to the “international marriage market” to find a spouse is perceived as undesirable. From a deficit perspective, the prevalent assumption is that the Korean man was not an attractive enough candidate, and that is the reason he could not marry a Korean woman. Rather than thinking that this person loved his or her spouse, people easily assume that “he got the closest option to a Korean woman he could get.” As a substitute for a Korean spouse, what marriage-labor immigrants bring with them go unacknowledged.

Myungsoo also shared during both the 2014 and 2015 interviews that some marriage-labor immigrants got married and moved to Korea because their parents wanted them to and/or they wanted to seize an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status (Kawaguchi & Lee, 2011). For these reasons, problems in marriage occur because the marriage-labor immigrants never took ownership in this process. Likewise, some of the Korean spouses, particularly

husbands who got married because of the pressure they receive from their families, society, and the culture, did not feel a sense of responsibility to maintain the relationship and protect the family. “Mama boys,” as Myungsoo referred to them, passed on their problems to his family members and/or blamed others when problems arose between them and their wives. In essence, neither side committed to a marriage out of love, but rather, it was arranged due to cultural, economic, and family needs.

In the current context of marriage-labor immigration in Korea, the immigrants’ spouses, in-laws, or parents back home seem to exercise a strong influence on marriage-labor immigrants’ lives. Empowering marriage-labor immigrants and their Korean spouses in the midst of these conflicting cultural narratives, the center Myungsoo worked for was trying to produce leaders among marriage-labor immigrants by building their sense of competence. The tension between the discourses about marriage-labor immigrants (and their spouses) and endeavors to equip them to partake in another discourse about themselves was demonstrated in my conversations with Myungsoo through the conflicting narratives he shared.

Similarly, the inconsistency between the policy rhetoric that promotes diversity and the policy goal to assimilate differences into mainstream Korean culture has been pointed out as an example that demonstrates the on-going tension between the co-existing discourses in an axiological conflict in contemporary Korea (Olneck, 2011). For instance, unlike the language used in a number of policies and support programs by many government branches (including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, and the Korean Educational Development Institute), monoculturalism serves as the underlying principle, assuming that children with different cultural backgrounds are in need of programs that will improve the children’s Korean language skills and help them adjust to Korean cultural norms (Y. Lee, 2013b).

Double Standards: The “West” and the “Multicultural”

The ways in which marriage-labor immigrant parents navigate and negotiate cultural discourses become even more complicated with the double standards used to situate “non-Koreanness” in Korean society. Explaining how Korean people have affinity for “Western (i.e. White)” culture, Myungsoo confidently stated that Korean extended family members of marriage-labor immigrant families would treat Korean or Western daughter-in-laws much differently than how they would treat marriage-labor immigrants. He said, “they [the Korean in-laws] would put them [Korean or White daughter-in-laws] on pedestals.” Later in the interview, he reiterated his point: “As I mentioned earlier, if the daughter-in-law is Korean, or White, then could they [Korean in-laws] treat her like that? They will serve her, in reverse.”

Myungsoo explained that the extended family members of marriage-labor immigrant families often put demands on the marriage-labor immigrants, especially those from Southeast Asian countries, requiring them to fit in to the Korean cultural norms. He elaborated that the Korean family members’ expectation for marriage-labor immigrants to perform successfully as “Korean” is “to minimize their sense of embarrassment about marrying a foreign woman.” Here, “foreign” denoted more meaning than non-Korean. In other words, Korean family members would not want the immigrants to confirm the negative stereotypes about Koreans who marry non-Koreans, particularly when marriage-labor immigrants are from countries with a “lower status.”

The disparities between how the “West” and the “multicultural” are perceived are stark in Korean society. Idealizing and fetishizing the “West” and the English language, the “Westerners” are assumed to be more sophisticated and from a higher class than Koreans (Lo & Kim, 2011). Contrasted with the “*perceived* lower-class status” of marriage-labor immigrants from Southeast Asian countries (Freeman, 2005, p. 97, emphasis in original), the “Westerners” are given higher

social status by the virtue of their home country. This double standard reveals that the marginalization marriage-labor immigrants and their children frequently experience is not merely because they are different from Korean people. Rather, the perceived power relationship between Korea and Southeast Asian countries was in effect.

Myungsoo added to his earlier statement by saying that there is a stronger patriarchy and hierarchy reinforced in marriage-labor immigrant families. In this sense, marriage-labor immigrants are expected to fulfill “higher expectations than Korean women [as a daughter in law],” based on the traditional values based on a Confucius ideals. This also means that whether or not marriage-labor immigrants had a higher education level and more economic ambition than their Korean spouses, marriage-labor immigrants are expected to fulfill the discourse of a submissive “Korean” wife, without doubting the opportunity to live in the better environment of a wealthier country (Freeman, 2005; T. Lim, 2010). The way in which marriage-labor immigrants are read in Korean society functions as a justification for imposing this “outmoded conception of husband-wife relations” and arguably an outmoded discourse of mothering (T. Lim, 2010).

This example of imposing double standards on those perceived to be “different” illustrate that the ways in which Korean and non-Korean members relate to each other are not necessarily rooted in individuals and their differences. Rather, the sociocultural perception of marriage-labor immigrants’ status plays a key role. Myungsoo’s example of marriage-labor immigrant daughter-in-laws being treated differently compared to their Korean or White counterparts illustrate how Korean society selectively decides what kind of “differences” imposes a threat to the Korean national cultural identity.

Fulfilling Existing Discourses: Balancing Mother-Child Relationship and Work

As we were discussing the programs run by the center that supported children from marriage-labor immigrant families, Myungsoo shared his concerns about how some mothers chose to work rather than spend quality time with their children. During the interview in 2013, he had similarly expressed how sad he felt when seeing marriage-labor immigrant mothers who did not spend enough time with their children. Marriage-labor immigrants choosing financial opportunities as their priority would have consequences in their children's lives, he explained:

The relationship between a mother and a child is really important in immigrant families for the children's development and wellbeing. I feel sad that some [marriage-labor immigrant] mothers choose the opportunities to make money by engaging in seasonal labor in their town, even though they could spend the time with their children.

He was clear in expressing his concerns about the influence the lack of a mothers' presence might have on the children from marriage-labor immigrant families. Myungsoo's words also resonated with the prevalent concerns about the academic achievement and emotional development of the children from marriage-labor immigrant families (Youngdal Cho, 2011). Particularly, the educational disparities between children from marriage-labor immigrant families and Korean families were often discussed as one of the key problems in policy documents and media (Y.-K. Choi et al., 2011; Youngdal Cho, 2011).

His comments led me to think whether he would also advocate that Korean working mothers should spend more time with their children. Even though the context of our conversation was explicitly about marriage-labor immigrant families, Myungsoo specified the scope of his words by articulating how the mother-child relationship is "really important in *immigrant* families." I also understood his words as implicitly voicing a preference for traditional stay-at-home moms over working moms, as he emphasized the role that mothers play in the development

of young children. Back in the 2013 interview, Myungsoo did not bring up the role of fathers in raising children, which brought to the forefront the issue of gender in parenting in Korean society. In 2014, when I brought up the some of the marriage-labor immigrant informants' comments about the pressure mothers experience in their responsibility as the primary caretakers, he acknowledged that the role of mothers in children's education was often emphasized over the role of a father in Korea. Positioning fathers as breadwinners of the family and mothers as caretakers, the circulating beliefs and practices of mothering in Korean society culturally confined the role of marriage-labor immigrants within the limits of their home (H. Lee, 2012). In what ways does the perspective of marriage-labor immigrant parents differ from what Myungsoo articulated during the interview?

Interestingly, the sense of responsibility as parents, from the viewpoint of marriage-labor immigrants themselves, was deeply intertwined with their desire to be economically competent. This directly contrasted with the expectations on marriage-labor immigrant mothers to attend to the traditional discourse of a Korean mother, as it was demonstrated in Myungsoo's words. I know from talking with many marriage-labor immigrant informants in the past three years that they strongly wanted to work and contribute to their family's finances, even though their language skills and availability might restrict the types of jobs they can have, or the work opportunities themselves. Some of the marriage and immigrants who participated in the interview shared that their inflexible schedule due to the responsibilities of child rearing and their limited Korean language skills did not allow them to get even a part-time job. Employment seemed to be constantly on the minds of marriage-labor immigrant parents, considering the number of times money, work, and family finances were brought up. Considering that many husbands of marriage-labor immigrant women did not have well paying jobs (N.-K. Kim, 2009; Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008), seeking opportunities to become a dual income family might not be an option but rather a necessity for survival.

The dissonance between the responsibility of caring for their children (as well as the expectation that such care will be a priority) and the intense desire to work opens up a space of discussion. In particular, I would like point out how children's well-being is positioned as the opportunity cost for employment seems to trouble some people, and vice versa. The notion that mothers are the ones to care for and educate children, rather than the ones who are providing financially, is still prevalent in the larger Korean society (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008). Nevertheless, many Korean women in contemporary Korea choose to work, despite the childcare challenge. Some solutions they employ include having fewer or no children (J. Hwang, 2009), asking their parents to help (Kwon, 2014), and hiring nannies, many of whom are Korean Chinese women (Bijeuallaiteam, 2015; T.-J. Kim, 2013). Yet, the strong societal expectation of marriage-labor immigrant mothers in Korean society should conduct themselves made me think that something is amiss. Moreover, at the preschool at which I used to work in the United States, the youngest child enrolled in the infant classroom was six weeks old. If I follow the logic of the discourses that Myungsoo ascribed to during the 2013 interview, does it mean that I should feel bad about that child because the mother went to work after putting the baby in childcare?

In 2014, Myungsoo mentioned that after the Korean government began providing financial support for childcare to marriage-labor immigrant families in 2012—regardless of household income level—there were even more marriage-labor immigrant mothers who joined the workforce. He was concerned that after the support policy was implemented, more and more marriage-labor immigrant mothers focused on work opportunities. As Myungsoo shared his thoughts about the importance of mothers spending quality time in children's development, he felt unsettled about the possible outcome of the government's support of childcare—marriage-labor immigrant mothers spending less time with their children, which would negatively influence the children.

This same policy was also discussed from Haejin and Sabai's perspectives as recipients in chapter four. By allowing marriage-labor immigrants to take classes or join the workforce, the support policy provided Sabai and other marriage-labor immigrants with opportunities for learning and making contributions to family finances. Haejin was especially appreciative that children from marriage-labor immigrant families were able to receive an equal education compared with children from two Korean parent families. I understood Haejin's statement, especially the phrase "equal education" as implying that many children with two Korean parents are enrolled in childcare programs. A number of media reports have criticized the problems of the private education market for young children in Korea (S.-M. Kim & Youn, 2013; H.-K. Shin, 2014). According to The Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE), in 2013 80% of children in Korea under five attended preschools or kindergartens (considered public education), 30% studied using home-study materials, 10% attend private cram schools for supplementary lessons (H.-K. Shin, 2014). This statistics indicated that some children were participating in both public and private education. If Korean children are already spending a lot of time away from home and attending extra classes, why is it continuously emphasized that children from marriage-labor immigrants need to spend time with their mothers?

During the last interview conducted in 2015, Myungsoo referred to a family as the fundamental foundation for the well-being of children. Regardless of how much support children from marriage-labor immigrants receive from a "multicultural" family support center, Myungsoo was sure that children would not prosper without the parents' care:

Because the welfare policy is very low-level [in Korea], even if the "multicultural" centers diligently support the families, the children need to be raised with their mom and dad's love. The children don't succeed because the workers at the "multicultural" center work hard. It is like a house of cards [because children don't receive enough attention from home]. There is no use for fertilizer because the roots are weak.

Throughout the conversations, Myungsoo consistently articulated his position of emphasizing parents' (particularly mothers') role in children's growth. The complexity of the discourses of mothering, entangled with the need to work, exhibited itself throughout my conversations with Myungsoo. The issues of gender role, different expectations, and private education gave me an insight into some of the contradictions and dissonances among various beliefs and practices about mothering in Korea. The simplistic causal connection between marriage-labor immigrants who are mothers and their children's poor academic achievement and emotional well-being is problematized through this examination.

Navigating Expectations, Needs, and Desires

The above discussion with Myungsoo about the immigrants contending with two oppositional discourses about mothering and working is just one instance of the tension around the expectations on the immigrant mothers that emerged throughout my fieldwork and ethnographic interviews. To see the two conflicting discourses of mothering only in a dichotomous relationship is to miss the complexity in how they function in the context of contemporary Korea with rapidly transforming demographics. The tension between mothering and working cannot be easily separated from cultural discourses about marriage-labor immigrants.

As this issue was discussed in the first two interviews with Myungsoo, as well as interviews with other informants, I came to believe that the tension between mothering and working is a topic in which various stakeholders are deeply invested. Many policies and programs seem to be interceding in this area of the lives of marriage-labor immigrants as well (M. Kim, 2010). So, why are marriage-labor immigrants in the spotlight when they work or want to work? When compared with Korean working mothers, the working immigrant mothers seemed to be causing much more tension in their homes. To explore this tension further, I brought my

questions to Myungsoo during the interview conducted in 2015 to see how he made sense of the two coalescing discourses:

MinSoo: One thing that I continue to think about is—those who work. A lot of Korean moms contribute to the household income because they work. It seems like the perspective on “multicultural” families, or immigrant women who work is different, compared to how people perceive Korean women. I am not sure how to understand this.

Myungsoo: It is like a coin with two sides. If you don’t go out [to work,] it is getting harder and harder to make a living. The husband is getting old, and the income is decreasing. But the spending is increasing because the children are getting older. That’s their [marriage-labor immigrants’] initial goal when coming to Korea. They want to make money, and they want to see their parents live like human beings. There are more than a few cases where the immigrant women came with the heart of Simcheong [the main character of a Korean folk story who sacrifices herself in the ocean for her father].

This conversation presented more than the two sides of a coin as Myungsoo started off his comment. First, he spoke of the necessity of the financial activity, addressing the needs of both Korean and marriage-labor immigrant families. To meet their own and their immediate family’s needs in Korea, marriage-labor immigrants needed to work.

Marriage-labor immigrants’ self-sacrifice for the well-being of their parents was suggested as the second explanation of why marriage-labor immigrants’ wanted to work.

Myungsoo also noted that the opportunity to be a part of the workforce and help their parents back home was another motivation that led marriage-labor immigrants to move to Korea.

Introducing a famous Korean folk story that celebrates children’s filial duty to their parents,

Myungsoo made the point that this was not uncommon; there already was an existing cultural

discourse that honor's children's sacrifice to serve the parents. This also demonstrated the significance of marriage-labor immigrants' decision, which came with a social pressure for marriage-labor immigrants to contribute to their parents' finances. There was a cultural expectation that the parents' living conditions would improve, and to save the "face" of their parents in their community, marriage-labor immigrants needed to make a difference in their parents' home.

The need and pressure to make money, doubled with the cultural significance of financially supporting one's parents, opened the gate to family problems, at times leading to conflicts or even a divorce. Some Korean spouses and their marriage-labor immigrant partner could not come to an agreement and overcome the differing expectations about the marriage and what came out of the marriage. Myungsoo continued to explain:

If not, people say, "what did you do? You send your daughter off for a marriage. Did you sell your daughter off, and you are living like a beggar?" The parents [of marriage-labor immigrants] are misunderstood like that. So there are many cases of the couples splitting apart, breaking up, and divorcing, because marriage-labor immigrants want to give a financial support to their parents [and their Korean spouses disagree]. There are a lot of cases where marriage-labor immigrants run away from home [in Korea]. After some time passes, and they have their own children, the couple tries to make a living. Then you know what problem emerges? During this time when children are sensitive and need love, the mothers work over time until late at night, because the money is big, because they get paid 1.5 times of the regular pay. Then there is no mother's care, even though mothers are the primary caregivers. Then children are disturbed emotionally, and there are children who are autistic, even though they don't have autism. What is it called? ADHD? There are children who can't concentrate. My nephew has some tendency of that. So, I don't think that's a normal environment for raising children, in cases like that.

The questions Myungsoo posed, in which the parents' neighbor talks about selling a child into a marriage, troubled me. If you expect something in exchange for the cost you paid, wouldn't that be more like a financial transaction? The way Myungsoo explained the cultural expectation gave me an impression that marriage-labor immigrants were regarded as their parents' financial property, similar to an investment.

The third discourse he used to explore my question reiterated the tension between seizing the employment opportunity to "make a living" and meeting children's needs. Positioned as "interfering" or "competing" with raising children, the economic activity of marriage-labor immigrants, particularly the mothers, was seen as dangerous and even detrimental to a child's upbringing. This was similar to previous interviews, in which Myungsoo often emphasized the importance of the role of mothers as the primary caregiver.

Putting the blame on marriage-labor immigrant mothers for their children's acquired "learning disabilities" was a disturbingly familiar discourse. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources (2006), as well as Cho (2006) and Kang (2010), point out how marriage-labor immigrants' lack of language skills impedes their children's language development. In particular, the Educational Support for Children from Multicultural Backgrounds, 2006, associated low academic performance, emotional disturbance and learning disabilities with language development:

Children from women immigrants tend to have a disadvantage in Korean language development and adaptation, as their early years are spent with mothers who also lack in these abilities. Naturally many students experience difficulties in keeping up with school studies, suffer from excessive emotional negativism, and even show signs of violence and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (p. 6).

This example demonstrates the attitude of Korean society towards mothering, emphasizing the influence of mothers on the children's learning, social relationships, and well-being much more

than other possible factors, including other family members, the local community, and media. In this cultural context, marriage-labor immigrant mothers grappling between financial needs and childcare responsibilities are easily positioned as not being “good” mothers. If they spend time with caring for their children, their lack of language skills construct them as inadequate mothers, and if they spend time at work, they are perceived as negligent mothers.

Myungsoo complicated his explanation even further by addressing the desires of marriage-labor immigrants as individuals and women. Many marriage-labor immigrants that attended the programs Myungsoo and his coworkers taught were in their twenties. As marriage-labor immigrants see others spend money, Myungsoo mentioned that they wanted to do so as well:

Immigrant women attend the programs [offered by the Multicultural Family Support Center] diligently for about two years, during pregnancy and the beginning of the childbirth process. But as soon as their kids to go preschool, the mothers go to a factory—a factory! The mothers feel envious when they see their friends buy pretty things and put on make-up using the money they make. It is a woman’s mentality. But the reason we can’t say they can’t do that is, because the immigrant women are still young. There are a lot of people around their mid-twenties. They are younger than how old you [MinSoo] are now. But their babies are already two, three years old. Guess what they want to do—they buy pretty clothes, stuff like that. So there are a lot of things that are difficult to say, “this is right.” When I see the child, I wish that the mom didn’t work too much, or at least not so much as to be difficult on the child. But from an immigrant woman’s perspective, if she says “my husband won’t be able to work later [since he is older and will retire sooner], so I need to make money when I can.” I have nothing to say to that. Because of the financial problem, eventually because of the financial problem, it turns into a vicious cycle—a vicious cycle.

The kinds of employment opportunities marriage-labor immigrants can have are limited. As Myungsoo noted, many of them engage in simple labor at a factory, or take jobs that Korean people avoid (Kong et al., 2010). The way in which Myungsoo perceived young women's desires to shop and adorn themselves was used to make sense of why marriage-labor immigrants put themselves in the factories. When he repeated the word "factory" twice, with much added emphasis, I took it as he meant to say, "They are willing to take such low-level jobs to get what they want." The marriage-labor immigrants as individuals, within the limited opportunities they had, were perceived to be finding ways to fulfill their own aspirations, even when the approach was not considered as desirable from a Korean perspective.

Lastly, Myungsoo explained that marriage-labor immigrants also grounded their reason to work in their future needs. About one half of marriage-labor immigrant families live at or below the poverty line (Youngdal Cho, 2006). Taking the responsibility of supporting the family when the husbands are older, marriage-labor immigrants needed to fulfill the role of a breadwinner. Even though Myungsoo articulated the need for marriage-labor immigrant mothers to spend time with their children, he could not dispute the efforts to meet their own financial need. Acknowledging this, he shared that their tight finances have implications in many areas including raising children, which leads to one problem after another in "a vicious cycle."

A number of factors, including age, gender, social relationships, and socioeconomic standing, play important roles in explaining the tension as marriage-labor immigrants navigate the space between mothering and working. Myungsoo pointed out the various needs and desires of marriage-labor immigrant parents, particularly mothers, using multiple discourses. As Myungsoo noted at the end of his comment, it is a grey area with unclear boundaries and heightened tension. Caught between conflicting desires and responsibilities, marriage-labor immigrants contend with various cultural bonds as an individual, parent, spouse, child, employee, and community member.

The attempts to understand how they navigated and negotiated the existing discourses needed much more than a linear explanation.

Going Along to the Field

In 2015, I went along for a day with Myungsoo and three other staff members from the family support center to a nearby rural town, where they offer classes to marriage-labor immigrants and to a local elementary school. On this chilly spring day, no one expected anything out of the ordinary. All the necessary supplies were safely packed in bags, the bus driver moved the vehicle to a nearby parking lot, and everyone was on time. Once people got on the bus with all the bags, the driver said urgently in a troubled voice: “Something is wrong. The bus is not moving.”

“This can’t be happening. We don’t have the budget to deal with this.” Frustrated, Myungsoo started making some phone calls, trying to figure out what to do. Because one of the main tasks of the center was to provide services in remote areas, being able to travel is absolutely essential for the staff. When I was wondering whether I needed to come back on another day to shadow Myungsoo, one of Myungsoo’s coworkers volunteered to use her own car. After a few minutes of worry and disarray, we were finally on the road, though later than the plan. On the way to the destination for the day, Myungsoo continued talking on the phone, trying to make arrangements for the repair and keep the center’s main office posted about the situation.

As we were driving through unfamiliar roads adjacent to open fields, Myungsoo shared how the particular vehicle that just broke down was purchased by the center so that the center could run a mobile library program. Myungsoo explained that the program was not offered any more because nearby cities had begun providing similar services. The need for books decreased as books became more generalized in remote communities. Myungsoo believed that marriage-

labor immigrant mothers had become more aware of the importance of books for their children. This led to families and friends sharing books with one another.

Driving through the road in the middle of bare fields filled with wind, Myungsoo and his coworkers chatted about the plan for the day. As I was enjoying the warm sunshine coming through the window, the scenery changed drastically, going from busy multi-lane streets, to highways, to bumpy roads. Government buildings and churches—the largest and newest buildings in the vicinity—caught my eyes, as they seemed randomly sprinkled among the tumbledown houses.

When we arrived at the village of Jinwon, where the class for marriage-labor immigrants was offered, Myungsoo carried a projector that weighed more than 30 pounds, and his coworkers carried a couple of heavily loaded bags on their shoulders. Rearranging the tables and the chairs, Myungsoo and his colleagues prepared to welcome their marriage-labor immigrant students. The two tables located by the entrance way were completely covered with handouts containing language tips and legal information, sign up sheets, newsletters in Vietnamese, information packets, Korean language tests, lyrics of Korean children's songs, and nametags written in Korean. After a quick lunch at a local restaurant, the social workers from the Chungsun Multicultural Family Center were busy welcoming marriage-labor immigrant mothers coming to class with their babies in their arms and hand in hand.

Promoting Bilingualism at Home

“Một hai ba, một hai ba.” It sounded out of place to me. Marriage-labor immigrants, as well as the social workers, were saying out loud, “one two three, one two three,” in Vietnamese while helping their children brush teeth. Did the voices sound out of place because “one two three” was too simple for Vietnamese-speaking adults to repeat multiple times? Or maybe

because everything else in class was taught in Korean? As I was observing the class Myungsoo and his coworkers were teaching I thought about how marriage-labor immigrants might experience the emergent emphasis on bilingualism. If marriage-labor immigrants were aware of the different ways “Koreanness” manifested itself in Korean society, encountering efforts to promote bilingualism might be a perplexing experience.

Nevertheless, recently the Korean government has begun an attempt to take into account needs and wants from the ground level by promoting bilingualism at home, through the use of both Korean and the home language of a marriage-labor immigrant. Furthermore, mothering children in a manner unlike that of Korean parents is now seen as a strength of marriage-labor immigrant families—particularly when language skills are concerned. Policy documents (e.g. see Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006), media reports (S.-H. Lee, 2013), as well as informants I interviewed used the discourse of bilingualism to argue and make space for marriage-labor immigrant families in Korean society. Bilingualism was conceptualized as a tool that benefits individuals, families, and the nation during an era of a global economy with fierce international competition (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

During the go-along interview carried out in 2015, I observed Myungsoo and his coworkers demonstrate to the marriage-labor immigrant mothers how to incorporate their mother tongue when praising their children and doing every day activities, such as washing hands or brushing teeth. Myungsoo explained to me that marriage-labor immigrant families were increasingly encouraged to use the marriage-labor immigrants’ first language at home, using various discourses:

MinSoo: As I am seeing what you do, it helps me understand.

Myungsoo: This is the trend these days. Because the children are growing up, we make it [the programs] fit to that. The concerns immigrant women have, well, it is not

totally appropriate to say that they are immigrant women's concerns in a way, because it is possible that they don't have concerns or they can't have concerns. That's because they can't afford to think about what matters for my children's future. So I feel that the [Korean] Ministry of Family and Gender Equality is trying to fix what they misunderstood.

MinSoo: You mean, the government is addressing what they misunderstood?

Myungsoo: Yes. They all go through trial and error. My nephew [the child of his cousin] is Vietnamese. [The mother] is an immigrant woman. So I told my cousin's wife in passing, "I think it would be okay if kids use Vietnamese starting when they are young," without being convinced about it myself. ... If the child does not speak Korean well enough, my cousin's wife would take the responsibility since the mother is Vietnamese. So they have a tendency to mother using their broken Korean. It is understandable from their perspective. So I could not recommend it to them strongly [to use their mother tongue when communicating with their children]. Recently, the environment is changing that way [encouraging the marriage-labor immigrant mothers to speak their first language], and I also agree.

Myungsoo started by explaining that in the past, marriage-labor immigrants did not have the room to consider how their decisions influence their children years later, because their "survival" in Korean society was a more pressing issue. As the children from marriage-labor immigrants grew older, certain needs and problems were made visible. One of the perceived necessities was using more than the Korean language at home.

Then all of sudden, Myungsoo changed the subject of his explanation from marriage-labor immigrant mothers to the Korean Ministry of Family and Gender Equality, talking about how the Korean government was adjusting their perspective. After I asked a question to clarify

what Myungsoo was talking about, he steered the conversation differently to his “hunch” to tell his cousin’s wife to use Vietnamese with her children, even though there was no official endorsement about promoting bilingualism at home. He also brought up Chinese marriage-labor immigrants as examples who effectively promoted bilingualism at home.

The way Myungsoo navigated through his explanation about the recent surge of bilingualism as a key theme in support programs for marriage-labor immigrant families seemed very confusing at first. His statement did not come across as coherent, even though each piece he mentioned carried significance of its own. Trying to work through what was awry with his words, I approached what Myungsoo’s explanation using contextual information about marriage-labor immigration.

Being aware of the circulating discourses about marriage-labor immigrants provided the first clue in gaining a different perspective on marriage-labor immigrants’ incompetency of which Myungsoo spoke. I had initially understood Myungsoo’s words as meaning that marriage-labor immigrant mothers were preoccupied with their everyday survival, and this prevented them from thinking about their children’s future, implicitly neglecting their own children’s well-being. Then I questioned, would marriage-labor immigrants say this about themselves? From which perspective might this come from? As I discussed earlier in the dissertation, marriage-labor immigrants are frequently framed from a deficit perspective (S. Kang, 2010; M. Lee, 2008). If the Korean government believed that marriage-labor immigrants should not worry simultaneously about both their lives and their children’s lives, it is possible that it decided not to implement any policies and programs that could distract the parents from making a living.

The empathy Myungsoo expressed toward marriage-labor immigrants provided the second clue that provided another reading of this transcript. Myungsoo was clear in saying that marriage-labor immigrants put themselves in a vulnerable position by using their Korean to raise their children. Being held responsible for their children’s Korean language skills (or the lack of),

marriage-labor immigrants maximized their children's exposure to Korean and tried to minimize the chance of their children confusing Korean with another language. In this sense, marriage-labor immigrants were deeply concerned about the choices they made and how the decisions might affect their children. Then, from where came the pressure to raise a child who could speak Korean fluently?

This discourse of bilingualism is based on an additive logic, having a Korean parent and a marriage-labor immigrant parent in the same household to teach the child both languages. There exist a number of factors that influence the implementation of bilingualism, however, including power dynamics within a family, the needs of Korean family members of marriage-labor immigrants, and the cultural status of the non-Korean language spoken by marriage-labor immigrants. For example, teaching the children the mother tongue of the marriage-labor immigrants is influenced by the power dynamics within a family, as Minh and Juan shared during the initial interview in 2013. The Korean family members of a marriage-labor immigrant family, such as the mother-in-law, may want the children to be fluent in Korean, and require that the marriage-labor immigrant only use Korean as the “official language” of the household. This conflict between the prospect of children from marriage-labor immigrant families becoming an asset to the nation—the discourse of multiculturalism as a weapon for the global competition—and the ways in which such vision is impeded presents an intriguing disparity. The benefit for the nation is trumped by the cultural and emotional need of homes. The desire for competency in the Korean language and culture as one of the key requirements reveals the significance Korean society places on “Koreanness.”

What I am suggesting here is that it might not be marriage-labor immigrants who could not imagine the possibility of bringing up children who were not Korean enough, but rather those who subscribed to the discourse of “Koreanness.” My interpretation is that due to the prevalent cultural discourses that value the homogeneity of Korean national cultural identity, marriage-

labor immigrants were not permitted to imagine any other possibility than raising their children properly “Korean.” A generation of children who identified more strongly with the language and culture of their marriage-labor immigrant parents could be extremely threatening to the cultural majority in Korea.

Meeting Changing Needs through Support Programs and Policies

Myungsoo’s work constantly surrounded him with the issues and problems of marriage-labor immigrant families, providing him with opportunities to observe closely their actual needs. Through many conversations, Myungsoo shared his extensive knowledge on the different programs and policies offered by the multicultural family support center, knowledge gained through his experience of working with marriage-labor immigrant families. When asked, “What are programs geared towards children from marriage-labor immigrant families that the center offers?” he gave a prompt answer. While the center had a staff of only about a dozen employees, many programs were offered for children and parents from marriage-labor immigrant families, as well as Korean community members. These programs included a play program involving children’s multiple senses, a minivan outfitted as a moving library [this service has since been discontinued], and diversity awareness classes offered in schools and other parts of the communities. The center operated and carried out different projects based on the funding received from various branches of the Korean government. Due to the wide range of projects run by the support center, Myungsoo shared, they were always short staffed. Even though the center could apply for various grants, the number of people they could hire was limited: “More work does not necessarily mean more people. You know what I mean?”

The future of such support centers is gradually being transformed alongside the changes in the marriage-labor immigrant population. Even during the two-year span of my three

interviews, the staff that work with Myungsoo made various decisions to meet the constantly shifting needs of marriage-labor immigrant families. During the 2014 interview, Myungsoo shared: “More and more marriage-labor immigrants are joining the workforce.” To accommodate the work schedules and the changing needs of marriage-labor immigrant families, some immigrant laborer support centers in the area open on the weekends. Unlike similar marriage-labor immigrant support centers, the center Myungsoo worked for tried to meet the needs in the field by providing programs and services for marriage-labor immigrant families living in remote areas by traveling to such regions. Moving a step further, Myungsoo and the director of the support center thought that the overall structure of support centers for marriage-labor immigrant families would need to change in order to accommodate the emergent needs in local communities.

The day spent shadowing Myungsoo in 2015 brought to my attention various changes that had taken place since the first interview. While in 2013 Myungsoo had mentioned that the center was using a blog to share information with marriage-labor immigrants, two years later social workers used a mobile app to share documents, pictures, and feedback with each other and marriage-labor immigrants. Also in 2015, the center was promoting using the first language of marriage-labor immigrants as an effective mothering strategy. This contrasted sharply with Minh and Juan’s comment from the 2013 interview about how it was a stereotype to believe that marriage-labor immigrant families could raise bilingual children. Two years later, the center was teaching marriage-labor immigrants about the importance of exposing children to different languages from infancy, providing them with tools to negotiate the family dynamics that value Korean as the official language in the household. As a part of the class, Myungsoo and his coworkers showed the marriage-labor immigrant women a video about the positive impact fathers have on children’s development, discussed establishing personal goals to improve family dynamics, and shared various activities the mothers can do with their children at home.

As Myungsoo and I sat down together to talk—while his coworkers were teaching a class for a dozen marriage-labor immigrant mothers—Myungsoo reflected on how the demographic shift in Korea has slowed down in the last couple of years. The changes that marriage-labor immigration to Korea had brought about were not limited to certain areas of Korean society or to the national borders. The far-reaching influence of marriage-labor immigration seemed almost volatile to me, being unpredictable and multifaceted:

MinSoo: This is our third meeting. It has been about two and a half years [since the first interview], and it seems like there were many changes, much quicker than I thought, compared to now and then. As I listened to what you share—

Myungsoo: When you came [the first time in 2013], it was almost the high point [of marriage-labor immigration to Korea]. The influx [of marriage-labor immigrants] had been at its high point, and a lot of babies [from marriage-labor immigrant families] were being born. Then the children [began] flooding into elementary schools and kindergartens. From a government perspective, it was their homework to figure out how to incorporate the children into the curriculum—also for the education office as well. ... Nowadays, the influx [of the immigrants] diminished a lot because of the human rights issues that occur when marriage-labor immigrants enter Korea, and they have their own “bachelor problems” in rural areas in the sending countries, like Vietnam and Cambodia, because so many women left. So they [the foreign governments] put a lot of restrictions.

MinSoo: So that they [marriage-labor immigrants] can’t leave the country.

Myungsoo: Yes. So since we met, the influx suddenly decreased. Because of that, there was a heated discussion about whether to keep the center open or to close it. Or change it to a family center [to provide services for both Korean and marriage-labor immigrant families].

Looking back in 2015 at the two previous interviews with Myungsoo, I was surprised by the many changes that had taken place during such a short amount of time. There were many more transformations than simply new people joining the staff at the center and others leaving. Myungsoo explained that even though the overall number of new marriage-labor immigrants entering the country had dropped, it did not mean that the impact of marriage-labor immigration to Korea had disappeared. On the contrary, the presence of the marriage-labor immigrant population seemed to be growing.

Marriage-labor immigration led to an increased number of childbirths, which was one of the planned goals of the Korean government (Jeon et al., 2012). Educating the children from marriage-labor immigrant families introduced a new set of unforeseen tasks. Social studies textbooks were revised, eliminating references to the ethnic homogeneity of the Korean people (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). Teachers were also learning how to work with the changing demographics of children in their classrooms (K. J. Hwang, 2011). The influx of the marriage-labor immigrant population brought about systematic changes in the curriculum, such as textbook revisions (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

Human rights violations in marriage-labor immigration, at times leading to fatal outcomes (e.g. see H.-S. Kang, 2014), were brought to public attention both in Korea and those countries sending marriage-labor immigrants. In 2010, the Cambodian government temporarily banned international marriage between Korean men and Cambodian women after 25 Cambodian women were illegally “sold into marriage” to Korean men by a Cambodian matchmaker (G. Park, 2008; The Associated Press, 2010). The concerns about fake marriages and even human trafficking were brought up, leading to various legal restrictions.

Another unexpected aftereffect of the inflow of marriage-labor immigrants to Korea was that Korea exported the problems of its rural communities to other countries. The rapid increase

of the marriage-labor immigrant population in Korea caused the sending countries to experience a shortage of eligible brides in their own rural areas. Myungsoo explained that as the countries that sent many brides to Korea, such as Vietnam and Cambodia, closed their gates, the number of marriage-labor immigrants moving to Korea decreased.

Myungsoo expected that the needs of marriage-labor immigrant families would continue to transform. As the children from marriage-labor immigrant families become older each year, different kinds of needs would emerge. Marriage-labor immigrant parents and their spouses would also age, and they would need different kinds of things as they establish roots and become an integral part of local and national communities.

The Gestation Period for Marriage-Labor Immigration Policies

During the 2015 interview, Myungsoo told me about recent policies and programs that promoted bilingualism. In light of the children from marriage-labor immigrant families growing older, and the accompanying perceived emergent needs, the Korean government has officially recognized and promoted programs to encourage bilingualism at the homes of marriage-labor immigrant families. However, I remembered reading a policy document from 2006 that discussed the benefits of bilingualism and the need to promote it for national benefit. If bilingualism was on the Korean government's radar a long time ago, why was it being carried out as something "new?" What made the recent policies and programs "new?" I was curious to hear how Myungsoo made sense of this disjunction:

MinSoo: When I looked at "multicultural" family policies, one of the policies that came out from the [Korean] Ministry of Education was in English—both in Korean and English—in 2006, almost ten years ago. In there, they talk about bilingualism as one of the strengths of "multicultural" families, but in reality, regardless of the

desire to do so, the implementation was not successful because of their concerns around being Korean.

Myungsoo: My personal opinion is—back then was the gestation period for “multicultural” family policies.

MinSoo: Yes, it’s the very beginning.

Myungsoo: It was just conceived, so “multicultural” families from that time were people who got married in the beginning [of the influx of marriage-labor immigration to Korea]. It was the period when the Southeastern Asian marriage market had just been formed, and the inflow had just started. It was the time the marriage market was being formed. ... Based on “multicultural” families formed through marriages with Westerners, they started making a framework for [marriage-labor immigration] policies.

MinSoo: Not based on people from Southeast Asia, but—

Myungsoo: Yes. Even if they considered people from Southeast Asia, they generally looked at people who married through the Unification Church or people who married Korean Chinese people. But there is no problem for Korean Chinese cases after marriage. For people who married Westerners, the mother side has high level of education, so they strongly want to create a home environment that encourages bilingualism. We know that that’s an advantage [of having a marriage-labor immigrant family], but for Southeast Asian women, it depends on their educational level. You can say that people who immigrate to Korea nowadays have a higher education level. Their countries are more developed. Korean men who wish to get married have a higher education level, too.

I was intrigued by the pregnancy metaphor Myungsoo used, considering the role that low birthrate played in instigating marriage-labor immigration in Korea. As the metaphor implied,

Myungsoo saw policies for marriage-labor immigrants as something that develop over time, rather than a static set of rules. Addressing various issues manifested after the marriage-labor immigrant population started to increase, the Korean government gradually adapted its policies and made them more “mature.” As the phenomenon of marriage-labor immigration manifested itself, facilitated by the growing “marriage market,” it might have been easier to observe common threads and patterns that could be addressed by a systemic approach through policies.

On the other hand, referring to the year 2006 as the “gestation period” for marriage-labor immigrant policy seemed late and even retroactive, considering that marriage-labor immigrant population had been rapidly growing in Korea since the 1990s (T. Lim, 2010). Even though the Korean government actively facilitated the influx of marriage-labor immigrants to the country, the government might have failed to imagine the ramifications of what such a demographic shift might produce in society.

Myungsoo further explained that the early stage of creating policies for marriage-labor immigrant families was based on available precedents, including international marriages through the Unification Church and the cases with “Western” marriage-labor immigrants. When Myungsoo said “people who married Westerners,” I understood him to be referring to Korean women who married Western men, based on his comment about highly educated mothers and my contextual knowledge about international marriages between Korean women and non-Korean men. My first reading of Myungsoo’s words was that he was explaining how it was inevitable that the policies would encounter difficulties that necessitated changes. The limits of such an approach to policy making was clear, because possible beneficiaries of the policies and a number of dissimilarities, including gender, socioeconomics, and countries of origin, were not taken into account.

Marriage-labor immigration itself also changed over time, making it more necessary for the government to be responsive to the shifting phenomenon. As an example, Myungsoo noted

the increasing educational level for both marriage-labor immigrants and their Korean spouses, as well as the educational disparities within the marriage-labor immigrant population. Giving an example of a highly educated mother, he mentioned briefly how the educational level is one of the contributing factors to whether or not marriage-labor immigrants acknowledge the importance of promoting bilingualism.

If I take what he said at face value, the low education level of some marriage-labor immigrants, particularly from Southeast Asian countries, becomes the reason for children from marriage-labor immigrants not being bilingual. I am not sure whether this is the case. What seems disjunctive is that marriage-labor immigrants experienced the pressure to teach their children to speak fluent Korean, as discussed in the previous section. Yet here, bilingualism at home is being explained in direct association with the education level of marriage-labor immigrant parents. This is because they have not advocated for the importance of bilingualism at home? Or, is it possible that the voice of marriage-labor immigrants were not heard because they are positioned as vulnerable or not “Korean enough?” While I attempted to make sense of the relationship between raising bilingual children, the change in marriage-labor immigrants’ educational level, and modifications of the policy for marriage-labor immigrant families, marriage-labor immigrants were also grappling with multiple discourses.

Raising “Korean” Children

Marriage-labor immigrant mothers I met in the last three years were trying to make sense of their childrearing experiences based both on their own experiences, and their understanding of the national and the local culture. Minh, the key informant from chapter two, navigated available discourses of mothering by comparing what she grew up with herself with what she observed in Korea, and using her conclusions as the basis for making decisions she believed best served her

family and children.

Myungsoo shared during our interviews in 2013 that when Korean family members did not recognize the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants engage in daily activities, the Korean in-laws pointed out what is different as “wrong.” During our last conversation in 2015, Myungsoo reiterated what we had mentioned in relation to mothering. Korean family members did not trust marriage-labor immigrant mothers with the way they took care of their children and tried to teach the mothers how to raise the children in a “Korean” way. Because of this reason, mothering the children became a site of conflict. The language of instruction, in particular, could generate much tension because many Korean in-laws imposed the “Korean only” rule in the household, as mentioned earlier in the chapter about the interviews with Minh and Juan.

Myungsoo’s personal experience with his cousin’s child provided an example that challenged the concerns of Korean family members. According to Myungsoo, his nephew who “did not know Korean,” “mastered” Korean at preschool within three months. While it is arguable whether his nephew spoke Korean or not, considering he was surrounded by Korean speakers in the local community, this story opened up another perspective to approach the tension around raising “Korean” children. I interpret that this taboo-like concern of, “if a child is taught in Vietnamese, he or she will become Vietnamese” stems from imagining children from marriage-labor immigrant families as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which adults can write whatever they desire. What if we imagine children can handle more than what adults “feed” them? Is it possible that the prevalence of rote learning in Korea contributed to constructing these concerns about raising children from marriage-labor immigrant families? When imagining children as capable of becoming more than what they are instructed to be, I interpret that the tension around marriage-labor immigrant mothers and their mothering practices might be relieved.

Conversing right outside of where the class for marriage-labor immigrants was taking place, Myungsoo brought up his thoughts about how encouraging marriage-labor immigrants to

speak to their children in their mother tongue involved more than simply providing an environment for obtaining language skills. His hypothesis was that by talking in a language with which they feel comfortable, and caring for their children in a way with which they are familiar, marriage-labor immigrants could more easily communicate love and care for the children. Considering how marriage-labor immigrants experience stress from navigating a community and a culture unfamiliar to them, Myungsoo thought that this approach would positively influence their children's emotional development.

The intersection between marriage-labor immigration to Korea and raising children has brought up a great sense of uncertainty and a desire to control. What marriage-labor immigrants brought to Korea, including language skills and memories of childhood, was overlooked and/or denied in the hope of maintaining "Koreanness." Through the tension around raising "Korean enough" children, marriage-labor immigration has challenged norms about mothering in Korean society that are usually taken for granted.

"A Complete Set of Blessings"

Welfare overload, high school-dropout rate, high divorce rate, domestic violence, and school violence. These are some of the "side effects" of marriage-labor immigration that the Korean government did not expect. When the Korean government tried to help bachelors living in rural areas get married, while at the same time boosting the low birth rate, it resulted in a number of social issues. During the interview carried out in 2014, Myungsoo called this array of social problems associated with marriage-labor immigration, "a complete set of blessings that includes all the problems Korea has."

I read Myungsoo's choice of word, "complete" in the sense that emergent issues about marriage-labor immigration to Korea were much more diverse than expected. In other words, I

understood him to be saying: “It seemed as if no more new problems could possibly come out of this,” because the number and the scope of issues was much bigger than anticipated.

After reading and rereading the transcript from the 2014 interview, I also started questioning the meaning of the word, “blessings.” The act of giving blessings involves a giver and a receiver. This suggests that the blessings came from the giver, the outside, rather than it originating with the receiver, from the inside. In this sense, I understand through Myungsoo’s sarcastic analogy that marriage-labor immigrants are the “problem bearers.” Importing social issues that did not previously exist in the country, marriage-labor immigrants surprised the Korean people with the unexpected.

In the context of rapidly increasing marriage-labor immigration in Korea, what I would like to point out is the significance and the uniqueness of Korea as a site where many social issues associated with marriage and immigration manifested themselves. The role of Korea as the “recipient” of the “blessings” played in the phenomenon of marriage-labor immigration is not trivial. The cultural, historical, and political contexts in which marriage-labor immigration was introduced and proliferated are filled with norms and traditions that marginalize marriage-labor immigrants.

I brought up his analogy again the following year, as Myungsoo was discussing the problems related to the increase of marriage-labor immigrant population in Korean society. Instead of revealing more of what he meant in the 2014 interview, he responded by providing an explanation that gave a different meaning to his metaphor:

Myungsoo: Well, it’s not a “blessing.”

MinSoo: Perhaps, a “complete set of problems?”

Myungsoo: Comprehensively, what it means to be a beneficiary of social welfare is that a certain socially vulnerable class, well, you can just see it as a “a class of people who are vulnerable in all areas.” All the problems are now unfolding.

When Myungsoo rearticulated what he meant, by stating how marriage-labor immigrants were vulnerable in all areas, it opened up a different perspective on the emerging population in Korea. In other words, when I went back to ask Myungsoo about “a complete set of blessings,” the second conversation did not provide space for revealing more of the “truth.” Because he contradicted himself by directly addressing how the connotation of the word “blessing” did not correspond with the marriage-labor immigrant population, this made the meaning of what he said in the earlier interview uncertain.

This example provides insight into how a range of different discourses is available, and it illustrates the complexities of circulating discourses about marriage-labor immigration. I also take this as how various discourses about marriage-labor immigration function as tools people use to make sense of the transforming demographics in contemporary Korea. Far from being static beliefs to which people ascribe themselves, these discourses are deeply rooted in the specific time and space in which they are used. In this sense, recontextualising “a complete set of blessings” during the 2015 interview opened up space for another explanation of the phrase.

Raising Korean Obama

“A country where Obama can become a president—it [a racial minority becoming the president] needs to be possible in Korea as well.” Myungsoo brought up President Obama during our 2014 interview, noting that there were things that only Obama could do because of his upbringing and experiences as an African American man. In the same vein, Myungsoo speculated how there must be something only children from marriage-labor immigrant families could do in Korean society, because they have their own unique perspectives:

I think we need a world where it [a child from a marriage-labor immigrant family becoming a president] can happen, even when living in Korea and the mother and the

father are both Black. You know there are things they [children from marriage-labor immigrant families] go through. It can be thought of as social oppression, but if the scar is sublimated, I think it can contribute a lot to making a more beautiful world.

I was surprised to hear the name Obama from Myungsoo. Even though I was aware that a lot of multicultural educational literature was being imported to Korea in response to the recent demographic changes, I still felt perplexed why Obama served as a symbolic figure in marriage-labor immigration in Korea. Many children from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea are born as Korean citizens because the revision of the Nationality Act in 1997 required that only one parent must be a Korean citizen, rather than both, for their children to be Korean citizens (N.-K. Kim, 2009). Still, it seemed to me that Obama and children of marriage-labor immigrant families came from distinctively different cultural, historical, and political backgrounds, even though Obama was born from one White American mother and a black African father.

The precedent of Jasmine Lee, a marriage-labor immigrant woman from Vietnam, provides an insight into what electing a Korean Obama could do in Korean society. As a naturalized Korean citizen since 1998, Lee is the first marriage-labor immigrant member of the Korean National Assembly, elected as a proportional representative in 2012. A number of controversies stemming from speculations about Lee and her children have flooded the media since her election (e.g. see C.-J. Lim, 2014; S.-J. Shin, 2014; Shin-Yoon, 2015). For example, last year, a bill was introduced to legislate a law to protect the rights of children of undocumented workers in Korea. Even though the bill was introduced by 23 members of the Korean National Assembly including Lee, she was primarily blamed for putting forth this bill that was said to waste tax money paid by Korean people (J. Lee et al., 2014; C.-J. Lim, 2014). The government website giving advance notice of legislation was flooded by people who expressed their objection, accumulating 14,193 comments over the two week period during which the public could express their opinions (“National Assembly Pre-announcement of Legislation,” n.d.). Compared to other

proposed bills that have no or few comments, this was an extremely unusual circumstance that reflected the attitudes in Korean society about Lee as the first marriage-labor immigrant member of the Korean National Assembly.

The unique perspective a marriage-labor immigrant could bring is always and already situated within the entangled discourses about “Koreanness” and many others. What I am suggesting here is that a Korean Obama could reify the pre-existing cultural discourses in Korea that marginalize marriage-labor immigrants in Korea. Even though it might not provide a quick solution to the difficulties marriage-labor immigrants experience in Korean society, the tension made visible through a public figure could facilitate the process of communication and transformation.

The Journey of Navigating between Discourses

As a Korean social worker in the midst of communities with a high marriage-labor immigrant population, Myungsoo provided another way to make meaning out of the daily lives of marriage-labor immigrants in Korea. His personal connection to marriage-labor immigration through his cousin’s family also provided him with an insight to the prevalent phenomenon. Through his stories, it was made visible how a number of discourses are reflected in support policies and programs, how individual lives were influenced by cultural discourses, and how conflicting discourses co-exist.

The interviews and fieldwork with Myungsoo have helped conceptualize discourses and experiences around marriage-labor immigrant families as emergent and dynamic in multiple ways. Both the marriage-labor immigration to Korea and the Korean government’s response to the demographic shift have changed over the years. Navigating the space between coalescing discourses, marriage-labor immigrants were met with a number of confounding challenges.

As a growing part of Korean society, marriage-labor immigrants have challenged and transformed how Korea and Korean people have historically understood themselves, as a one-race people that took pride in their heritage. In the context of rampant globalization, marriage-labor immigrant families find themselves in the midst of familiar cultural discourses about the “foreigners,” particularly the dichotomy between the “West” and the “multicultural.” Even if members of marriage-labor immigrant families are marginalized in many ways in Korean society, their influence goes beyond the scope of their local communities. Myungsoo, familiar with the local marriage-labor immigrant communities as well as the national Korean cultural discourses, was also negotiating within the in-between space, as a Korean man and a social worker.

Chapter 6

Discourse and Textual Analysis

What Were the Emergent Discourses in Interviews with Marriage-labor Immigrants?

The discourses that emerged about marriage-labor immigrants and their mothering from the ethnographic interviews I conducted between 2013 and 2015 were and continue to be complicated and confusing to interpret and understand. This is because at times these discourses simultaneously coalesced and contradicted one another. For instance, interviews with Myungsoo illustrate such a conundrum, where marriage-labor immigrant mothers who work and are major contributors to their family's finances are criticized for shirking their responsibilities as mothers. Due to their perceived low socioeconomic status in Korean society, marriage-labor immigrants are pressured to adapt "Korean" ways as mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, rooted in long held patriarchal and hierarchal values and cultural beliefs (Freeman, 2005). In this dissertation, I examine the disparities between the insider perspectives of informants in relation to the mainstream discourses, where marriage-labor immigrant parents are seen as incompetent. As the immigrants are also frequently blamed and held responsible for their children's poor academic achievement and for the higher rates of mental health issues and learning disabilities in children from bilingual immigrant families (e.g. Youngdal Cho, 2011; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006) these discourses of blaming mothers provides a much needed context for understanding the experiences of marriage-labor immigrant parents and their children. In newspapers and government documents, it is commonly written that immigrants have brought other significant social problems to Korean society, including the higher divorce rates, higher

incidents of domestic violence, and an overload of the welfare system (H.-R. Kim, 2009; N.-K. Kim et al., 2012; Park, 2012).

On the other hand, marriage-labor immigrant mothers are positioned as the “savior” of a number of social problems in Korea, including the low birth rate, lack of eligible brides, and an aging population. During this era of globalization with a competitive economy, the homes of marriage-labor immigrant families are also touted in mainstream discourses as a space where children can be raised to be bilingual (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). Marriage-labor immigrants fulfill a national and cultural need for Korea, and marriage-labor immigrant women, in particular, learn to embody patriarchal and hierarchal values in Korean society as mothers, wives, and daughter-in-laws (Freeman, 2005; S. Kim, 2009).

The three stories of key informants illustrated sometimes coalescing and other times conflicting discourses about mothering and offer a window into this phenomenon of a rapidly rising marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea. All three of my women informants told me stories about tensions they experienced between mothering and work. These women informants described feeling the need to often “justify” working or felt “vilified” for poorly raising their children, and they often pointed out in interviews what were considered “good” or “deficient” ways to mother (Bloch, 1998). These examples help to envision how discourses informants navigate as marriage-labor immigrant mothers are positioned within the larger sociocultural context of Korean society. Beyond the task of caring for their children, the immigrant mothers contend with what “mothers” in Korea should do and are supposed to be like.

The story of Minh as a marriage-labor immigrant mother highlighted how she contended with the cultural discourse that positions her as lacking and an emerging discourse on the need for cultivating autonomous immigrant mothers in local communities. While the stigma associated with marriage-labor immigrants urged Minh to be “better,” trying not to fall short of the cultural expectation of a mother, the cultural perception of “needy” immigrants prevented her from

becoming more independent. Minh felt that she was discriminated against and had not been given any opportunities to prove herself. At the same time, she was denied the chance to help herself and become more independent because too much help was offered to her. While the new programs promoted by the Korean government and implemented by the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center are geared towards bringing up leaders among marriage-labor immigrants as Myungsoo explained, the preconceptions about marriage-labor immigrants led Minh to be doubtful about how she was positioned in Korean society.

As a Korean social worker that worked on a daily basis with marriage-labor immigrants as coworkers and program participants, Myungsoo acknowledged the pressure on marriage-labor immigrants to raise children who can speak fluent Korean. According to Myungsoo, marriage-labor immigrants are under enormous pressure to use Korean because immigrant mothers are afraid that Korean people, including their Korean in-laws, would blame the mothers if their children do not speak the Korean language fluently. Meanwhile, the immigrant mothers are being encouraged increasingly more to speak the mother tongue to the children. This dissonance is echoed in a policy document by the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources (2006), blaming immigrant mothers as the cause of children who have poor Korean-language skills, while simultaneously advocating for the value of bilingualism in the global economy. Marriage-labor immigrants navigate and negotiate these seemingly incompatible discourses every day of their lives, and make meaning out of them.

The topic of language fluency also emerged in the interviews with other informants. When I asked Minh in 2013 whether she taught her children Vietnamese, she shared her plan about teaching her daughter the language the following year. For marriage-labor immigrants, teaching their mother tongue to their own children was about much more than the language skills themselves:

I am planning on teaching my daughter Vietnamese next year, around the time when she

is going to school since she is seven right now. Others around me have asked, “Why didn’t you start teaching her when she was little?” But, when the baby was born, everyone at home was talking in Korean, and they would say something if the mother [Minh] and the oldest daughter communicate in Vietnamese [so she could not teach her daughter Vietnamese earlier]. Also, there is my mother-in-law. Since we live with my mother-in-law, there are parts that I can’t do things comfortably [at home]. So when she grows up a little more, I am thinking of teaching her Vietnamese next year.

Minh acknowledged that she had been asked about teaching her children Vietnamese before. She had considered this issue before the interview. For her, teaching her children Vietnamese was not as simple as others might have thought. Being sensitive to the unspoken rules in the household, she learned that she needed to speak to her children in Korean. She was aware that her Korean family members would not appreciate feeling ostracized if she and her daughter were to communicate in Vietnamese. In particular, her mother-in-law – the person on top of the family hierarchy – and her rules did not allow Minh to teach Vietnamese comfortably to her children.

In Haejin and Gouba’s case, Gouba’s English skills served the role of elevating the social status of Gouba and Sumi, Haejin and Gouba’s daughter. Haejin shared that Sumi’s envious friends told Sumi: “We pay a lot of money to learn English, but your dad speaks good English [so you can learn from your dad].” Sumi also felt a sense of pride about her own language skills: “Even if I don’t take extra classes to learn English, my English language skills are on the same level as fifth graders!” Gouba was more than welcome to bring his English in to the home. Compared with the struggles marriage-labor immigrant mothers go through due to the pressure not to bring another language in their family, the praise Gouba received for his English skills seemed even ironic.

The interviews with key informants provided room to tell more than the dominant cultural story about marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korea. When juxtaposing emergent

discourses about language across the stories of Myungsoo, Minh, Haejin, and Gouba, complexities in the ways marriage-labor immigrants navigate these discourses are made visible. The tension between and across contradictory discourses demonstrates how challenging it could be for the immigrants to make sense of the circulating discourses. In an attempt to explore the complexities of the tension generated by coalescing and contradictory discourses of mothering, I employ the Bakhtinian textual analysis, using heteroglossia, authoritative discourse, and internally persuasive discourse. This analysis provides multiple explanations that complicate the understanding of ubiquitous national level discourses about marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korea. I employ the Bakhtinian textual analysis in two phases. First, I examine the examples from the transcripts through the heteroglossic lens. Then, I re-analyze the same examples using Bakhtinian ideas of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse.

Heteroglossia, Authoritative Discourses, and Internally Persuasive Discourses

In chapters three, four and five I provided examples of insider perspectives on how marriage-labor immigrants describe their experiences of mothering. In the following sections, I use three key Bakhtinian ideas—heteroglossia, authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses—to examine a number of discourses that emerged in the interviews and apply a Bakhtinian textual analysis. This analysis is grounded in the assumption that the meanings of key informants' words are not always self-evident to the researcher or the informants themselves. Instead discourses are conceptualized as tools informants use in particular contexts, rather than direct reflections of their minds (or even thoughts), and I examine how circulating discourses are reused, recreated, and resituated in particular contexts. This also contributes to the process of seeking understanding as to how key informants situate themselves using available discourses in various settings, making visible what discourses are present and what discourses are absent.

Heteroglossia and living heteroglossia

As a “concrete” discourse, grounded in the context of how words are voiced rather than as an abstract language (Morris, 1995, pp. 75), utterance is a locus of where one’s own mind and the socio-historical meaning intersect (Morris, 1995). This means that utterance is always situated in a particular context, in relation to what came before it and what will come after it. In other words, utterance inherently encompasses ideology, or worldviews of different groups of people, in Bakhtinian sense (Morris, 1995; Park-Fuller, 1986). In addition, every utterance is under the influence of centripetal force, which tries to centralize meaning and maximize mutual understanding, as well as centrifugal force, which tries to undo the work of centripetal force through fragmentation (Bakhtin, 1981). The notion of utterance is essential in conceptualizing heteroglossia, a Bakhtinian term introduced in chapter two, because heteroglossia administers how meaning is constituted in utterance (Park-Fuller, 1986).

Heteroglossia represents “ideologies inherent in the various languages” (Park-Fuller, 1986, p. 2), referring to “the conflict between ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’, ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses within the same language” (Morris, 1995, p. 248). Heteroglossia, as a force that decentralizes meanings of discourses, is always situated in particular temporal and spatial contexts, and it cannot be isolated (Morris, 1995, p. 75). Rather than being static or linear, utterances as part of heteroglossia are always in relation to other discourses and the particularities of the context. Heteroglossia also exists in a more micro level because “every utterance contains within it the traces of other utterances” (Morris, 1995, p. 249). Utterances are under the influence of the dynamic forces that hold them together—centripetal force—and dismantle their unity—centrifugal force (Dentith, 1995). Even though centripetal force attempts to unify the ways in which utterances are understood, the meaning of discourses continuously shifts due to centrifugal forces: “The dialogic relations of heteroglossia do ensure that meaning remains in process,

unfinalizable” (Morris, 1995, p. 74). Heteroglossia is also “perceived as the constituting condition for the possibility of independent consciousness” because the unchallenged authority of a truth is relativized through coming in context with other discourses (Morris, 1995, p. 73).

These specific ideas are useful in my Bakhtinian textual analysis because they illustrate dynamics within and across circulating discourses, rather than portraying them as static and self-contained. The Bakhtinian ideas also became useful in the process of interpreting the discourses that emerged from the interviews, for the ideas highlight uncertainty and tension that stem from the multiplicities of discourses and the ways in which they interact with one another. This adds to my intention of offering multiple possible interpretations of informants’ insider voices, rather than finalized explanations.

In my reading of the transcripts, I particularly attend to the tension between the competing forces through what Bakhtin refers to as “living heteroglossia.” The emergent ingenuity and multiplicity observed in the field, textualized in the transcripts, are under the influence of both unifying and heteroglossic forces. This means that in this study, I see my informants and the ways in which they negotiate various discourses as a part of unfolding discourses that work within the specificities of a given context.

As the conflicting force countering the “normative-centralizing system of unitary language,” living heteroglossia represents the ways in which utterances function to convey meaning, intention, and purpose (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272; Dentith, 1995). In other words, the notion of “living heteroglossia” is articulated through the ways in which utterances unfold in dialogues: “the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). As a site where a unifying process (centripetal force) and a decentralizing process (centrifugal force) intersect, utterances are grounded in concrete contexts. Through the iterative and diachronic process of returning for additional interviews and

reengaging the transcript, I involve the informants in the dynamics of living heteroglossia.

The Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia unfolds within the particularities of the contexts in which discourses are situated, which means that living heteroglossia demonstrates that the way in which discourses interact with one another is never static. The notion of living heteroglossia challenges the assumption that language is “a unitarian and fixed system” (Zamorano, 2005, p. 128). In other words, the “interdependence of the ‘abstract’ idea and the ‘concrete’ living person” is reflected in the fact that both the force that centralizes meaning of language and the force of living heteroglossia—which decentralizes the meaning of language—are simultaneously at work (Shepherd, 2012, p. 132).

Living heteroglossia is illustrated in the changing interpretations of what emerged in the interviews across the diachronic dimensions. In 2014, Myungsoo used the expression of “complete set of blessings” to illustrate the wide range of problems that marriage-labor immigration brought about in Korean society. This time, Myungsoo used the word “blessings” ironically, implying that the “blessings” were actually “problems.” When I brought up the phrase during the follow-up interview in 2015, I thought that he would further elaborate on the analogy and the meaning of the phrase would remain the same. This was based on the assumption that language is cohesive and fixed.

During the interview carried out in 2015, however, Myungsoo interpreted the phrase differently. “It [marriage-labor immigration] is not a ‘blessing.’” He interpreted the word more directly, and he further clarified that “a complete set of blessings” meant in fact “a class of people who are vulnerable in all areas.” The change of context provided space for Myungsoo to interpret his words from a different perspective. In this sense, the meanings of his words, or anyone else’s words, remain unfinalized under the influence of living heteroglossia.

Through analyzing discourses that emerged during the ethnographic interviews and fieldwork, I attempted to find multiple interpretations by reading across discourses that emerged

in the interviews. Exploring different ways to understand the meanings of the texts is essential to understanding the complexities of making sense of contradictory cultural discourses. I seek out multiple ways to interpret discourses, exploring intersections in the transcripts that reveal the dialogic relationship between the personal and the sociocultural and between my interviewee and myself.

Throughout the two phases of analyzing the transcripts and carrying out follow-up interviews, my interpretations about how I experienced and understood an interview were challenged. Re-engaging the informants over time provided different perspectives with which to interpret and understand what had happened during the interviews. At times in the follow-up interviews, my informants did not necessarily address what I thought was crucial. For example, during my last interview with Minh in 2015, I brought up her comments from the previous year's interview that pertained to her perceived need to be "better" (as an immigrant) than Korean coworkers. As I asked Minh to elaborate on what she had shared the year before and whether the need to be "better" also translated to how she raised her children as a mother, she went on to talk about how she respected others by using the honorific form of Korean. Then she moved on, during the 2015 interview, to talk about how Korean people looked down on her and how necessary it was for her to be more confident when interacting with Koreans:

After I spoke with you last time, I thought about it, and I tried [to be "better"]. I tried, but from other people's perspective, they think I am below them, not on the same level, because I talk to them like "I did this; I did that [using in the honorific endings in Korean.] ... I think you need to respect everyone. I am thirty-one now. I think it is important that my children talk confidently [about how they are from a marriage-labor immigrant family] and that I work with pride [as a marriage-labor immigrant]. "

The way she responded in 2015 to my mentioning of what she had shared in the previous interview was unexpected, leading the conversation in a different direction.

The different descriptions and interpretations that emerged provided a foundation for examining meanings that are not stagnant and finalized. Being mindful of what preceded and what followed the discourses, I sought out multiple descriptions of the ethnographic interviews and fieldwork I had carried out in the past two years. In the sections below, I analyze some of the examples mentioned in chapters three, four, and five through a heteroglossic lens. By doing so, I attempt to highlight the ideologies behind the words of key informants and the moments of conflict between conflicting discourses at work in heteroglossia.

Heteroglossia and Minh's interviews

In Minh's story, I discussed how she grappled with multiple ways of identifying herself as a mother, employee and student, and how these roles inform each other. The Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia is a useful tool in thinking beyond the preconception that individuals can only hold one perspective about oneself at a time (Holland, p. 15). Contrary to a general "Western" notion of identity that takes as its prototype a coherent, unified, and originary subject" (Holland, 2001, p. 7), the Bakhtinian idea recognizes the possibility of multiple ways of perceiving oneself, which is always "forming." Through the lens of heteroglossia, I see Minh continuously navigating the tension between and across these roles. The social, emotional, temporal, and spatial conditions through which Minh perceived herself are also continuously changing. After becoming a mother, Minh sensed how people perceived her and her baby differently than how they might have perceived a Korean mother and her baby. She realized, however, that she needed to change for the sake of her children, who needed to be a part of the local community:

After the baby was born, as I raise the baby, I felt people's eyes. ... At first, I was very scared and lonely, and I didn't want to talk with others. But after five to six years, I thought, "I can't continue on like this."

After contending with the sense of being scared and lonely for a number of years, Minh came to a realization that her way of coping with “people’s eyes” would not benefit her children. After she became a mother, she did not want to face and acknowledge the cultural stigma against her child and herself. However, she came to the conclusion that she needed to put her child’s need first in how she positioned herself in the local community.

As Tobin (2000) and Holland (2001) point out, people improvise to make use of different points of views and ways of speaking depending on the ever-changing contexts in which they are situated. In the past two years, I have seen how Minh as an employee and a student has positioned herself differently in relation to stereotypical and deficit perspectives on marriage-labor immigrants. Her new job, which required her to talk with people she did not know and offer services, influenced her attitude, body language, and personality. The change was even noticeable to her family members, including her mother-in-law who asked, “Is there something wrong with you?”

During the interviews, Minh articulated some of the different “voices” she heard that positioned her as one type of mother. Often, she heard questions like the following:

- “Did you come because of money?”
- “Why did you come even though your [Korean] husband is a lot older than you?”
- “Are you going to send your children to Vietnam when they grow up?”
- “Why do you study so hard? If you can communicate enough in Korean, you can just go to work.”
- “Other moms know how to do these things, but why don’t you?”

These questions, which came from Korean people, other marriage-labor immigrants, and her imagination (of what her children might say in the future) directed Minh’s attention to one “official” image of marriage-labor immigrants in Korea, accusing her of being an incapable mother who moved to Korea through an opportunistic marriage. Considering that the questions

came from various kinds of relationships in her life, it was more difficult to deal with them. A simple denial or rejection of the questions did not necessarily help Minh grapple with them. Minh herself struggled with this deficit view of marriage-labor immigrants: “Honestly, when it comes to “multicultural” children, the moms are rather lacking, in terms of the language and the social relationships.”

Minh grappled with this centripetal force that positioned her as a “not good enough” mother who got married only for a financial gain in multiple ways during our interviews. For example, she at times addressed the official discourse directly by telling others about her own views. To newer marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam, for example, she said would say, “You need to invest some time in yourself. Learn as much as you can, and study as much as you need. Then think about money.” Even though the fellow immigrants did not necessarily agree with her, causing some tension, Minh dedicated much time to learning about the Korean culture and language, as well as taking college courses.

She also took a proactive stance in talking to her children’s teacher and asking for help: “Please let me know if there is any problem communicating with my child, or if there is any good information because my child is ‘multicultural.’” While she later regretted this a bit, and wondered whether or not she had made the right decision for her child, I understood her words as saying she was doing her best to make sure her children did well in school and had access to any helpful information.

She faced some challenges working for the Chungsun Multicultural Support Center and felt like she needed to be a “better immigrant” than a Korean person. This experience echoed the question that she asked herself from the perspective of her children: “Other employees know how to do these things, but why don’t you?” Nevertheless, at her new job, she was not afraid to acknowledge her marriage-labor immigration status and confront a customer who refused to receive service provided by Minh. She told the customer on the phone that she wanted to be

given the opportunity to prove herself:

Dear customer, I originally came from Vietnam. I got to work here because of these reasons. If there is anything that you find uncomfortable, I don't have to go. But I have never seen you yet. If you want to change to another person after I visit, I will talk to people at work and send somebody else.

Providing an alternative way to perceive marriage-labor immigrants, Minh used her position as an employee to decentralize the stereotypes against her. While her action took much courage, it contributed to unfinalizing how she was seen by Korean people.

Moreover, Minh asserted her legal right as a naturalized citizen and insisted that her children be seen as Korean: "If marriage immigrants came here, we will live here and we will obtain it [a Korean citizenship], and when I obtain the citizenship, my children are Korean." She was clear in articulating the intention and purposefulness in her decision to emigrate and live in Korea, making it clear that her children are Korean, not "multicultural." Minh also shared that there were times she experienced herself as Korean. After living in Korea for many years, she felt more Korean than Vietnamese at times, especially when she realized that she spent and managed money in certain ways:

Usually Korean women do things like that. They buy things like new pots and pans, or electronics. When I do that I feel, when I write in the household ledger, I feel like I may have become Korean.

In this sense, Minh challenged not only the stereotypes that denied other ways of understanding marriage-labor immigrants, but also the emphasis on marriage-labor immigrants as solely spouses and parents. In other words, the ways in which she made meanings out of multifarious and conflicting discourses as a marriage-labor immigrant mother were informed by the roles she played outside the boundaries of her home. Through a heteroglossic lens, what I am suggesting here is that Minh was in a continuous process of grappling with the centripetal force that

positioned her in the midst of preconceptions about the immigrants and the centrifugal force that fragmented the biased single story.

In addition, during the interviews and fieldwork, Minh grappled with various discourses that described the role of a marriage-labor immigrant mother in conflicting ways. For example, she used a number of discourses to explain her experiences as an immigrant mother during the 2014 interview. First, Minh situated herself from the deficit perspective, which is prevalent in support policies and programs, pointing out how marriage-labor immigrants are “lacking” as mothers. She directly linked “multicultural” children and their marriage-labor immigrant mothers, including herself: “Honestly, when it comes to “multicultural” children, the moms are rather lacking in terms of the language and the social relationships.” Even though she later specified by articulating how her children were “Korean” and not “multicultural,” the discourse of deficient marriage-labor immigrant mothers was one of the key pieces Minh used to position herself in relation to her children.

At the same time, Minh did not feel comfortable being framed as “the person that needs help.” She wanted to become autonomous as a mother, rather than become dependent on the help offered by others. By asserting that she volunteered during her spare time, she demonstrated how she contributed to the local community. Even though she felt disappointed when her request to have her daughter participate in a mentoring program was overlooked, Minh as a marriage-labor immigrant mother desired to be perceived as more than a beneficiary of available support programs in Korean society.

During the same interview, Minh also described herself as a diligent mother who invested in her studies of the Korean language and culture. Unlike other marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam, she put becoming a competent mother as her priority: “If your kids ask you, ‘other moms know how to do these things, but why don’t you?’ Words like that will break my heart.” Even though she did not approve of the ways Korean mothers put their children through many

hours of study, she wished to be able to do what other Korean mothers could. Her heart sank with the thought of disappointing her children because she could not do as they did.

Much tension and uncertainty arises when I juxtapose these conflicting discourses from the 2014 interview using the idea of heteroglossia. Minh, as a marriage-labor mother who was “lacking,” wished to be independent, and served those in need in her community. She also aspired to be like Korean mothers, even though she did not agree with the way in which they raised their children. The way she envisioned herself shifted the common cultural understanding of who marriage-labor immigrants are and provided other possibilities. In this sense, the discourses Minh used to explain herself as a marriage-labor mother made her unpredictable and uncontainable. They deconstructed the “official” discourse about marriage-labor immigrants, by illustrating different underlying beliefs upon which various discourses are established. Examining the contradicting discourses in a contiguous relationship through the Bakhtinian idea of heretoglossia made visible the dissonant co-existence of familiar values and beliefs that constructed Minh as a marriage-labor immigrant mother.

Heteroglossia and the interviews with Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai

In Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai’s stories, I first examine through the heteroglossic lens the way they navigated contentious relationships, which was highlighted due to Sabai’s struggle with her husband. As Haejin and Gouba got involved and tried to help with the difficulties Sabai experienced with her Korean spouse, the circumstances became more tangled and muddled in multiple layers of relationships. Haejin and Gouba ended up withdrawing themselves from their relationships with Sabai and her husband in order to stabilize the circumstances and alleviate the tension in their own family.

The manifold relationships they grappled with, including the social hierarchy between

marriage-labor immigrants and Korean natives, the tradition of hierarchy between family members in Korean society, the relationship between siblings, and the shared cultural understanding between Korean people, intersected and brought about much uncertainty and friction in Haejin, Gouba, and Sabai's families. While each relationship, separate from others, is a familiar cultural discourse in itself, when these relationships are put side by side, the interactions between them are volatile.

Gouba associated Sabai's relationship with her husband with how Korean people treat marriage-labor immigrants, particularly the ones from countries with a lower socioeconomic standing. His experience working as the breadwinner in Korean society resonated with Sabai's difficulties with her Korean husband:

You know, if you don't do anything, Korean people think that foreigners are simple-minded. ... In this situation, when I see what Sabai is going through, I think my sister is being ignored because she is a foreigner.

Gouba felt personally connected to what was happening in Sabai's life not only because Sabai was his sister, but also because Gouba saw himself in the struggles Sabai was having with her husband. The dynamics between Gouba and his Korean employer and coworkers reminded him of Sabai's relationship with her Korean husband. As Gouba was looked down upon and had to explain his home country at work, he thought that Sabai was having a similar experience at home:

If you look at it that way [if Sabai were Korean, Japanese, or American], I don't think my brother-in-law would have done that. I am sure he would talk with my sister so nicely if that were the case.

In this heteroglossia, the unifying force drove the interview towards the discrimination Gouba and Sabai received in Korea as marriage-labor immigrants, and this became the core of how Gouba made sense of what Sabai and he were experiencing. Gouba firmly believed that he and his sister were perceived to be inferior because of their home country: "My sister and I came from the

lower level. You know, ... the attitude [of Korean people] changes [when they learn that Gouba and Sabai are from Myanmar].” In other words, if Sabai were not a marriage-labor immigrant from Myanmar, her husband would not have threatened Sabai by saying that he “would leave and take the children” if she did not leave on her own.

Meanwhile, Sabai’s husband attempted to divert the focus of the issue at his home as “my family problem” and he wanted to talk with Haejin through their Korean connection. Haejin also pointed out that how Sabai’s personality might have contributed to the difficulties she was experiencing with her husband:

Everyone wants the house kept clean, things like that, you know? But she would pile up dirty dishes. In a situation where she needed to feed her children, she would say, “I can’t cook.” It’s not “I can’t do it”—there are a lot of places that teach her how to do things if she wants to learn.

These two discourses conflicted with how Gouba understood what Sabai was going through in her family. As the centripetal force tried to channel the dialogues around what Sabai and her husband were going through as the issue of how marriage-labor immigrants are perceived by Korean people, Sabai’s husband and Haejin’s approaches provided other ways to see behind the “truth.”

Values and beliefs embedded in the relationships, similar to ideologies ingrained in discourses, were made visible through layering of the relationships by creating the in-between spaces of relationships where expectations are negotiated. Haejin and Gouba ended up not keeping in touch with Sabai’s family due to the escalating tension and the conflicting forces that were influencing both their family and Sabai’s family. The heteroglossia of relationships highlighted the clash between various cultural discourses, tracing the dynamics of the competing underlying assumptions.

Another example that I examine is the family portrait episode from the 2013 interview.

Sharing how their family portrait brought about much commotion in Sumi's classroom in 2013, Haejin and Gouba used multiple conflicting discourses to explain their understanding of what happened. When analyzed through the notion of heteroglossia, the episode makes visible the complexities of circulating discourses about "foreigners."

From the perspectives of parents, Haejin and Gouba listed a number of discourses to understand how Sumi dealt with and made sense of the episode around her family picture that none of the family members expected to occur in her classroom. The first discourse they used pertained to the strong influence teachers have on students. Expressing her appreciation, Haejin shared how Sumi's teacher countered Sumi's classmates' response to Gouba's appearance by saying, "Sumi's dad looks really cool—he looks like a celebrity, doesn't he?" Secondly, Haejin acknowledged the children's curiosity as a factor, pointing out how children have a tendency to be inquisitive about "foreign countries." Combined with Gouba's English skills, the curiosity about other countries made Sumi's friends envious of Sumi who can visit her dad's country.

In contrast, Gouba credited the school education as a tool that Sumi used to negotiate the negative classroom atmosphere about "foreigners": "It is all because of school education." Similarly to Haejin's comment on Sumi's teacher, he recognized the significance of outside influence on children. Haejin responded to Gouba's words by emphasizing what she did as a mother to familiarize Sumi to the family history: "No, I, her mom, talked to her openly about things like that!" Haejin's theory was that because she was open in discussing how Gouba was from Myanmar, Sumi felt comfortable sharing about her father's country. Lastly, calling attention to the changing school environment as a factor, Haejin referred to the possibility that the cultural climate of Sumi's school was changing. She noted that Sumi's school was becoming more open to diversity: "The environment has changed a lot, and within schools there is a lot of education to accept things like "multiculture" as something more general."

Identifying a number of discourses Haejin and Gouba utilized to understand how their

daughter navigated the cultural climate of her classroom brings to the forefront the multiplicities and complexities of circulating discourses. In particular, Haejin's comment on how children respond to "foreigners" and "foreign countries" with curiosity directly contradicts what prompted the family portrait episode—Sumi's classmates laughing at the "foreigner" father in the family picture. This demonstrates how colliding belief systems behind each of the competing discourses complicate our understanding of how people put the discourses to use. Situating what the teacher and parents offered to Sumi in the changing school environment also illustrate that the array of discourses are not isolated from one another, but they are intertwined.

The centrifugal force at work in this heteroglossia is attempting to make this episode about Gouba. Haejin recognized the depth of what unfolded in Sumi's classroom when she heard what had happened: "When Sumi talked [about what happened] after coming back from school, I couldn't tell everything to Sumi's dad." Understanding the family portrait episode with Gouba in the center of the event resonates with the larger discourse about how marriage-labor immigrants are considered as an anomaly in Korean society.

Heteroglossia provides the framework to draw together different points of views that stem from conflicting values. A number of the reasons Haejin and Gouba discussed, in seeking to understand why Sumi seemed to have dealt with the episode in a positive way, illustrate other ideologies that are competing with the unifying force. Sumi's teacher, Sumi's classmates' curiosity, school education, Haejin, and the environment all mitigated the pressure on Gouba as the "other" as the centrifugal force.

Reexamining the family portrait episode through the Bakhtinian idea made each of the employed discourses more visible by placing them in a contiguous relationship. During the interview, as Haejin and Gouba conversed back and forth discussing their thoughts, an array of discourses emerged. This made the meaning of what had occurred in Sumi's classroom ambiguous and open-ended with many "unofficial" ways of interpreting the episode.

Heteroglossia and Myungsoo's interviews

The notion of heteroglossia informed the way in which Myungsoo made sense of marriage-labor immigrants' choices to prioritize work over caring for their children. His explanation of the reasons why marriage-labor immigrants were preoccupied with working was far from being linear, straightforward, and neatly packaged. Various factors, including the perceived purpose of marriage-labor immigration, the expectations of marriage-labor immigrants' parents, the decreasing income, and the desire to fulfill one's own wants, demonstrated the complexities of the intertwined discourses about marriage-labor immigrants in Korean society.

The centripetal force of the way Myungsoo grappled with marriage-labor immigrant mothers' decision to work was his belief that mothers were the primary caregivers and they should prioritize spending time with their children over choosing to work:

“I feel sad that some [marriage-labor immigrant] mothers choose the opportunities to make money by engaging in seasonal labor in their town, even though they could spend the time with their children.”

Even after acknowledging that there were various reasons why marriage-labor immigrants chose to work, or needed to work, Myungsoo often reiterated this discourse during the interview. For example, he returned to discussing his beliefs about mothers as the primary caregivers after discussing how social expectations experienced by the parents of marriage-labor immigrants (e.g. how their quality of living would improve due to the money their children send back home) could be a reason why the immigrants go to work:

If not, people say, “what did you do? You send your daughter off for a marriage. Did you sell your daughter off, and you are living like a beggar?” ... So there are many cases of the couples splitting apart, breaking up, and divorcing, because marriage-labor immigrants want to give financial support to their parents [and their Korean spouses

disagree]. ... During this time when children are sensitive and need love, the mothers work over time until late at night, because the money is big, because they get paid 1.5 times of the regular pay. Then there is no mother's care, even though mothers are the primary caregivers.

Besides the fact that the expectation of marriage-labor immigrants' parents provided a cultural reasoning behind marriage-labor immigrants' desire to work, Myungsoo was fully aware of the financial needs marriage-labor immigrants had. Some marriage-labor immigrants chose to work because they had thought ahead to what would happen to their family financially when her husband retires and as children grow older. This perspective conflicted directly with marriage-labor immigrant mothers needing to spend time with their children as the primary caregivers by placing the mothers at work instead of home:

If you don't go out [to work,] it is getting harder and harder to make a living. The husband is getting old, and the income is decreasing. But the spending is increasing because the children are getting older.

In this sense, working marriage-labor mothers were not choosing to work over mothering a child, even though Myungsoo continued channeling our conversation towards his conviction about this. Marriage-labor immigrants working outside of the boundaries of home contributed directly to their family's need.

Myungsoo explored another competing way to make sense of marriage-labor immigrant mothers' decisions during this interview. This diverted his attention away from his beliefs about the significance of the role marriage-labor immigrant mothers play in the lives of their children: "The mothers feel envious when they see their friends buy pretty things and put on make-up using the money they make. It is a woman's mentality." Acknowledging individuals have their own desires, Myungsoo pointed out how such envy towards fellow immigrants is only natural and instinctive considering they were women. While marriage-labor immigrants' desire was being

situated as the gendered norm (“it is a woman’s mentality”) it might also resonate with the reasoning behind the assumption that mothers are the primary caregivers of the children, and the two discourses when placed adjacent to each other made visible the tension between the two: one gender-based discourse led the immigrants to work, and the other led them to home.

This type of conflict around these differing discourses highlights the ideologies behind the discourses, making the interview more decentralized and the “official” discourse less authoritative. A number of discourses Myungsoo used do not coherently add to a whole due to the tension between them. Juxtaposing these various discourses to explain the perceived needs, expectations, and desires of marriage-labor immigrants highlights the tension and contradictions between the discourses. According to Myungsoo’s account, it is challenging to point out whether marriage-labor’s economic activities pertained to meeting individual and/or family needs. The gender-based understanding of why marriage-labor immigrant mothers should be primary caregivers of their children also conflicted with another gender-based explanation of how immigrant women were compelled to spend more time at work to fulfill their desires as women. Conceptualizing the discourses as parts of heteroglossia, saturated in implicit cultural values and beliefs, helps understand how they interact with one another in social settings, rather than being isolated in confined spaces.

The various discourses about mothering navigated by marriage-labor immigrants relate to one another through much tension. Specifically, the cultural discourse that attempts to maintain the image of a traditional wife and mother is challenged and defamiliarized through other discourses the immigrants employ to make sense of their circumstances. The process of making visible the wide range of discourses interacting and intersecting with the worldview rooted in Confucianist values introduces much ambiguity by suggesting alternatives to the culturally dominant discourse. In this sense, heteroglossia makes the world more uncertain and multivocal by highlighting the friction between various discourses (Clifford, 2006). The Bakhtinian idea

also makes it possible to conceptualize how coexisting discourses that tell different stories stem from a number of varying value systems.

I also would like to revisit using heteroglossia as an analytic tool through the way in which Myungsoo made sense of the implementation of support policies and programs that promote bilingualism. During the last interview carried out in 2015, Myungsoo mentioned a number of sociocultural beliefs that influence the understanding of bilingualism in relation to discourses of mothering. His discussion pointed out the low education level of marriage-labor immigrants, the need to prioritize pressing issues in the everyday lives of the immigrants, the fear of raising “Korean” children who cannot speak fluent Korean, the changing cultural climate about promoting bilingualism, and the need to raise children from marriage-labor immigrants as assets for the national economy.

Some of these discourses directly pertain to the concerns about the Korean cultural identity. According to Myungsoo, promoting bilingualism was increasingly recognized as a necessity in contemporary Korea. However, using the discourses indicating marriage-labor immigrants’ education level or the pressing needs in their daily lives as the reasons why bilingualism could not be promoted in marriage-labor immigrant families suggests the ideological basis upon which circulating discourses about bilingualism were framed:

For people who married Westerners, the mother side has high level of education, so they strongly want to create a home environment that encourages bilingualism. We know that that’s an advantage [of having a marriage-labor immigrant family], but for Southeast Asian women, it depends on their educational level.

The disparity between how the “West” was perceived, compared to the “Southeast Asian” speaks to a sense of something being at amiss. While Myungsoo oriented his thinking around the deficit of marriage-labor immigrants from Southeast Asian countries, the tension between the “West” and the “Southeast Asian” hinted at what else might be at play:

The concerns immigrant women have, well, it is not totally appropriate to say that they are immigrant women's concerns in a way, because it is possible that they don't have concerns or they can't have concerns. ... That's because [marriage-labor immigrant mothers] can't afford to think about what matters for my children's future. So I feel that the [Korean] Ministry of Family and Gender Equality is trying to fix what they misunderstood.

Myungsoo's words became more and more fragmented and stratified, spinning out of control, when he switched the subject of his account from marriage-labor immigrant mothers to the Korean Ministry of Family and Gender Equality. While the centripetal force tried to focus Myungsoo's words on marriage-labor immigrant mothers from Southeast Asia who lacked education, when he introduced the Ministry, the interpretation of Myungsoo's words became ambiguous. By introducing "unofficial discourses" that explicated his words in alternate ways, the "official discourse" that made the understanding Myungsoo's account of linear and clear became uncertain.

The fear of raising "not Korean enough" children also speaks to implicit cultural values that promote a centralized understanding about the implementation of bilingualism in Korean society based on "Koreanness" as the national cultural identity: "If the child does not speak Korean well enough, my cousin's wife would take the responsibility since the mother is Vietnamese." This account tried to bring our attention back to marriage-labor immigrants as the focal point of the conversation about bilingualism and how they are responsible for their children's Korean skills.

The heteroglossic lens allows for examining the beliefs behind the discourses in social contexts by bringing together a number of discourses in proximity with one another. The Bakhtinian idea highlights the tension between and across the competing discourses in Myungsoo's accounts by accentuating the cultural norms embedded in the discourses that often

go unchallenged.

Not Thick but Different Descriptions

My intention in this section is to re-analyze these examples from the transcripts through new Bakhtinian ideas and explain the notion of “different description” that I demonstrate through polyvocal interpretations. While the heteroglossic lens provided one way of interpreting what informants shared during the interviews, the use of another analytical tool opens up other possibility interpretations.

In the genre of ethnography, the ethnographer traditionally aims to get a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). The goal of a thick description is to create a sense of depth through details situated in a specific context in which the ethnographer was immersed. By doing so, the ethnographer strives to illustrate meaning making processes that function as the core structure of a culture. Through the three ethnographic case studies in this dissertation, what I aimed to do is different from Geertz’s notion of “thick description.” Instead, I set out to explore “different descriptions,” that is, descriptions in my ethnographic interviews that were read polyvocally and diachronically (across time) to compel myself to examine the multiple possible interpretations (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

The framework for my research, based on the idea of “polyvocality as ethics” (Tobin & Davidson, 1990), supported my moving away from a linear sense of causality to a more “rhizomatic description” (focusing on lateral connections with no emphasis on the cause of the effect) and a sense of events unfolding as happenstance (Valente & Boldt, 2014). In this dissertation, this does not mean that I simply watched events unfold as an onlooker, but that I was deliberate in my effort not to look for causality while carrying out the interviews and reading the transcripts. In other words, I carried out the interviews with the purpose of gaining “different,”

“rhizomatic,” or polyvocal descriptions. I also read the transcripts with the understanding that the discourses that emerged in interviews are not whole and complete, and that what emerged during the interviews was happenstance. This means that the emerged discourses were not a reflection of how the informants’ minds were organized, but instead, they were what unfolded in the specific context of the interview.

Based on this understanding, in the second phase of my Bakhtinian textual analysis I use new tools to re-examine the examples analyzed using the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia. . Using authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, I focus on the tension that emerged from the process of negotiating the dynamics between and across culturally dominant discourses and other alternate discourses. The earlier interpretation through the heteroglossic lens highlighted ambiguity and tension that rose from the multiplicities of discourses under the influence of centripetal and centrifugal forces. In comparison, this phase of analysis makes visible the negotiation process that informants go through as they contend with discourses that carry great authority in Korean society. I do this strategically to force myself to come up with polyvocal interpretations of the transcripts with the goal of gaining a new perspective on the meanings of the transcript.

My purpose in this second phase was not only to read the transcripts carefully and do a close reading, but also to read the transcripts across time and with alternative Bakhtinian tools that seemed useful and emerged during my initial analysis phase. In my readings and re-readings of the interviews with Minh, Haejin, Gouba, Sabai, and Myungsoo, I looked to find meaning in what informants said across interviews, rather than attempting to seek the “correct,” deeper, or thicker meaning of what the informants said. In particular, revisiting what was said in the previous interviews and placing discourses in new contexts generated additional meanings. This decision to focus on the multiplicities of possible meanings problematizes the assumptions that informants are aware of why they shared what they shared during the interview, that the meaning

of what informants said in the previous interview is static and informants are able to access it later, and that the follow-up interviews will clarify what was ambiguous in the previous interviews (J. Tobin, 2000). Based on this intention, I first elaborate on two Bakhtinian ideas I use as analytical tools—authoritative and internally persuasive discourses—and reexamine examples from the interviews.

Authoritative and internally persuasive discourses

Examining these examples through the Bakhtinian ideas of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse draws our attention to the dynamics between various discourses within heteroglossia. The notion of authoritative discourse manifests itself in this dissertation through the forms of culturally dominant discourses in Korean society. Authoritative discourse is based on traditions, conventions, and cultural norms (Matusov, 2007). Such discourse does not accommodate open-ended dialogues, while demanding of people their full-fledged support. This commanding discourse coerces us to make it our own.

On the other hand, internally persuasive discourse is made visible through the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate and negotiate various discourses. An internally persuasive discourse and an authoritative discourse could be joined into one, though such a case is rare (Bakhtin, 1981). According to Matusov (2007), Bakhtin conceptualized internally persuasive discourse as the ways in which people relate to a text by experimenting, problematizing, and seeking alternatives for the interplay of both author and discourses in the text. Based on this idea, I interpret as internally persuasive discourse the way in which marriage-labor immigrants employ a critical perspective on discourses that are culturally taken for granted. A person is engaged in internally persuasive discourse when different ideas come in contact and conflict with each other (Matusov, 2007). As a productive site of negotiation where new

meanings emerge, internally persuasive discourse is half ones' own, half someone else's, and in the process of internalizing a discourse much tension is generated, placing the discourse adjacent to other previously internalized discourses. This "moment of crisis" makes the "truth" indefinitely susceptible for more testing (Matusov, 2007). In this regard, discourses of mothering in Korea—normative discourses that should not be undefiled—are challenged by the immigrants as they accept, resist, and transform these through internally persuasive discourses.

The struggle and the intertwined relationship between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, in turn, contributes to the process of establishing individual consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981). I am not suggesting here that discourses associated with violence or aggression against marriage-labor immigrants are always authoritative discourses, or that discourses related to the immigrants' freedom to choose can consistently be ascribed to internally persuasive discourses (Matusov, 2007). Rather, I am suggesting that authoritative discourses negotiated by marriage-labor immigrants are rooted in the cultural beliefs and practices of Korean society, and internally persuasive discourses in the context of this dissertation problematizes the unquestioned authority of such culturally dominant discourses.

In this section, I first identify authoritative discourses that emerged from the examples analyzed through a heteroglossic lens. These discourses highlight the contexts in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate their daily lives, illustrating the powerful "word of the fathers" rooted in Korean society (Morris, 1995, p. 78). Then, I provide examples of internally persuasive discourses that contest the authority of the culturally dominant discourses about marriage-labor immigrants and their mothering. Placed between a discourse one identifies with and another discourse that belongs to other people, internally persuasive discourses demonstrate the process of various discourses being disputed and rearticulated.

Authoritative discourse

The matter of culturally dominant discourses, and how in particular marriage-labor immigrants wrestle with these discourses, illustrates how the discourses prevalent in contemporary Korea have the effect of binding marriage-labor immigrants through implicit sociocultural pressure. For example, Minh reports the experience of becoming increasingly more assimilated and of doing things “like Korean women.” Unlike her marriage-labor immigrant friends who spent money without thoughtfully managing it, Minh spent the household income purposefully, doing as Korean women are reputed to do:

I buy my kids new clothes. I buy things we need at home. Usually Korean women do things like that. They buy things like new pots and pans, or electronics. When I do that I feel, when I write in the household ledger, I feel like I may have become Korean.

Meanwhile, Minh distanced herself from other Vietnamese people because she recognized how Korean people’s gaze on her when she was with her friends from Vietnam was distinctively different compared to when she was with Korean people. Minh first explained this as “difference in personalities,” but acknowledged that there was more to consider in this regard:

So, I don’t get together with Vietnamese friends that much because our personalities are different. I don’t meet with foreigners that much. I just study like Korean people, I go to private schools to take lessons, and I do what I want to do. . . . If I hang out with Vietnamese friends, I only get to talk in Vietnamese, and there is a strong image of us out there. People look at us—I sense that.

The Korean worldview that perceives marriage-labor immigrants to be an abnormality within society compelled Minh to seek out ways to act and feel more Korean. In particular, being perceived as Korean and disassociated from other Vietnamese people relieved the pressure she experienced from Korean society.

The common authoritative discourses across Chapters Three, Four, and Five include: the perceived lower social status or deficiency of marriage-labor immigrants (Freeman, 2005); the traditional discourse of mothering based on patriarchal and hierarchal values rooted in Confucianism (Song-Yi Kim et al., 2008), and the pressure on marriage-labor immigrants to fulfill the socio-cultural needs created by Korean women who refuse to adhere to such demands (Sumi Kim, 2009). Furthermore, various assimilationist policies and programs implemented by government branches and other social institutions reflect the underlying pressures that arise from these dominant discourses within Korean society (Bélanger et al., 2010; Y. Lee, 2013b). For example, Haejin, a Korean wife, expressed a sense of frustration in how Sabai as a marriage-labor immigrant was not actively seeking opportunities to learn and assimilate to Korean society, even though there are many classes and places that can offer her assistance:

Even in Korea, there are a lot of opportunities for learning and guidance through human resources agencies for women, family support centers, and multicultural support center—systems like that. But when I see Sabai, I feel sad because you can use those opportunities well, but she has a tendency of wanting to stay home.

Discussing the implementation of bilingual programs, Myungsoo also acknowledged how important it is not only for marriage-immigrant mothers to assimilate, but also for their children to perform adequately in order to be regarded as “Korean enough.” One of the markers was a relative degree of Korean language proficiency: “If the child does not speak Korean well enough, my cousin’s wife would take the responsibility since the mother is Vietnamese.”

These pre-existing cultural frameworks as authoritative discourses also demand a sense of commitment and allegiance from marriage-labor immigrants and Korean natives. As Myungsoo repeatedly shared during interviews, he wanted marriage-labor immigrant mothers to demonstrate their commitment to being a traditional wife and mother who invests the majority of her time caring for the children:

The relationship between a mother and a child is really important in immigrant families for the children's development and wellbeing. I feel sad that some [marriage-labor immigrant] mothers choose the opportunities to make money by engaging in seasonal labor in their town, even though they could spend the time with their children.

It is debatable whether marriage-labor immigrants are “freely” able to spend time with children considering both the pressures they experience as parents and home financial burdens, and for this reason I have explored various discourses associated with mothering and work more in depth in chapter five. What I am suggesting here through Myungsoo's words is that the traditional discourse of mothering in Korea functions as an authoritative discourse that demands the immigrant mothers' allegiance. Rooted in culturally dominant discourses, cultural institutions—including government branches, schools, and the media—have attempted to mitigate the tension around marriage-labor immigration by confining marriage-labor immigrants in particular roles as mothers and wives, establishing hierarchal relationships between Korean natives and marriage-labor immigrants, and placing immigrants under a set of cultural expectations (Lee, 2013; Olneck, 2010). Without acknowledging the contribution marriage-labor immigrants make towards both the local and national economies, the culturally dominant discourse instead demands full-fledged support of cultural conventions established upon traditions rooted in hierarchal and patriarchal values. Therefore, working mothers dividing their time between home and work is not an acceptable lifestyle option.

Furthermore, the authoritative discourses that emerged during interviews conducted for this dissertation are tightly associated and entangled with tension resulting from the continuous flow of immigrants to Korea and contradictory responses provided by cultural institutions regarding these contemporary demographic changes in Korea. Myungsoo compared the influx of marriage-labor immigrants to a natural disaster: “International marriage market—we call it a market. After the market opened, marriage-labor immigrants came into Korea since 2014 like a

tsunami.”

The rapid increase of the immigrant population in Korea has also led various cultural institutions to respond to the demographic change with organized measures including establishing support centers and assimilation programs. Yet, when Minh was turned away for a program that was established for marriage-labor immigrant families she was perplexed by the message such experience communicated to her:

There is a mentoring program—if there is a “multicultural” child at school, they send a college student mentor there, and the child can ask the mentor if there is anything the child doesn’t know. ... You should be able to request that your child participate in the program, but the teachers don’t give you the information.

Considering the fact that cultural institutions – including provincial education offices and public schools – in Korea have introduced programs targeting marriage-labor immigrant families, it was difficult for Minh to make sense of this contradiction. It was reasonable for her to think that she “should be able to” benefit from the mentoring program because it was for the immigrant families such as hers. Nevertheless, she was denied access to such resource, making her feel frustrated and confused. While she clearly made an effort to provide her children with access to programs that were planned to benefit children from marriage-labor immigrant families, Minh walked away from this experience feeling ignored, confused, and discontent.

As a Korean social worker, Myungsoo shared his perspective on the rising tension in the country regarding marriage-labor immigration. The disparities between what the Korean government expected from marriage-labor immigration and what “issues” marriage-labor immigrants “brought” into the countries were grave. According to Myungsoo, the expectation for marriage-labor immigration that “Korean men who could not get married can get married, they will form happy families, and it will lead to resolving national-level problems” (e.g. low birth rate) was so problematic that: “It seemed as if no more new problems could possibly come out of

this [marriage-labor immigration].” Such contradictions, positioning the immigrants as both solutions to existing problems and sources for new problems, illustrate the undercurrent of two discourses that drive the support policies and programs implemented by the institutions: a divide between the rhetoric of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, on the one hand, and assimilationist discourse, on the other.

Internally persuasive discourse and Minh’s interviews

In the midst of such pressure, marriage-labor immigrants grapple with authoritative discourses by resisting, reworking, and shifting them in the context of their daily lives. Internally persuasive discourses are located at the fringe of informants’ life-worlds and those dominant discourses that position marriage-labor immigrants as lacking, emphasize mothering based on the patriarchal and hierarchal values, and pressure the immigrants to meet the cultural needs Korean women used to fulfill. Juxtaposing these authoritative discourses with previously internalized discourses, the immigrants demonstrated how they negotiate available this tension.

The example of Minh investing in herself through work and study demonstrates how she negotiated the available discourses of marriage-labor immigrants and discourses of mothering. Additionally, insider accounts from Minh’s perspective provide a glimpse of how she was grappling with those dominant discourses that perceived her from a deficit perspective. After Minh visited the customer who initially refused to receive service from her, Minh realized what the alternative would have been if she did not proactively approached her customer and change the customer’s attitude towards her:

What came to my mind that moment is, if I did not contact the person for the second time. ... The customer will continue to think, “Because she is a foreigner, she doesn’t have to come here to my house to do her job.” ... If I didn’t visit, the customer could have

thought badly about me.

Minh's "experiment," her second phone call to the customer, challenged the "truth" regarding immigrants. Even though she did not know how the customer—who did not previously want to work with Minh because of her marriage-labor immigrant status—would respond to her, she took the risk of seeking an alternate way to be seen by others which in turn impacted upon her experience of herself as an immigrant. As a result, the authoritative discourse surrounding marriage-labor immigrants has become forever vulnerable to challenges to its authority.

Furthermore, through her efforts to be recognized as competent by her children and Korean people, Minh engaged herself in the process of establishing "the individual's belief-system" using her work and study as leverage (Dentith, 1995, p. 54). Simultaneously taking a part in multiple roles, Minh open-endedly positioned herself in relation to various discourses of mothering in Korean society. In this process, she also experimented with possibilities beyond fulfilling the needs created by Korean women who refused to participate in traditional discourses regarding the roles of the Korean mother and wife. During the last interview in 2015 she stated, "Even though my husband was hesitant to have me work at first, but now, when I ask him, 'should I quit?' he gets scared [thinking of the possibility of being the sole income earner.]" Additionally, her work experience at the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center, as well as her current position in the service industry, also gave her insight into how people are culturally perceived to be different based on occupational status in Korean society:

You know, people say that being a government employee is a great occupation. The pay is higher and you look more intelligent. People look up to you. People think jobs in the service industry are hard because you are always in the position to put others' needs first. Even though her current job was often looked down upon socially and culturally, Minh was much more content about having a position in the service industry. The new job helped her feel more competent unlike her old job at the family support center: "I had a hard time [at her previous

employment] because there were areas that I could not improve by making more efforts.”

Voicing herself with much joy and pride, she shared that what she was learning through the online bachelor’s degree program in business helped her with her new job.

Similarly to how Minh reworked the discourses that preside over her life through her roles as a student and employee, she also contended with the dominant discourse of a “deficient” marriage-labor mother through engaging in other discourses that would position her in different ways. Reworking the authoritative discourse by seeking autonomy, helping others, and rejecting some of the prevalent practices of mothering in Korea facilitated opportunities for Minh to make new meanings out of her own lifeworld. Even though Minh acknowledged herself as a “lacking” marriage-labor immigrant mother, the influence of culturally dominant discourse was challenged by contending discourses of independent, charitable, and critical marriage-labor immigrant mothers. Hence, she continuously experienced the need to contribute to the local community using her talents:

Even though I quit my job as an interpreter and a translator, I am continuing to help out at an immigration office through a multicultural support center. I volunteer frequently at places like community centers, helping out senior citizens, whenever I have time.

Rather than remain the recipient of various programs for immigrants, Minh was active in establishing her own understanding of who she was through the way she spent her time and energy. Expressing her disagreement with how Korean mothers raise their children, Minh was also deeply concerned about how her children spend their day:

They [children in Korea] go out in the morning and come back close to seven. That’s too much for your children—this is not having them study, you don’t “develop” people like that. People have their own talents within, and it seems like studying interferes with that.

This critical discernment in her philosophy about children’s education demonstrated how she had examined the culturally taken-for-granted discourses of mothering in Korea. Distancing herself

from the Korean style of mothering, Minh took a cautious stance towards what was frequently and habitually accepted as “norms.”

The tension created through the process of internalizing various discourses was made visible through Minh making use of and placing multiple discourses adjacent to each other. As she challenged the conventional ways of perceiving marriage-labor immigrants, immigrant mothers, and Korean mothering in Korean society, Minh negotiated a range of discourses to decide what worked for her and for her family, and in so doing managed to contend with culturally dominant discourses.

Internally persuasive discourse and the interviews with Haejin and Gouba

The decision of Haejin and Gouba to voice their concerns about how Sabai was being treated by her husband is another example of a family negotiating culturally dominant discourses. As a part of the efforts to engage Sabai’s husband in a dialogue about how Sabai was perceived and treated as a marriage-labor immigrant wife, Haejin and Gouba challenged the authority of cultural assumptions and implicit beliefs. Since Sabai was Gouba’s older sister, Sabai’s husband was higher in the family hierarchy, but Haejin and Gouba still questioned Sabai’s husband on the basis of how he treated Sabai. Her husband did not respond well to this confrontation to his authority:

One thing I want to say is that since Sabai’s husband is Korean, I think he believes in the idea of “elders first” in Korean culture. Why does someone who is lower in the family hierarchy recklessly treat someone who is above? He has an attitude like that.

Being familiar with the cultural discourse about family hierarchy, Haejin was more hesitant about speaking with Sabai’s husband about how Sabai was treated at home. It was particularly difficult for Haejin to contend with this authoritative discourse, having been under the influence of the

discourse all her life:

Sumi's dad wanted to only discuss what happened to his sister beyond the issue [of family hierarchy] because she is family, and also to talk about who was at fault. You know, we [Korean people] are influenced a little by our culture and this type of environment. So, Korean people can hold it back, but I think he [Gouba] is different. Without knowing what the result would be, Haejin and Gouba took a risk to problematize and consider alternatives to the authority Sabai's husband was claiming as an older sister's husband. When Haejin and Gouba challenged Sabai's husband, different ideas came into contact with each other, questioning the culturally taken-for-granted discourse about family hierarchy. Juxtaposing their own voices with the dominant cultural discourses about family hierarchy, Haejin and Gouba grappled with the authority of discourses that positioned Sabai in a difficult situation without much help.

The family portrait episode highlighted the different discourses that Haejin and Gouba used to resist and rework the culturally dominant discourses about "foreigners" in Korean society. The list of discourses Haejin and Gouba listed, including Sumi's teacher, school education, parental role, and children's curiosity functioned as the basis upon which they contended with the authoritative discourse that make marriage-labor immigrants seem "out of place." Sumi's classmates' laughter, at the sight of Gouba in the family portrait, left Sumi perplexed: "Why are they laughing?" Sumi didn't understand." Haejin understood why Sumi's classmates laugh, however, and she tried to talk with Sumi to see whether this episode left any negative impression on her about marriage-labor immigrant families like theirs.

While Haejin and Gouba acknowledged the family portrait episode as an event grounded in the preconceptions about non-Koreans as the "abnormal" in Korean society, they also use an array of discourses to understand the episode anew through a different lens. By introducing Sumi's teacher, her classmate's curiosity, school education, and Haejin into the episode as a part

of their efforts to understand how Sumi navigated in the situation, Haejin and Gouba put the discourse about “foreigner” in contact with other discourses that provided different explanations of the episode. After expressing her gratitude towards Sumi’s teacher multiple times, Haejin ended the conversation about the family portrait by iterating her wish of giving Sumi opportunities to be seen as “a normal child” without any stereotypes about children from marriage-labor immigrant families attached:

This is what I pray for. I want my daughter to have a good teacher who looks at her without stereotypes in mind, like a normal child, bringing out her strength. There are many “multicultural” children with low self-esteem.

The notion of internally persuasive discourse makes visible how Haejin was grappling with the culturally dominant discourse about marriage-labor immigrants and their children. After spending an extended amount of time exploring various ways to understand the family portrait episode, Haejin hoped that Sumi did not need to go through what Gouba experienced as a marriage-labor immigrant. Noting how the children from marriage-labor immigrant families have low self-esteem, Haejin was fully aware of the significant influence the authoritative discourse has on “multicultural” children including her daughter.

Internally persuasive discourse and Myungsoo’s interviews

The process of rearticulating circulating discourses to make sense of them presents open-ended possibilities by contesting the pressure from authoritative discourses. As Myungsoo wrestled to understand how marriage-labor immigrants navigated competing cultural discourses about mothering and working, he illustrated the tension and ambiguity that stem from the process of internalizing competing discourses. He articulated during the last interview that he could not demand marriage-labor immigrants stay home and spend time with their children or quit their

jobs because he resonated with the discourse the immigrants used to demonstrate their needs:

So there are a lot of things that are difficult to say, “this is right.” When I see the child, I wish that the mom didn’t work too much, or at least not so much as to be difficult on the child. But from an immigrant woman’s perspective, if she says “my husband won’t be able to work later [since he is older and will retire sooner], so I need to make money when I can.” I have nothing to say to that.

This means that Myungsoo started internalizing the discourses marriage-labor immigrants employed to make sense of their lives. The financial needs of marriage-labor immigrant families, for example, conflicted with the cultural discourse that demanded that immigrant mothers spend more time with children as the primary caregiver. In the bordering space between the two discourses, the familiar culturally dominant discourse became visible by acknowledging other contrasting discourses with which marriage-labor immigrants grappled. The authority of the cultural discourse also was made ambiguous, even though Myungsoo continued revisiting the cultural discourse that demanded immigrant mothers to fulfill traditional discourses of mothering in Korea.

With the implementation of policies and programs that support bilingualism, there are multiple dominant discourses at play, including the deficit perspective on marriage-labor immigrants, and the authority of "Koreanness" as the virtuous national cultural identity. Bilingualism as a rising discourse supported by the Korean government provides a leverage for Myungsoo to contest the authoritative discourses. He grappled with conflicting values and beliefs, exploring ways to make sense of the discrepancies between these discourses. While acknowledging how beneficial it could be for his cousin’s family to have a bilingual home environment, Myungsoo was aware of the expectation of raising a “Korean child” who confirms to the cultural norms of Korean society:

So I told my cousin’s wife in passing, “I think it would be okay if kids use Vietnamese

starting when they are young,” without being convinced about it myself. ... If the child does not speak Korean well enough, my cousin’s wife would take the responsibility since the mother is Vietnamese.

While acknowledging the benefit that marriage-labor immigrants bring to local and national communities in Korea, he noted the pressure marriage-labor immigrants experience about raising a "Korean enough" child. As he processed the disparities between competing discourses on implementing bilingualism in the homes of the immigrant families, Myungsoo experienced tension with the authoritative discourse that emphasized the Korean national cultural identity as it came into contact with emerging discourses in Korean society.

As the demographic landscape of the country changed over time, the discourse about promoting bilingualism became more and more recognized. Consequently, Myungsoo’s mind became more closely aligned with the popular discourse of contemporary Korea:

So I could not recommend it to them strongly [to use their mother tongue when communicating with their children]. Recently, the environment is changing that way [encouraging the marriage-labor immigrant mothers to speak their first language], and I also agree.

While the authoritative discourse rooted in traditional, conventional, and normative values of Korean society still positions Myungsoo in a place of contention, he experienced more comfort in the fact that his thoughts about bilingualism was becoming more recognized in Korean society.

The Bakhtinian idea of internally persuasive discourse helps conceptualize the way in which key informants navigate the delicate space between completely rejecting culturally authorized discourses and wholeheartedly subscribing to authoritative discourse. I am not suggesting here that engaging oneself in the process of internalizing a discourse necessarily means the elimination of authoritative discourse. Still, the process of creating new meanings through internally persuasive discourses makes space for elements that are often disregarded

under the influence of authoritative discourses. For instance, overlooking the role that race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomics, and nationality play in the mothering of marriage-labor immigrants justifies the inequality and discrimination, as does the framing of marriage-labor immigrants as lacking and deficient. Internally persuasive discourse, bordering multiple social and internalized discourses, opens up the possibility of examining how these aspects function in the discourse of mothering by making visible culturally familiar values in authoritative discourse.

Shared Discourses between Minh, Haejin, Gouba, Sabai, and Myungsoo

The ways informants navigate and negotiate the discourses of mothering illustrate the intersections between the assumptions about mothers and “others” in Korean society. Out of a number of discourses that emerged during the interviews, the notion that mothers are the primary caregiver for their children were shared among all the key informants.

Minh, who navigated between multiple discourses through her roles as a mother, an employee, and a student, for example, subscribed to the viewpoint that her most important identity was being a mother: “Since I am a mother, that [being a mother] is the most important thing, thinking of the children’s education.” While she regarded time to invest in herself and her relationship with coworkers and her in-laws as important, she did not hesitate to articulate that her children were her priority.

As a working mother, similar to Minh, Haejin decided to quit her job working at a preschool because she was willing to put Sumi, her daughter, before her work. She said during the 2014 interview: “I thought like that [she thought it was important to support her husband], and looking back at this point—the child, that weighed on my heart. So I thought that I needed to put things down decisively and spend time with her.” Even though Haejin is Korean and Minh is a

marriage-labor immigrant, both of them were working, and they both assumed the role of a primary caregiver.

Haejin's husband, Gouba, confirmed her role as the one who was mainly responsible for caring for their children. As Gouba described himself as the breadwinner of the family and a "fool" who did not do anything at home, he saw Haejin as being in charge of taking care of Sumi, helping her with her homework, and making inquiries about her studies. "I have nothing to say to Sumi's mom, because there is nothing I do for Sumi. I am like a fool. What I can do is to do my best in making money."

With the strong desire to find employment, Sabai was responsible for taking care of her children. Mentioning that she could not help her children with their homework because of her poor Korean, she spent much time providing her children with transportation to a local multicultural family support center: "If I work, I can't send my children there. I need to take them there and send them there. Because of the children, I need to be available all day."

Lastly, Myungsoo emphasized the marriage-labor immigrant women's role as mothers, pointing out the influence the mothers have on their children: "The relationship between a mother and a child is really important in immigrant families for the children's development and wellbeing." Being explicit about his opinions on how he thought the immigrant mothers needed to prioritize their time, Myungsoo stressed that "mothers are the caregivers."

The other thread that went through all the informants' interviews was that the marriage-labor immigrants were perceived to be a group of people who did not necessarily belong to Korean society the same way that Korean people did. Even after living in Korea for many years and obtaining Korean citizenship, the stigma against marriage-labor immigrants persisted. For instance, Minh continuously compared herself to Korean coworkers and Korean mothers. Pointing out how she needed to be a "better immigrant" than Korean people she worked with, she illustrated the implicit divide between Korean natives and marriage-labor immigrants at her work.

Minh also compared herself to Korean moms, feeling the pressure of needing to be as competent as Korean moms. She was concerned about the possibility of disappointing her children: “Other [Korean] moms know how to do these things, but why don’t you?”

Haejin took much pride in the fact that she openly discussed with her daughter Sumi about Gouba being a marriage-labor immigrant: “I, her mom, talked to her openly about things like that [how Gouba is a marriage-labor immigrant]! I haven’t hid things like that since she was a baby.” She believed that her openness contributed to how Sumi was confident in sharing about her father and his home country with her classmates.

Sabai felt a disconnecting between herself and Korean society due to the lack of information available to her for employment possibilities. “Even though I want to work, what can I do? Where should I go? There is no information.” When it came to her children’s study, she felt similarly: “I can’t send the children to the private schools for extra lessons—I don’t know anything.”

Gouba experienced many years of discrimination at his work: “So at work, Korean people were very ‘particular’—they did not treat me like a human, but like an animal.” Even though the situation improved over the years, his experience at work made him feel shunned by and looked down upon in Korean society: “They [Korean people] don’t know. They don’t know Burma. ... My sister and I came from the lower level.”

Myungsoo was much more implicit in his words about how marriage-labor immigrants are perceived to be different from Korean natives. He spent a lot of time on explaining how marriage-labor immigrants navigated the Korean society and how the Chungsun Multicultural Family Support Center tried to assist them from a Korean native’s perspective. During the interview in 2014, Myungsoo indirectly acknowledged the unseen discrimination in Korean society through his wish to see a Korean president who was raised in a marriage-labor immigrant family: “I think we need a world where it [a child from a marriage-labor immigrant family

becoming president] can happen.” Covertly stating how Korean society was not ready yet to see this happen, he explained the value of having a child from an immigrant family (born in Korea) become the president of the nation.

All five key informants shared these two discourses—one about mothers as the primary caretaker and the other that distinguished the immigrant population from the native Korean population. From varying perspectives, the informants articulated the ways in which they made sense of their life stories by using these discourses that resonated in their lifeworlds. In the section below, I examine discourses that contradicted one another, in order to examine the complexities of the discourses that marriage-labor immigrants accept, resist, and transform.

Contradicting Discourses between Minh, Haejin, Gouba, Sabai, and Myungsoo

Across the interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015, marriage-labor immigrants’ desire and decision to work emerged numerous times in varying contexts. Whether or not it was deemed positive or not, this demonstrated how the informants’ minds were organized around the idea of making a living, what opportunities extra household income could provide, and how working influenced other parts of life. In particular, Myungsoo’s words from a Korean native’s perspective provided a wider view on the range of available discourses marriage-labor immigrants negotiate in their mothering by offering opportunities to compare and contrast what he said with what was expressed by marriage-labor immigrants.

One of the ways that the strong emphasis on the economic activity for marriage-labor immigrants was highlighted was through juxtaposing work with mothering. Myungsoo, as a Korean man working with marriage-labor immigrants, spoke strongly about the importance of immigrant mothers spending time with their children. He pointed out the lack of mother’s care as being a direct cause of why children are emotionally disturbed and acquire learning disabilities:

Then there is no mother's care, even though mothers are the primary caregivers. Then children are disturbed emotionally, and there are children who are autistic, even though they don't have autism. What is it called? ADHD? There are children who can't concentrate.

At the same time, Myungsoo positioned the immigrant mother's employment as the main reason why they did not spend enough time with their children during the crucial time period when children need their mothers the most: "During this time when children are sensitive and need love, the mothers work overtime until late at night, because the money is big, because they get paid 1.5 times their regular pay."

The discourses that emerged from Minh's interviews were far from Myungsoo's description on how mothering and work negatively influence one another. Through her new work, she experienced a change in herself as an individual. Having to work with customers she never met before, she needed to carry herself with smiles and a positive attitude. She also benefitted from the flexible work hours this position offered, and being able to pay for her study gave her a sense of autonomy. Minh saw a connection between how she saw herself and how her children perceived her as a mother: "I think it is important for me to work with a sense of self-assurance, and my children talk [about how their mother is a marriage-labor immigrant] with confidence."

Even though Haejin decided to leave her job in 2014 to spend more time with Sumi, the extra income her employment brought to the family provided her the means to provide Sumi with additional educational opportunities: "Because the living expenses take up too much [of what my husband and I make], it is not easy to send my child to a private school for supplementary lessons like Korean parents." While Haejin and Gouba's finances did not allow them to send Sumi to additional lessons at private schools as Korean parents did, Haejin's work contributed to Sumi's education by making additional money to purchase supplementary study materials the family

could otherwise not afford. This allowed Haejin to feel like she was participating in the cultural discourse of mothering in a way.

In addition, there were dissonant discourses about the level of education of marriage-labor immigrants and its influence on mothering. Myungsoo believed that immigrant mothers with a low level of education were limited in the way they could raise their own children:

For people from Southeast Asia, they did not have the opportunity have such stimulation [as a young child by participating in educational programs such as Montessori], and also a lot of people from China and Vietnam in the Ho Chi Minh region only graduated from middle school. In that case, when they have a baby, they have a limitation to thinking about how they need to raise their children.

He made a direct connection between how immigrant mothers did not have the opportunities to experience various forms of “stimulation” as a child and how their mothering was confined in their own childhood experiences. He contrasted this with how Korean mothers make efforts to expose their children to a range of experiences, even if that meant spending a lot of money.

Myungsoo’s explanation about the correlation between mothers’ level of education and their mothering also resonate with his comments about how immigrant mothers who were not highly educated could not afford raise their children bilingually: “We know that that’s an advantage [of having a marriage-labor immigrant family], but for Southeast Asian women, it depends on their educational level.” Compared with Korean mothers with higher levels of education that were married to “Westerners,” immigrant women from Southeast Asia were perceived to be incompetent due to their limited education.

While Myungsoo’s perspective, oriented around marriage-labor immigrants themselves, pointed out the immigrants’ lack of education imposed difficulties upon their mothering, Minh, as a marriage-labor immigrant mother herself, pointed to family relationships as the main source of

the difficulties she experienced while having her children. The absence of her mother and her husband's personality made the process of giving birth more challenging.

When I was delivering the baby, the most difficult thing was that my mom was not there. There was no one that could help me. The only person I could lean on was my husband. Because the men from Chungsun Province are not very talkative or expressive, I spent a lot of time feeling lonely.

According to Minh, the troubles she experienced were rooted in the fact that she did not have the family support she needed, rather than in her lack of knowledge about having a child.

In addition, Minh brought up a new insight on what counts as "the level of education." Even though she graduated from high school in Vietnam, it was too costly to request a notarized document to prove her level of education: "It cost about \$1,000 to receive the notarized document. ... Here [in Korea], you just pay a dollar [as a Korean native] to receive such document." This meant that the officially recognized level of education for Minh was lower than her actual level of education. Because she could not get recognition of her educational background, she had to take a qualification exam to receive an equivalent of the American General Education Development (GED) degree.

Even though Korean society recognized Minh as only having received a middle school education from Vietnam, she had a fervent desire to learn to become a "better" mother. Among marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam, she was an advocate for such learning:

From my honest perspective as an immigrant who moved to Korea earlier, I tell them [newer marriage-labor immigrants from Vietnam], "You need to invest some time in yourself. Learn as much as you can, and study as much as you need. Then think about money."

As she recognized the importance of "investing in herself," she decided to pursue college education. Even though Myungsoo presumed that the level of education for marriage-labor

immigrants would limit them as individuals and consequently in their mothering, Minh challenged Myungsoo's words by continuing to expand her horizon. In other words, discourses emerging from the interviews with Minh demonstrated that marriage-labor immigrants coming to Korea with a certain educational background would not necessarily maintain that level of education after arriving in Korea.

With the complexities of these shared and contradicting discourses and subsequent examples in mind, I now explore muddled and absent discourses across the transcripts.

Muddled and Absent Discourses between Minh, Haejin, Gouba, Sabai, and Myungsoo

Over the course of carrying out interviews in the past two years, I experienced moments in which unexpected discourses emerged and surprised me. For example, Myungsoo discussed how the parents and relatives of marriage-labor immigrants expected the children to know the immigrants' home language.

At the grandparents' home [where the parents of immigrant mothers live], immigrants' children couldn't talk with their grandmother. So the relatives [of the immigrants] would ask, "why didn't you teach the kids Vietnamese? Why you don't teach them Cambodian? The mom is Vietnamese or Cambodian. You shouldn't do that." They come back [to Korea] after hearing things like that.

My focus for this dissertation was on how children from marriage-labor immigrant families are under pressure to speak the Korean language fluently, and at the same time are encouraged to learn the home language of their immigrant parents. However, Myungsoo's words demonstrated how the families of marriage-labor immigrants in their home country also wanted to see the children to become competent in the immigrant parents' home language. This means that marriage-labor immigrants have another dimension of discourses they grapple within the home

country. Beyond the circulating discourses in Korea that promote Korean proficiency and bilingualism, the immigrants also need to negotiate how they balance cultural discourses of mothering in an inter-cultural context. As the immigrants travel back and forth between their home country and Korea, the level of complexity in how they negotiate various discourses is much more than what has been perceived on the Korean side.

During the last interview with Haejin, she shared that she had heard news about Sabai's family. Since 2014, Haejin and Gouba's family had not kept in touch with Sabai's family. To my surprise, Haejin shared that Sabai got a job and became the breadwinner for the family. As Haejin explained that Sabai's family had been struggling immensely with their finances, I was astonished how Sabai's position in the family had changed so rapidly over the course of two years. She was a stay at home mom, struggling to find employment opportunities and information for her children's study, but she became the only working spouse in the family providing financially for her family. My familiarity with media reports about how marriage-labor immigrant women are victimized through domestic violence, a legal system that favored their Korean spouses, and social discrimination was muddled by the news about Sabai (H.-R. Kim, 2009; S.-H. Kim, Kwon, & Kim, 2009). I interpreted this as how the insider voices of marriage-labor immigrants and their life stories not being made visible. As the immigrants navigate their everyday experiences and negotiate various discourses, the ways in which the immigrants transform and are transformed in the process are often not acknowledged in Korean society.

Explaining how she came to Korea, Minh articulated how it used to be that international marriages with Vietnamese people were only possible through matchmaking companies because there were only minimal exchanges between individuals in Vietnam and other countries. She went on to explain that she and her husband were attracted to each other because she was "taller than other Vietnamese women" and "Korean men were also taller" than men from other countries to whom she had been introduced, including Japanese and Taiwanese men.

Through Minh's words, I see that the discourse about marriage-labor immigrants' physical appearance is absent from the majority of the interview transcripts.. While informants were very sensitive to how their children were seen in the local community, the discussion about what roles physical appearance of the immigrants play in the process of immigration and navigating their lifeworld in Korean society was largely missing. Knowing that Korean Chinese people (in the Korean diaspora) were considered to be the most desirable candidates (Kong, Yoon, & Yu, 2010), I understood that this preference implicitly included the physical resemblance of the immigrant spouses to Korean people. This was one of the key factors making certain groups of eligible brides more attractive. The focus of the existing literature and the interviews I carried out, however, were more about how the immigrants fulfill the existing cultural discourses of a traditional mother and wife by carrying out duties and responsibilities.

These muddled and absent discourses demonstrate the complexities of the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants grapple with their lifeworlds. By emphasizing the uncertain spaces the immigrants navigate, these examples make visible the intricacies of negotiating the dynamics of the discourses of marriage-labor immigration in contemporary Korea.

Chapter 7

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research

In the Field

My research on children from marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea has transformed over the years as growing relationships with my informants that have affected the ways in which I experienced and positioned myself in the field. My interest in the research topic was initially prompted by *Rainbow Kindergarten*, a Korean television program featuring children from marriage-labor immigrant families. A critical analysis of this program has demonstrated that children have been simultaneously perceived as threats to the Korean national identity and valuable human resources for the country's performance in the global economy. This tension and inconsistency in how these children are understood, interpreted, and contextualized has complicated the ways in which the children navigate sociocultural norms around notions of national identity, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity.

Focusing on what unfolded from my ethnographic interviews and fieldwork led me to recognize that what emerges from this research is not individual performance of cultural expectations but rather the ways in which we influence and are influenced by relationships among people and sociocultural contexts. Over time, this understanding, combined with my emergent interactions with informants in the field, served as the impetus for re-imagining how I personally experienced cultural discourses as an in-betweener conducting fieldwork at "home" (*i.e.* in my home culture.)

My dissertation research, produced from the perspective of an in-betweener ethnographer, is a product of collective and interactive experiences in my relationships with the informants. Even though different cultural communities identify me as either "Korean" or "American," and

marriage-labor immigrant parents (and their children) as either “social problems” or “national assets,” this identification arises in specific cultural contexts. Applying this perspective to my ethnographic interviews, fieldwork, and writing, eventually I came to understand that perceived differences were experienced in constantly transforming liminal spaces, affected by emergent occurrences disrupting static understandings of cultural identities and discourses. This realization complicated my own limited understandings of research as being about exerting the knowledge of researchers. This is a long-standing problem of research in education, the belief that research is a premade and objective product, not an ever-shifting process. I now think of research as a dialogical process that is continuously shaped by multiple perspectives.

Translation: In-between Korean and English

In this dissertation, I engaged myself as a researcher who is a critical partaker of the polyvocal text. Throughout the process of interviewing, conducting fieldwork, and writing, I was constantly transformed by the interaction with my informants, rather than maintaining “objective,” distant from the lives of the informants (Biehl & Locke, 2010). Investigating the space between the informants and myself as a researcher involved the examination of what I bring to the field and the processes of interpreting the discourses that emerged during the ethnographic interviews with marriage-labor immigrant parents. The conversations with other social workers, who influence the lives of immigrant families in various capacities, also helped me to contextualize the tensions experienced in Korea as a result of the rapid change in national demographics in the last decade.

Navigating the space between Korean and English provided me with some unforeseen challenges. The Korean language was used as the main language of conducting all of the ethnographic interviews and fieldwork. Some of the main difficulties I experienced while

conducting interviews in Korean arose due to my unfamiliarity with what kinds of terms Korean researchers would use, what kinds of questions they would ask, and how they would carry themselves in an interview and fieldwork setting. Since I had never attended a Korean institution of higher education, I knew nothing of the researcher culture in Korea. The researcher vocabulary I knew in English sounded out of place when directly translated to Korean. Regardless of my concerns and struggles, this worked to my advantage, because some of my marriage-labor immigrants might have had a harder time understanding me had I been using academic Korean.

In preparation for interviews and fieldwork, and in the process of writing this dissertation, I used English as the primary language with which to analyze transcripts, refine interview questions, receive feedback, and write the chapters. I continuously struggled trying to translate to Korean nuances I could articulate in English. In particular, the term “marriage-labor immigrants” was a difficult one to use with my informants without offering long explanations. A number of existing words used to indicate non-Korean natives (including the Korean equivalents of foreigners, immigrants, immigrant women, immigrant laborers, and foreign laborers) and various phrases referring to their families (including the Korean equivalents of multicultural families, immigrant families, and international marriage families) already existed in their vocabulary list, and the informants used them depending on the contexts, at times interchangeably, throughout the interviews.

My attempts to provide English translations as close as possible to the way(s) in which I understood what informants said during the interviews were challenged on multiple occasions. Some of these instances include situations in which: the informants stop in the middle of a sentence and start a new one; they repeated the same words multiple times; they made grammatically incorrect statements, and they omitted certain grammatical components as permitted in conversational Korean.

The marriage-labor immigrant informants had varying degree of familiarity with the Korean language, and Minh and Gouba, the key informants from chapters three and four, were fluent in Korean. Moving beyond the evaluative attitude on the competency in the Korean language of participants and interviewer (myself), I focus on how the various degrees of language competency, juxtaposed with other factors, play a part in illustrating the complexity of the marriage-labor immigrant parents and their lifeworlds. The different degrees of command that people had of the Korean language provided a rich middle ground that dismantled the possibilities of solely relying on my (limited) insider knowledge of the Korean culture or the outsider perspective to which I have become accustomed while living outside of my “home” country. During the analysis and interpretation of the data, this uncertainty allowed me to pay closer attention to what role(s) the various discursive and non-discursive elements may have played in the contexts of the interviews and fieldwork.

As an attempt to reside “in between the lines” and gaze sideways, I immersed myself in transcripts, video and audio recordings of the interview, policy documents, and news articles that related to the stories shared during the interviews and fieldwork. I focused on writing in a way that opens up multiple interpretations of what I saw and what I heard during the fieldwork and interviews, rather than closing them down. This process led me to the path of acknowledging and embracing uncertainty, and the incompleteness of my dissertation study. Making my own writing vulnerable by acknowledging the unknown helped me not to settle on a single explanation of the discourses of mothering marriage-labor immigrant parents navigate.

Here, I expand on how shifting between two different languages functioned as a tool for facilitating polyvocal interpretations in this dissertation. The use of the Korean language during the ethnographic interviews and fieldwork and the challenges of translating from Korean to English provided an opportunity to put polyvocality into practice by continuously engaging and reengaging the data. In “Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree,” Heider (1988)

articulates the disparities between the perspectives of different ethnographers. Listing various factors including temporal context, different focus on cultures, personality of ethnographers, theoretical perspective, and degrees of rapport, Heider (1988) investigates the reasons behind contradictions between ethnographers. Through this discussion, Heider (1988) implicitly suggests what needs to be taken into consideration in order to conduct and understand ethnography.

My contribution to this conversation comes from a slightly different context. A part of the multiplicities of “voices” in my dissertation stemmed from navigating both Korean and English in the process of collecting and analyzing data. In this sense, the dissonances did not come from the works of other researchers who studied the same discourse of phenomenon. Rather, the disagreement was with my own self about what I thought earlier, translated, and/or interpreted as I revisited the data.

Borrowing from the idea of how ethnographic accounts are “made” (Heider, 1988), I suggest in this dissertation that navigating the two languages reflects the complexities of the ways in which marriage-labor immigrants navigate and negotiate discourses of mothering. This means that I recognize the significance of the emergent contradictions provided through working with the two languages, rather than attempting to pursue a more “truthful” translation or interpretation in this dissertation. Focusing on the multiplicities and incongruities in the transitional spaces between Korean and English, I also acknowledge my role as a researcher and that what I bring to this dissertation influenced the research.

Why Does This Research Matter to Early Childhood Policy?

While President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have frequently mentioned Korea as a model country with a high-performing education system, Korea is currently

undergoing an educational crisis, trying to address the low academic performance and high dropout rate of children from marriage-labor immigrant families. Considering that many children from marriage-labor immigrant families will be entering the public school system in the near future (N.-K. Kim et al., 2012), the Korean educational system is currently faced with the urgent need to seriously consider the impact of the rapidly transforming demographic landscape of the country.

In fact, the educational systems in both countries are currently contending with an increasingly diverse population and the complicated lives of children from immigrant families. Similar to Korea, the education system in the United States is currently in dire need of effectively addressing issues of bi/multilingualism, nationality/citizenship, gender, and bi/multicultural identity in relation to the idea of ethnic normalcy. The concept of a “normal” child, which is traditionally organized around fixed understandings of cultural identity, needs to be challenged in order to reflect the rapidly transforming demographic landscape of the country. Considering how “minority” newborns recently outnumbered their white counterparts for the first time in history (Yen, 2013), addressing cultural differences in the classroom is also a pressing issue in the United States.

Each of the conversations I have presented and analyzed in this dissertation has implications for policy in early childhood education. The stories in this dissertation call for recognizing the need to include in policy the discourses marriage-labor immigrants who have been marginalized in Korean society work with on a daily basis (Swadener & Jagielo, 1998). Conceptualizing the work of marriage-labor immigrant mothers and the role of their spouses as a dichotomy isolates mothering as the sole responsibility of women, rather than a “broad societal and family concern and pleasure” (Bloch, 1998, p. 322). Many policies position marriage-labor immigrants, particularly women, as parents within the confines of a family, emphasizing their role as a caretaker. In this section, I discuss childcare and language policy as two key areas that

could be informed by this dissertation, while comparing the contexts in Korea and the United States.

Childcare

The lives of immigrant mothers in the United States and their needs, as Polakow (2007) describes, resonate with the needs of marriage-labor immigrant mothers in Korea. The significance of having access to childcare translates to different contexts through the connection between work opportunities and access to childcare. This means that inadequate childcare options pulls immigrant mothers out of the working world. Immigrant mothers in both countries are similar in that they have limited cultural knowledge about what is available for their children, limited language skills leading to limited work opportunities, yet a lower income level necessitating extra income.

Mothers in the United States with a low socioeconomic status, and the care for their children, are culturally constructed as pathological and abnormal (Bloch, 1998). Similarly, marriage-labor immigrant mothers in Korea, about half of which live at or below the poverty level (Youngdal Cho, 2006), are perceived to be not good enough mothers, who are responsible for their children's poor academic performance and emotional disturbance. The assumptions of marriage-labor immigrant mothers as always already failing (Bailey, 2003) calls for the need to problematize the cultural discourses of mothering and universalized theories about mothering and childcare (Bloch, 1998).

Providing reliable childcare for immigrant families both in Korea and in the United States is a necessity for economic autonomy, and attendant programs could provide them with more language skills and cultural knowledge. As a stepping-stone for promoting different ways to understand the lifeworlds of immigrant parents, childcare contributes to the tasks of challenging

the assumption of “failing” mothers by providing them with the tools to transform their “story” in their everyday experiences of navigating the discourses about immigrant mothers.

Language policy

Promoting bilingualism requires considering assumptions and examining conflicting discourses about languages, relationships, and sociocultural standing. The stories from the key informants in this dissertation captures the need for being aware of how cultural discourses function on the ground level. As Minh discussed chapter three, the difficulties in creating a bilingual home environment, in light of sociocultural needs and power dynamics in Korean families, could influence how support policies and programs are or are not effectively implemented. Implementing policies on bilingualism can benefit from the understanding of how marriage-labor immigrants navigate cultural discourses in their homes and local communities.

In the United States, the English-only policy is also rooted in cultural discourses that denote the hierarchal power relationship between different languages (Cummins, 2000; Fillmore, 1991, 2000; Soto, 1997). The irony of how Spanish with an English accent and English with a Spanish accent are perceived differently in American society also hints at the cultural norms and values associated with the languages (Lefkowitz & Hedgcock, 2002; Lippi-Green, 1997). As children in the United States whose home language is not English are put under pressure to learn the “American” language, the significance of their home languages are undermined (Fillmore, 1991).

When cultural discourses are taken into account in language policies, the task of promoting one language or multiple languages becomes much more than improving language skills. Language policies in Korea and the United States are intimately connected with cultural norms and values in the local and national societies. Implementing language policies that

acknowledge the significance of cultural discourses would provide a gateway for promoting a sense of community, respect, and diversity.

The settings in which policies are implemented also continuously shift over time. Revisiting the key informants over the period of two years demonstrated how quickly the needs of marriage-labor immigrant families change. For example, from interviewing Myungsoo, I learned that the demand for a mobile library has decreased significantly. For this reason, the support center Myungsoo worked for decided to discontinue the service. This means that the needs of marriage-labor immigrants in Korean society are changing, along with the population. In light of this, I suggest that taking into account the changing and emergent needs is key to maintaining and developing effective policies and programs for marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea and the United States. Various factors lead to the need for changes policy, including children from marriage-labor immigrant families getting older, marriage-labor immigrants becoming more familiar with the culture of the new home country, and the immigrants establishing networks to help one another. Considering such changes that occur over time will provide more effective grounds for carrying out effective policies for marriage-labor immigrant families.

Why Does This Research Matter to Early Childhood Educators Today?

In this section, I address how this dissertation about marriage-labor immigration in Korea contributes to early childhood education in the United States. I consider this possibility through the task of reconceptualizing some of the prevalent beliefs and practices in the United States in three ways: re-envisioning competence, raising sensitivity to underlying cultural discourses, and defamiliarizing the familiar.

Re-envisioning competence

The pressure of standardized testing is increasing in the United States, and early childhood education classrooms are not exceptions (Strauss, 2013). This focus on quantifying children's competence takes our eyes away from seeing the children and what they bring to the classroom (Ayers, 2010). The emphasis on producing a certain type of legible and "objectified" competency in children has implications for the ways of people parent and teach. Whether parents help their children cope with the pressure of the test or opt the children out of the tests, standardized testing raises much tension about what is the "right" thing to do from parental perspectives. The dilemma and the stress of teaching to the test haunts teachers in their everyday interaction with children. Framed as a way of representing "America" to the international community, scores from standardized tests are given much authority.

This dissertation provides the framework for challenging assumptions about which students count as "good" or "competent" in early childhood education classrooms. This dissertation questions what it means to be "Korean," how "Koreanness" functions in Korean society and the ways in which children and parents from marriage-labor immigrant families are perceived in contemporary Korea. I also consider how re-envisioning discourses of mothering can help resist and transform cultural discourses about who counts as a competent child and parent, creating alternative possibilities. Creating room for examining who counts as "American" children and parents allows the perception of children and parents in early childhood education settings from various perspectives, rather than taking a single viewpoint—such as standardized testing—and assuming who children and parents are.

Similarly, this dissertation can inform the way in which immigrant parents and their children in the United States are positioned by examining the power dynamics between and across various cultures. This dissertation acknowledges the roles of race, ethnicity, gender,

language, and socioeconomic status play in the ways discourses about parents and children from marriage-labor immigrant families are culturally constructed (M. Kim, 2010; N. H.-J. Kim, 2009; J.-I. Lee, 2008). In particular, I challenge how marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korea, and their children, are frequently positioned as problems and blamed for social issues. Borrowing from this, it could be also problematized how immigrant parents and children in the United States are perceived as incompetent. The stories of the key informants make visible the voices of marriage-labor immigrant parents, providing a framework for examining which knowledge, language, and culture “count” in early childhood education classrooms.

Lastly, the tension around marriage-labor immigration in Korea can help inform our teaching philosophy and pedagogy in early childhood classrooms in the United States. As an indication for competing norms and values, the ways in which conflicting discourses manifest themselves in everyday experiences draw attention to the assumptions on which beliefs, practices, and policies of early childhood education classrooms are based. For example, the heated debates and media reports about English-only policies in schools (“Language Wars,” 2013; Shorland, 2012) could provide insight to underlying normative assumptions about culture, language, and competency in American society. Examining and re-envisioning what counts as competent has implications for identifying such tension by defamiliarizing cultural discourses about “good” and “American” children and parents.

Increasing sensitivity to underlying cultural discourses

As educators and individuals, we identify with what is familiar to us and what make sense to us (Britzman, 1986). Working with marriage-labor immigrants required me to visit and revisit conflicting, odd, and even disturbing discourses and analyze the ethnographic interviews and fieldwork from varying perspectives. This approach to making sense of what the informants

shared, with the assumption that their answers are complicated and not easily “readable” or accessible, can be also adopted in classroom environment. The relationships between and across the multiple stories demonstrate the complexities of various circulating discourses, as well as the necessity of theories that articulate such complexities.

Carrying out ethnographic interviews and fieldwork with marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea made it clear that the discourses the informants were navigating were not linear, permanent, or consistent in relation to one another. This made it challenging to understand their lifeworlds and how they negotiate the contradictions in their everyday lives. Becoming increasingly more aware of how conflicting discourses can co-exist allowed me to explore different ways of understanding that which did not make sense at first, or was not recognizable.

What I am suggesting here is that (mis)reading children based on the circulating cultural discourses is inevitable, considering that all people make use of discourses grounded in particular cultural, historical, and policies contexts (Morris, 1995). However, taking into account the contexts in which the lives of children are situated, including culture, history, and politics, helps foster sensitivity to the discourses that influence beliefs and practices in early childhood education classrooms. This awareness of “hidden curriculum” provides the ground for engaging and re-engaging what seem to be amiss, as Tobin (2000), Paley (1991), and Dyson (1997) do in conversations with children.

Defamiliarizing the familiar

This dissertation uses ethnographic interviewing and participant observation to understand the discourses of mothering marriage-labor immigrant parents in Korea navigate on a daily basis. In particular, the ethnographic concept of defamiliarizing what is familiar (Kaomea, 2003) can contribute to making visible assumptions about immigrant parenting in in the United

States. Defamiliarizing provides early childhood educators with tools to engage the children from immigrant families in multifarious ways. As “theory makers” in early childhood education classrooms (Paley, 2009), educators can benefit from the use of defamiliarizing as a tool that assists in continuously modifying their understandings about children from immigrant families based on emergent interactions, conversation, and observation. Early childhood educators could also revisit and rearticulate their assumptions about immigrant parents who navigate the spaces in between the culture in the local communities and what children bring into their home.

My dissertation as research conducted in Korea provides another point of reference to examine the assumptions and cultural norms in early childhood classrooms in the United States. American Anthropologist Margaret Mead poses a crucial question, which highlights the implication of this dissertation in the United States: “What light do these differences throw upon our understanding of our own conception of education?” (Mead, 1943, p. 633). By taking a contextualized understanding of the discourses of mothering from the Korean context and compare it to the American setting, ethnographic defamiliarizing can provide a critique of familiar cultural norms and values about immigrant parents and children in the United States (Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

Moving Forward

Through the three stories of key informants, this dissertation also investigates various discourses of mothering and how marriage-labor immigrant parents accept, resist, and transform discourses about mothering. Through ethnographic interview and fieldwork, I highlight the voices of marriage-labor immigrant families in relation to one another. In order to understand marriage-labor immigration to Korea from different perspectives, this dissertation focuses on the stories of a Vietnamese marriage-labor immigrant parent, a Korean/Burmese couple, and a

Korean social worker.

In this process, I investigate how local, national, and international histories of race, gender, class, citizenship, nationality, and culture shape the discourses of mothering in Korea for marriage-labor immigrant parents, and I investigate what implication these discourses have for raising their children. This dissertation does not reflect the voices of children, teachers, and policymakers, as the focus of the research was on the discourses of mothering marriage-labor immigrant parents navigate. Even though Haejin worked at a preschool, the majority of what she shared reflected her perspective as a mother and wife. Myungsoo, a Korean social worker, was extremely knowledgeable on marriage-labor immigrant support policies and programs, but his accounts were focused on how various policies and programs influenced the parents.

Based on what this dissertation examined and what was not investigated within the scope of the study, I plan to extend this dissertation in four different ways: by engaging children from marriage-labor immigrant families, by conducting follow-up with key informants, by carrying out long-term fieldwork in Korea, and by conducting a cross-cultural study.

First, I will conduct a follow-up study to engage the voices of children from marriage-labor immigrant families. In the last two years, I have built rapport with marriage-labor immigrant parents. Establishing relationships is essential in creating opportunities to work with children from marriage-labor immigrant families. When I was searching for possible field sites and informants more than two years ago, some people were hesitant to partake in my research because they felt that by allowing their children to participate in research studies, they were “selling their children.” People’s hesitancy was also influenced by the increased interest in marriage-labor immigrant families in Korean society, and many marriage-labor immigrants and institutions that work with their families were being bombarded with requests to participate in research projects. Having a long-term relationship with the researcher prior to giving consent to have their children participate in a study would be more comforting and reassuring from the

parents' perspective. The rapport with the informants also provides an understanding of the contexts in which children's lives are situated.

Second, I would like to continue examining the complexities of the discourses marriage-labor immigrant parents navigate by revisiting the key informants in upcoming years. Writing this dissertation, I have learned how revisiting informants in different temporal and spatial contexts provides a framework for problematizing static interpretations of the informants' lives. The experience of conducting three ethnographic interviews and fieldwork over the span of two years has changed my relationship with the key informants, unfolding dialogues in unexpected directions. By carrying out additional interviews with the key informants, I will investigate how various cultural discourses of mothering manifest themselves in transforming contexts.

Third, I plan on carrying out long-term fieldwork in Korea. I will select a field site based on this dissertation and the follow-up interviews I carried out. This fieldwork will create opportunities to establish new relationships and continue building rapport with the informants included in this dissertation. Juxtaposed with the ethnographic interviews I conducted in the last two years, the fieldwork will provide another perspective from which to examine the discourses of mothering marriage-labor immigrant families grapple with in Korean society.

Lastly, since other East Asian countries are experiencing a similar boom in marriage-labor immigrants, I will conduct a cross-cultural study that compares Korea and another country with an increasing marriage-labor immigrant population. The demographic changes that Korea is experiencing through the increase of the marriage-labor immigrant population are also being witnessed in other countries. A number of studies examine the rapidly increasing marriage-labor immigrant population in East Asia, identifying Korea, Taiwan (Bélanger et al., 2010; Tsai, Chen, & Huang, 2011), and Singapore (Yeoh, Leng, & Dung, 2013) as the leading receiving countries, and China, the Philippines, and Vietnam as the most prominent sending countries (Jones, 2012; Kawaguchi and Lee, 2011). These studies address the complexities of marriage-labor

immigration in East Asia by investigating the key patterns including gender, age, residence, ethnicity, and the level of education (Jones, 2012). In particular, Belanger, Lee and Wang (2010) discuss how marriage-labor immigrant spouses are perceived and defined in Korea and Taiwan by challenging the assumptions behind the collected government statistical data, promoting assimilation, patriarchy, and nationalism.

Some of the studies focus on how marriage-labor immigrants are culturally constructed as mothers in the receiving countries. Carrying out focus-group interviews using photographs as prompts, Tsai, Chen, and Huang (2011) examined discourses about mothering and about marriage-labor immigrants in Taiwan. Examining various discourses including the preference for sons and the pressure to raise “Taiwanese” children, Tsai, Chen, and Huang (2011) demonstrate many similarities between the cultural discourses marriage-labor immigrants navigate in both the Taiwanese and the Korean contexts. The experiences of marriage-labor immigrant women in Taiwan, who undergo social exclusion and pressure to assimilate to the Taiwanese ways of mothering, coincide with the experiences of women in Korea (Cheng, 2013).

The effect that cultural beliefs and practices about “Koreanness” have in privileging some and marginalizing others has implications in other cultural contexts. Considering that many countries in East Asia are experiencing the influx of marriage-labor immigration, I will conduct a cross-cultural study investigating similarities and differences in the ways in which the phenomenon influences cultural discourses of mothering, as well as beliefs and practices in early childhood education.

Marriage-labor immigrant parents navigate a complex set of discourses in which they are immersed by accepting, resisting, and transforming them on a daily basis. The unease, tension, and struggles they experience influence both the way they perceive themselves as parents in Korean society as well as how Korea people relate to and understand them. By listening to the insider accounts about marriage-labor immigration and remaining attentive to the changing needs

of the parents and their children, we can continue to support them as they shed light on the assumptions behind the cultural discourses of mothering in Korea.

Marriage-labor immigrants are “raising Korea” as they bring up a new generation of Korean people. In the process, they accept, resist, and transform circulating discourses of mothering in Korean society. Marriage-labor immigrants contribute to re-envisioning diversity and inclusive communities by reconceptualizing discourses about marriage-labor immigrant families in Korea—including a conventional deficit perspective framing marriage-labor immigrant parents and children as always not Korean enough. The immigrants also challenge what it means to be “Korean” and a “mother” in Korean society. By doing so, marriage-labor immigration emerges as a framework providing new ways of envisioning diversity—of providing the foundation for inclusive communities based not on fixed boundaries of race, ethnicity, and nationality, but on permeable discourses about social practices, cultural beliefs, and relationships.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Interview questions included:

- What are the reasons why you immigrated to Korea?
- Can you describe your experiences as an immigrant mother/father?
- How would your experiences as a parent be different if you did not immigrate to Korea?
- Tell me about your children's experiences in/outside of school.
- How long have you worked as a social worker in this position?
- What do you do as a social worker working with immigrant families?
- If the immigrants need to talk to someone about their immigration status or other issues/problems, who would they talk to?
- What kinds of support and services do you provide to immigrants that come asking for help?
- Last year, you shared how you are Korean and Vietnamese in your daily life. What did you mean by this? Do you mean that sometimes you are Korean or sometimes you are Vietnamese?
- In what ways are you Korean and in what ways are you Vietnamese?
- In what ways are you like a Korean mother and in what ways are you like a Vietnamese mother? Or do you not think about your Koreanness or Vietnamese-ness in these ways?
- You have shared that you are concerned about your children being ostracized. Can you help me understand your concerns a bit more?

- In what ways would mothering be similar and/or different if Gouba was not a marriage-labor immigrant? Would it change anything? Why?
- Have you seen cases of marriage-labor immigrants who successfully balance the role of mother and the role of worker? Do you think it is (im)possible for both to co-exist? Why/why not?

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Publications

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