

Transitions of Tertiary Educated Korean Women in Australia

Gyungsook Jane Lee

Chonnam National University, South Korea

Abstract

This paper examines life course transitions of tertiary educated Korean women who arrived in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s as skilled migrants or dependent migrants of their husbands. The study attempts to find an informed theory or frame of reference by which to explain the circumstances of Korean women's life experiences post migration to Australia, women whose transitions were constrained by micro-level family situations underpinned by cultural values, macro-level migration policies and labor market arrangements. The constrained choices made by these women can be seen as ways in which they exercise agency in negotiating work and family. Some of their choices differ from mainstream expectations as reflected in government policies and academic discourse. This article draws on life stories to explore the contradictions and tensions experienced by tertiary educated Korean women following their migration to Australia.

Key words

Korean migrant women, labor market, transition theory, life story, narrative analysis

Introduction

This article explores the labor market experiences of Korean migrant women (Korean women, hereafter) in Australia through their life stories. While previous studies offered various theories that explained a woman's disadvantaged position in the labor market and discussed barriers to entry into the paid workforce in a host country upon migration, these studies did not satisfactorily reflect the reality for these women. Theories originate from different schools of thought: economic, political, anthropological and feminist, but nowhere is there a cohesive overview or a single united theory. Theories of labor market participation (LMP,

hereafter) are unable to incorporate or account for migrant women's complex and ambivalent orientations towards participation in the workforce. This ambivalence could be demonstrated as emerging from a host of cultural and social factors (both subjective and structural) as well as from an individual family's financial circumstances.

Korean women are often dissuaded from participating in the workforce, despite often possessing advanced (tertiary) educational backgrounds and work experience in Korea. Australia is further advanced than Korea both in gender equity in the labor market (e.g. laws and labor market programs) and in the integration of migrants into the wider community (e.g. language training and community awareness programs). However, Korean women do not appear to reap the rewards of these advances. This article explores Korean women's work related experience during their transition process in Australia. Some women may choose not to participate, rather than being forced into unwanted non-participation, leading to the question of whether historical systemic inequity is the reason for non-participation, or whether other factors play a role. Another significant question is whether Korean women can be seen as separate from their families, as individuals participating in society and the labor force, or whether they must be seen in relation to their families. Family relationships alter the status of women in a cumulative fashion: this paper no longer considers just the human capital of the woman, but also the human capital of her entire family. Add to this specific circumstances and cultural obligations, and a woman with high human capital may be unable or unwilling to participate in the labor market. This is not to suggest that this paper takes the position of women as primary care givers in the family as a given (entrenching inequity in the very terms of the study), but merely examines the circumstances of the family unit as a possible barrier to LMP.

One study on Korean women in the USA found that a decision making factor of LMP was the woman's own interpretation of the realities presented in their unique situations, to which strategies were developed to overcome the difficult transition process (Park, 2007), with the study concluding that a 'woman's own agency' is triggered by participation in the workforce. As limited research is available in this aspect of gender and migrant studies, the examination of Korean migrant women's life stories becomes a valuable tool for this exploration.

In examining the life stories of Korean women, narrative analysis was applied to explore women's life experiences in the transition process upon migration. Results of this study are thus not confined within the terms of any proposition but provide a wider, subtler, more individual expression of experience. This study focuses on the experiences of migrant women, for whom questions of feminism and cultural expectation collided with migration. Gender issues are significant, as many studies of LMP embrace the model of the male worker as isolated from family and other responsibilities, either marginalizing or disregarding a woman's dilemma between work, nurturing and domestic responsibilities. This paper demonstrates the power of qualitative research (through life stories) to disrupt such theories while also revealing the multi-faceted and often agonizing negotiations that women engage in with relation to work.

The significance of the study is that it attempts to find an informed theory or frame of reference by which to explain the circumstances of Korean women's life experiences post-migration into Australia. Studies have investigated the experiences of male Korean migrants in Australia and the labor market (Han, 1999; Seol, 2000; Shin, 2009); however, little research (Lee, 2008, 2013) is available on the female dimension of this situation.

The following section provides an overview of Korean migration to Australia, followed by an introduction to Korean migrant women in Australia. Subsequently, a literature review addressing labor market disadvantage theories is presented, followed by a summary of findings and a discussion of the results. The paper concludes with a summary and implications.

Overview of Korean Migration to Australia

The majority of Korean women who migrated to Australia in the 1970s arrived as dependents of their fathers, brothers, or husbands. These women arrived in Australia with few educational qualifications, little or no work experience and very limited English language ability. As a result, these women often faced a number of obstacles upon migration to Australia in transitioning and integrating into Australian society, including workplaces, schools, and social groups. The majority of the early Korean women worked in cosmetic, clothing, or footwear factories as

these industries did not require a good command of English (Lee, 2008).

This paper focuses on Korean women who migrated to Australia after the mid-1980s as spouses of skilled migrants, spouses of business migrants, or as skilled migrants themselves. The majority of these women were tertiary educated, middle class in terms of socio-economic status, with husbands employed in a profession requiring a higher education qualification (Lee, 2008). Korean women also arrived in Australia as independent skilled migrants in their own right, for example as computer programmers, geologists, childcare workers, nurses, flight attendants, and interpreters. However, the majority of these women lived as full-time housewives to their professional husbands.

Korean women who arrived during the 1990s came largely as dependents of husbands selected as a part of a business migration scheme. These women were likely to have obtained tertiary education and be full-time housewives with two school-aged children. In Korea, these women usually had domestic helpers. Some of these women worked before marriage but upon marriage or birth of their children, discontinued participation in the paid workforce (Lee, 2008).

Methodology

Research Method

As mentioned above, this study employs life stories as a qualitative research method. The 'life story' technique is recognized as being ethnographically rich, affording access to the subjective reality of people's lives, being useful in ways beyond the scope of theories and statistics. This technique requires the adoption of a sociological rather than economic approach towards the labor market, which allows the assumptions of the theories to be questioned. Life stories give a subjective narrative the innate ability to help a researcher understand life from the insider's perspective, as a way of meaning making, identifying life impacts, and interpreting experience (Atkinson, 1998). Life stories enable illustration of how change is experienced and provide contextual information outside the direct narrative and about the construction of the story. Life stories allow for a natural tendency to organize events and

situations in a way that gives them a logical order. In this way, the life story method provides a superior research technique for examining Korean women's work-related perceptions and experiences for this research study. Admittedly, an open-ended 'life story' is time consuming and can yield large amounts of information that is highly subjective and difficult to analyze. Despite these drawbacks, the advantages of discovering the otherwise unheard and unimagined experiences remains the basis for the inclusion of life stories in this study.

Data and procedure

Thirty-three tertiary educated Korean women's life stories were collected for this study.

Interviews were conducted in each participant's house or office in Korean, using an audio recorder, from which the recording was transcribed and translated into English. The participants suggested their preference for using Korean for the interview, despite their fluency in English. The duration of the interviews ranged from one and a half hours to three and a quarter hours, with the average time being two hours. To maintain privacy, pseudonyms for the participants have been used.

All interviews followed the same structure. The interviewee was asked initial questions concerning her and her husband's age, salary range, educational and vocational experience, English language skills, and length of time in Australia. The inclusion of the women's husbands was to acknowledge that the cumulative burdens and resources of the family unit have a great impact on the circumstances and aspirations of Korean women. Secondly, the participants were asked a number of open-ended questions designed to not only elicit answers concerning labor market experiences, but also to identify the level of self-awareness the participants had concerning factors affecting labor market opportunities. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed accounts of the experiences they felt to be most significant. This type of interview is best suited to gaining rich, high quality descriptions from participants in their own narrative styles. It ensures some commonality of topics across interviews, while also encouraging participants to expand into issues of significance. For example, the participants were asked why

they decided to migrate to Australia. This elicited a range of answers, from family reunions to the search for a better life, or better opportunities for their children. The question was designed to ascertain what sort of opportunities were envisaged by the women, and whether these opportunities were in terms of the participant as opposed to the husband, the children or the family unit as a whole. If the primary labor market aspirations were described in terms of children, these were further explored at this point. This was also designed to understand whether the participants had realistic aspirations for their lives in Australia or whether they were overly optimistic or pessimistic. The next question explored where these perceptions and hopes originated from and what sources of information were explored prior to migration. The participants were asked if life in Australia had met their expectations and what sort of difficulties they may have experienced.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is used in this study as a tool for exploring the individual experience of Korean women in (and out of) the labor market. Some scholars (cf. Riessman, 1993; Czarniawska, 1997) assert that narrative analysis focuses upon language as being not simply a technical device for constructing meaning, but is also a device for subjectively representing reality.

Methodologically, narrative analysis examines each individual's story, analyzing the tools of construction, the linguistic and cultural resources drawn upon, and how it persuades the listener of its authenticity. Also, narrative analysis is interpretive, involving both the narrator and the researcher who facilitates the narrative, and focuses upon human agencies rather than deterministic explanations of social phenomena. This is significant for this study in acknowledging that LMP constitutes a form of symbolic interaction and that each Korean woman defines her own identity and human agency to some degree, in accordance with human capital theory, but within limits, in accordance with segmentation theory.

Research methods: Key Issues

Several issues require consideration in the application of narrative

analysis techniques to the life stories of the participants as outlined above. While these issues may not all be resolved, this study acknowledges that some compromises and inconsistencies must be allowed for. These include issues of truth and the subjectivities of the participants and the researcher. At the outset, the problematic nature of symbolic truth must be recognized. This research method has the advantage of giving voice to the experiences of the participants. However, while these testimonies may hold more detail, nuance, and depth than statistical analysis, they cannot be regarded as unproblematic truths. While it may not be possible to share experience, it is possible to share the symbols of experience. The problematic truth is symbolized in language and narrative analysis recognizes this, accepting fragmented, inconsistent, and contradictory elements.

Further, this study involved a second language, meaning that discourse analysis is further complicated by the untranslatable aspects of the discourse and by the subjectivity of the translator/interpreter. As translator and interpreter, the researcher must be aware of the institutional, social, cultural and temporal context in which the interviewees responded to the research questions and endeavor to translate/interpret them into an academic context. The translations are subject to the possible meaning transfer between Korean and English and it is acknowledged that some aspects may be diminished and others amplified as a part of this process. In acknowledging these concerns, the researcher accepts them as sites of interpretation and potential misunderstanding, but does not regard them as sufficient to prevent the research from proceeding.

Characteristics of participants

The 33 participants ranged in age from 20 to 60 years old and had all lived in the vicinity of Sydney, Australia for five years or more. The defining characteristics of the sample involved in this study were marriage, education to at least an undergraduate level in Korea, and self-classification as middle class. Ten of the 33 women had followed the traditional Korean pattern of ceasing work upon marriage. Only a quarter of respondents continued to work after marriage while they lived in Korea. In Australia, thirteen respondents were full-time house-

wives at the time of the study, and half of the total number of participants also participated in volunteer work. Just less than one-quarter (seven) worked with their husbands in small family businesses and a slightly higher proportion (nine) were employees in organizations.

The study also considered the education and occupations of the spouses of the research subjects in order to fully appreciate their circumstances. All husbands had completed undergraduate studies or higher in Korea and some of them attended English language classes provided by the Australian Government. Upon migration to Australia, the husbands of the respondents experienced some degree of change in the nature of their occupations.

Theories Underpinning the Study of CALD Women and Work

Two established paradigms are most commonly used to describe and discuss the inequality of experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD, hereafter) workers in Australia: segmentation and human capital theories. These theories highlight the impacts of gender, race, and English language ability upon labor market outcomes. As Korean women may be considered a subset of the larger group of CALD migrants, these two paradigms may reasonably be applied in attempting to interpret their work related issues.

Segmentation theory is a more established theory than the human capital theory of labor market division according to gender and ethnicity. It argues that in Australia, white men will dominate labor market opportunities, indigenous women will occupy the lowest rung of the ladder of opportunity, and others will rest in between (Collins, 1988; Chiswick & Miller, 1985; Castles, Mitchell, Morrissey, & Alcorso, 1989; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan, 1998; Peck, 1989; Chapman & Iredale, 1990). Under the theory, Korean women will sit low on the ladder, based on their lower valued gender, race, and ethnicity. Human capital theory has evolved from segmentation theory to offer an alternative explanation for disadvantages in the labor market, focusing on an evaluation of an individual's apparently achievable skills or capital (Mincer, 1974; Cobb-Clark & Chapman, 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004; Richardson, Robertson, & Illsley, 2001; Richardson, Miller-Lewis, Ngo, & Illsley, 2002). These skills in-

clude qualifications such as degrees, work experience, English language competency, and other qualifications and attributes such as age and physical fitness. Neither theory is entirely satisfactory, as segmentation theory offers little scope for individual agency, and human capital theory tends to deny or negate the fact of structurally embedded and covert discrimination practices.

This paper suggests that transition theory provides another and more recent lens through which to view, discuss, and understand the work and transition experiences of Korean women in their newly adopted country, Australia. The paper argues that transition theory provides a better understanding of labor market issues of Korean women in Australia than labor market disadvantage theories such as segmentation and human capital.

Theories on Transition

Theories of transition developed by Schlossberg (1981) focused on the transition that adults experienced throughout life and how they coped and adjusted (Evans et al. 2010; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg et al. (1995, p. 27) and Goodman et al. (2006, p. 33) define the term transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.” The transition theory suggests that during one’s life, at the time of a change of residence, employment, environment, setting or situation, a transition occurs. When a transition occurs, a process takes place as individuals assimilate or adjust into the new situations in their daily life. For these scholars the transition theory forms a key aspect of the study of life roles, life-span development, and life stage theories. These scholars suggest that transition is a characteristic of life, regardless of an individual’s desire, as existence continuously moves along as life progresses. The impact of transition depends on many factors including the individual, social, and cultural environments. The degree of influence the transition has on the individual at a particular point in time varies widely. Under transition theory, it is as essential to understand how individuals perceive the transition in order to understand how an individual is affected by a changing life event, as it is to understand the type, context and impact of the transition itself.

Results and Discussion

Results

The life stories were divided into groups based on the subjects' volition and desire to participate in the labor market as evidenced by narratives. This acknowledges that non-participation may be a conscious choice for some women rather than a signifier of labor market exclusion or failure. Other women may experience non-participation with disappointment or frustration, and retain or find alternative activities. For many, choices and behaviors are described in terms of their identity rather than a strictly logical reckoning of their labor market chances and value. While focusing on the labor market experiences of Korean women, this study avoids implying that LMP is desirable or necessary.

Analysis of the life stories provides deeper insights for LMP or non-participation on migration. In this sample, 26 out of 33 women experienced LMP in Australia, and their decision to participate or not participate was strongly associated with their family's circumstances. Women whose spouses had secure and financially rewarding jobs had the choice of non-participation in the labor market. However, for women whose spouses either succeeded or failed in business or were sick, these women had to join the workforce regardless of their own aspirations and desires. Narrative analysis of the life stories classified the participants into four categories: full-time home makers; willing to work but required to stay at home due to family circumstances; not willing to work but required to join the workforce due to family circumstances; and women who are willing to work and are employed in paid work.

Not participating in the labor market but either doing care work at home or engaged in volunteer work in the community

Young-hee migrated to Australia in the late 1980s with her husband and two school-aged children, arriving in the professional migration category. Young-hee's husband had three years of work experience in the USA and was regarded a 'highly-in-demand professional' in the Australia Government visa category. Her husband obtained a job at a much lower position than his qualifications, work experience, and ex-

expertise deserved. However, his job provided financial security for the family. Young-hee said,

My husband was a pilot and engineer in Korea. The Korean government had sent him to study in America. We went to America and stayed there for about three years...after returning to Korea, my husband found that the Australian government recruited skilled migrant for Australia workforce. He liked the western life style and he applied as a skilled migrant... I knew that my husband had some problems finding a decent job [*in his profession as a pilot or an engineer*] in Sydney...after a few attempts to find work in his profession, he decided that he would take any jobs... It was not his trained profession and he didn't need any special skills but at least it was managerial and in an office.

Young-hee's husband had a secure and financially rewarding job, while she concentrated on her own role as a wife and mother. When her children grew up, Young-hee participated in voluntary work within the Korean community. She said,

... I didn't even think about getting a job. My parents were very conservative - their idea of being a girl or daughter was to finish a university degree and marry a good husband who can support you... One of my friends talked about a counseling course at TAFE that was taught in Korean. I attended the course and it was very useful and we organized a group to help other Korean women...

Young-hee reveals a strong influence from her parents' perception of appropriate gender and family roles. All discussion of LMP is premised on her understanding of her gender role. She describes her surprise in finding that the gender role was culturally determined, saying,

When I came to Australia, I found some women had to find paid work to support their families. I felt that I was so lucky that I didn't have to...

The narrative demonstrates Young-hee's surprised recognition of the need to participate in the labor market if family circumstances required her to do so. However, more importantly is that gender and cultural forces rendered LMP unthinkable for Young-hee. On the other hand, for her husband, participation in the workforce and his role as a financial provider for the family was non-negotiable.

Eun-ji is a 45-year-old full-time homemaker. Her husband is employed in a highly paid job in the ICT industry. She said,

On arrival [in Sydney], ...my husband had already found a job before we arrived. I had to arrange most of the housing and schooling...I had never looked for work in my whole life and I did not want to do paid work. It is a husband's responsibility to bring money into the home.

Eun-ji's role as wife and mother renders LMP unnecessary, undesirable and inappropriate, and ultimately unthinkable. Eun-ji described teaching Korean at a Saturday school saying,

I can't really say that it is really 'work.' I only teach on Saturdays, and only during school term. To me, it is like every Saturday I have a good reason to get out of the house and enjoy myself with students and other teachers. It is much more of a social thing for me rather than work...at the moment I do volunteer work with 'Relationships Australia' but only on a casual basis...

Although Eun-ji is paid for teaching Korean, she does not define it as work. She defends her activity as being 'not work' on the basis that

it is only Saturdays and during school terms. Eun-ji's narrative reveals a complex and even contradictory rendition of the impact of gender and cultural issues related to paid work. By defining infrequent and enjoyable Saturday school teaching in Korean as 'not work,' she manages to ensure her activity outside the home does not encroach upon her concept of herself as playing the role of a traditional married Korean woman.

In contrast, there exists women such as Kong-ji who are willing to work and regard themselves as career oriented but for some reason do not participate in the paid labor market despite this desire. The reasons for this non-participation may vary from perceived external barriers to recognized internal struggles. Within these women, consideration of the impact of material circumstances arises, promoting the question, "What is it that makes these women willing to work in the paid workforce and what is it that prevents them from realizing this desire?" Kong-ji says,

...When I was pregnant with my second son, we thought this was all too hard. Also, my first son was going to start kindergarten. So we considered several different options, but we decided that it would be best if I stayed at home and looked after the children full time... But the position I left was reasonably senior and the salary was good and I enjoyed it so much. I miss that job...

Kong-ji's narrative describes herself as resigning from her work for her young children. Despite her proven ability to secure a job and her expressed desire to do so, she does not participate in the workforce because she chooses or needs to stay home and take care of her school-aged children. It is the progress of her sons through school that dictates when, and under what conditions Kong-ji can return to work.

...I am so busy every day doing voluntary work while the children are at school. I hope I can find a good job when my second son starts high school. But I don't want to have a full-time job. Only two or three days would be enough with a family...

Kong-ji describes how she was solely responsible (by using the singular personal pronoun ‘I’) for organizing childcare and transportation for her first son while pregnant with her second child and working full-time. The narrative demonstrated that gender and cultural factors were likely to change over time, and to be more or less difficult to negotiate when children are younger.

Stemming from their own desires, Young-hee and Eun-ji never attempted to enter the labor market either in Korea or Australia, while Kong-ji had worked in the workforce but resigned to take care of her children, in her view to fulfill motherhood obligations. Narrative analysis reveals that aside from taking into consideration the extended traditional role of the mother as career, once their children have grown up, the women must also satisfy other requirements in the form of extra-domestic activities. These include honoring the requirements of her class, dignifying her activity with some form of tertiary study, and aligning her activities with volunteer community work. Thus any labor market activity represents a highly negotiated role that encompasses the traditional gender role in addition to other socially acceptable female spheres of activity.

Labour market participation or non-participation depends on family circumstances

For women such as Eunjin, Jin-seng and Eun-sook, LMP was necessary on arrival into Australia. These women, all fulltime housewives, did not participate in paid work before migration. Upon arrival into Australia, these women performed paid work either in their husbands’ businesses or at their own choosing. These women may regard themselves as obliged to participate in the labor market by family circumstances. They participate in the labor market in order to earn money and support their families regardless of their own aspirations. These women accept their needs and obligation to work, but do not find it liberating or rewarding in any personal sense. For these women, consideration of family circumstances gives rise to the question of what it is that makes these women need to work. In the sample, eight women were involved in their husbands’ business regardless of their own wishes.

Eun-jin, at 42 years old, migrated to Australia with her husband and

two school-aged daughters. Her life story demonstrates her difficult transition process when her family moved to Australia. She said,

When we arrived in Sydney, we found that we were not ready to be independent. We had such a protected life in Korea and we were not ready to respond to this new life...After three months we started to worry about our future...

After six months in Australia, her lack of confidence, lack of English improvement and her daughter's problems at high school were sufficient for Eun-jin to rethink migrating to Australia, and subsequently drove her decision to return to Korea. She said,

I attended AMES [*Adult Migrant English Services*] for six months, but I couldn't see any improvement...I couldn't see any bright future in Australia...I decided to go back to Korea to look for a business or any other options...When I arrived in Korea, Korea was such a strange place to me that I thought it would be too hard to adjust to being there again...I rang my husband to say that we had to stay in Australia and that even if we came back to Korea, life would not be easy...

Resolving to remain in Australia, unsatisfied with her English language skill and with a husband who wanted to work for himself, Eun-jin was forced to enter the workforce despite her perceived language problem. She said,

Then I came back to Sydney and we made up our minds to stay in Australia forever...It took one-and-a-half years to find this business, a health food shop. My husband knew that he didn't want to work for other people...with limited English and limited information, it was not easy to find a good business. Eventually, we bought this health food shop...

For Eun-jin and her family, the transition process was difficult with the lack of English language skills, cultural differences, few networks, and little information - these were the challenges to overcome in an almost heroic determination to survive on one's own terms. The transition process and the establishment of an unsupported business in the free market in Australia are related in terms of a rite of passage towards the goal of independence in the Western world. Eun-jin said,

I work about six hours and my husband works about ten hours a day. We open from Monday to Saturday. English is our greatest barrier...we wanted to have a business in mainstream society. English is the most difficult in relation to customers and wholesale and those sorts of things...

Eun-jin discovered that her English language skills did not equip her for the transition process as well as she had believed. The promise of a better future in the West is strong in her story, as she explains that it was the opportunity for their daughters that motivated them to migrate to Australia. She said,

...One reason we left Korea was that I only have two daughters and no son. In Korea it is very important for a woman to have a son. As my husband is the eldest son, it was very hard for him in Korea to have no son...My husband also felt that our daughters would be disadvantaged in Korea and he talked about how Australian women have equal power to Australian men...

In Australia, the narrative claims, females have the same career progression opportunities as males. The perceived equality of opportunity for women combined with the embarrassment of Eun-jin in not fulfilling her wifely duty and producing a son in Korea are also aspects of the journey to liberation and independence for Eun-jin and her family. In Australia, Eun-jin would be relieved of the cultural pressure to produce a son. Whereas staying in Korea represented a disadvantage

for their daughters, a positive future was perceived as possible for them in Australia, no matter how difficult the struggle to attain it.

Eun-jin's life story shows how roles specific to women can change for an individual in different circumstances. Eun-jin tells a story of change across countries, moving from a traditional 'good wife and wise mother' role in Korea to a working life as the co-owner of a small business in Australia. In Australia, although independent of Korea, she experiences guilt because she finds herself unable to give her children as much time and attention as she would like. Considerations such as the desire to perform family roles while working are unaddressed by theories of labor market disadvantage and only emerge through the narrative analysis of life stories. Thus, the transition theory appears more relevant to explain Korean women's LMP.

Another woman, Jin-seng, 55 years old, moved to Australia in 1983 with her husband, son and daughter. Her life story tells of her movement between roles in the home, the community and paid work. This movement was highly subject to the financial capacity and circumstances of her husband, whose illness and business failure led her to join the workforce. She said,

After we arrived in Sydney...my husband started a business, and his business went very well and I had to work for his business. I did not want to become involved in my husband's business but he forced me to. Business was booming and we opened several branches...But the company collapsed, all our money was gone and we lost everything, even our house... Then my husband started to get sick and I had to go to work ...I worked for five years but it was so hard with my limited English. All different kinds of people I had to serve, and it was tiring. So I retired from my job. When I migrated to Australia, I wanted to do my own things, not with my husband.

Jin-seng describes her work with her husband as something she 'had to do' against her will. In the situation, where Jin-seng's husband be-

came ill and she ‘had to work,’ the need to survive was clear. However, when her husband’s company was growing and becoming more successful, she describes her husband as ‘forcing’ her to work with him. Her husband’s ability to exert this force or sense of obligation upon her exists within the marital relationship and her position in that relationship. She did not assume the traditional role of woman when she was able to step away from it and was able to conceive of her own career and participation but found herself unable to refuse her husband’s assistance when it was demanded.

Eun-sook, 45 years old, moved to Australia in the late 1980s with her husband and son. She tells of her movement between roles in the home, the community, academia and the paid workforce. This movement was highly dependent on the financial and health circumstances of her husband, whose illness and business caused her to turn her English language ‘helping’ hobby into a source of financial support for the family. She said,

Before I came to Australia...[*I worked*] as a full-time housewife and I had to do all the housework... My husband started his own business... He was very busy doing his work and I stayed at home with the children. There were a lot of Korean people who did not speak good English and I started to help them with my English language skill...and I enjoyed helping them...

...My husband’s business went from bad to worse...[*we*] lost everything except our house. He became very ill and had to stay in bed all day. And my ‘helping people’ hobby became my real job to support my family... When my husband was sick, I needed money... I did research work and after work, I did my interpreter work. I went to bed every night at about 1am and got up at 6am. It continued for more than five years. After three years, my husband became better - he could look after the children at home and could do some housework... While my husband was sick, I don’t remember how many different jobs I had, I think, maybe more than 18 different

kinds of job...

Eun-sook prefers to stay at home with her children in a traditional role, in addition to doing volunteer work and 'helping people.' However, when necessary for the family's survival, she could perform to a high level in Australia and identified no issues arising from her gender or culture in preventing her participation in the workforce. She could draw upon her knowledge, background and skills to achieve highly when necessary, but would happily cease all extra-domestic activities when once again in a financial position to do so. Upon returning to Korea, she said,

Now, I am in Korea...I do not have to work for money. I feel that I am blessed that I can spend time with my family at home. I can be a real mother - not a woman who is tired and exhausted at work - and stay at home all the time, cook for the children and family, look after their homework and listen to their stories...

In this way, Eun-sook manages to maintain the traditional Korean ideals of womanhood, as wife and mother. When in need, she can step in to provide and when her husband is in a position to provide once more she may return to the home but ultimately she prefers to stay at home or do volunteer work. She expresses no personal desire to participate in paid work but claims to find no impediments in doing so when circumstances require her to do so. Gender and cultural factors are interpreted differently in different family circumstance. They may result in a highly domesticated life in Korea but may push Eun-sook into a life outside the home in Australia. In Korea, Eun-sook did not engage in the workforce so that she could stay with her children. In Australia, her story is the opposite.

Eun-sook's story displays three facets of LMP. Firstly, the Western promise opens new possibilities and roles for her, but the return to Korea sees her revert to her original role, revealing the Western promise to be located firmly within the West. Eun-sook expresses no disappoint-

ment or frustration in moving between roles and countries but accepts opportunity to enjoy traditionalism when she can. The adaptability during the transition process is the second aspect. The third aspect is that of the educational promise, which for Eun-sook includes status and a means of dignifying LMP. Eun-sook also refers to the discourse of the Western promise in discovering that she can ‘do more than house work,’ saying,

In Australia, I proved to myself and my husband that I could do more than housework – I could also do social and academic work...

Eun-sook realizes a hitherto unseen potential in her new situation. Her story illustrates the notion ‘when in Rome’ to a high degree, indicating the level of adaption that Korean women may realize upon migration to Australia, but that this adaptation is specific to time, place, and circumstance during the transition process and may change again upon returning to Korea. Her work and study load led her to great achievements in Australia but she did not lament the loss of these activities when returning to Korean housewifery and motherhood. Moving between the two roles as she moves between the two countries, Eun-sook’s story is illustrative of the notion of circular time¹ for women, operating according to needs and capabilities, rather than according to a linear career progression, a characteristic more prevalent in the male linear work pattern. In Korea, Eun-sook’s financial resources are greater and the range of suitable roles outside of the home is placed within the community and volunteer sectors. However when in Australia and under financial pressure, the range of activities available to her in the labor market widens, while the notion of roles acceptable to her status and class remains.

¹ Circular Time: traditional Native Americans perceive Time as being circular, possibly like the seasons.

Discussion

Each narrative of the three women 'who do not participate in paid work' reveals a variation in how gender and cultural factors can become covert and insidious. This is achieved through the echoes of the traditional roles of wife and mother, which may appear to have been displaced but are merely reinterpreted in a modern workforce. This narrative analysis demonstrates that need and desire may be considered as the motivators for Eun-ji, where the 'need' to participate is an external motivator generated by circumstance and the 'desire' to participate is an internal motivator generated from within women themselves. For Kong-ji, despite her desire to participate in the workforce, her childcare responsibilities do not permit her to remain in the workforce.

In the case of Young-hee and Eun-ji, it is evident that satisfaction with, and acceptance of the traditional role of wife and mother exists in conjunction with financial security and their husbands' professional position in the paid workforce. While this is consistent, consideration must be taken of the role of gender and culture in impacting the need or desire to participate in the labor market. Economic realities are a strong factor in the need to participate, and where these are not a factor, desire comes to the fore as the defining factor of whether barriers to participation exist. For these women, marriage and motherhood are the most significant factors in their lives, which are foundations of their life stories.

LMP is either impossible, unthinkable or a highly negotiated possibility that supports the traditional gender role. The availability of financial resources enables or disables the Korean women to participate in activities outside the home, while class and status impacts the particular perceptions of the role of wife and mother. For Kong-ji, family circumstances allow her to leave her job to take care of her young children. For these women the transition process does not alter their financial situation, and LMP is not necessary for these women.

Eun-jin, Jin-seng and Eun-sook did not plan to enter the workforce, but they found that they were able to reconcile their perceptions of themselves as wives and mothers while working. For these women in particular, paid work is acceptable, necessary or even forced if not personally desired at different times in their lives, and their obligations as

wives and mothers are drivers of that participation. As noted, two of the three women ceased their paid work as soon as they were in a financial position to do so, exhibiting the adaptability to move between roles in the paid workforce, as stay-at-home mothers and volunteer workers during the transition process. This is the characteristic of circular time for these women, as a non-linear progression that may repeat itself in a response to the vagaries and circumstances of life rather than a paradigm of the individual control of career and vision for the future.

Discourses are surprisingly consistent amongst these women considering the different labor market experiences and situations in which these women found themselves. The idea of a 'better life in the West' is one that is easily translated into a service for the future of their children. This better life necessarily involves a Western education for the children combined with the struggle to realize that the promise involves hard work and sacrifice on the part of the Korean women and their husbands. Migration, the establishment of a business, and the separation from traditional support networks are aspects of a rite of passage towards independence in the West.

The most frequently shared discourse in these life stories was 'husband's business.' Depending on a husband's success or failure in business, these women found more or fewer opportunities to participate in activities outside the home. This involves the notion of circular time for all women, accepting that LMP may occur at different times and in different ways, and that any exit and return is likely to involve reduced opportunities. This supports the findings of Game and Pringle (1979) and Poole (1984), wherein women in Australia are constrained by invisible constraints and spend time reproducing and supporting the workforce. This means that women in Australia who perform tasks that support the wellbeing of husbands and children are contributing to the workforce by sustaining other workers. It is their domestic support that facilitates the LMP of their family members.

The second most used discourse is 'changing and moving circumstances' surrounding Korean women in Australia. When financially supported by her husband, a Korean woman has no obligation to work but is mindful to maintain her social position: a 'middle class burden.' For Korean women whose husbands' established businesses and require their support, the demands of wifely duty and servitude to their hus-

bands are balanced by not suffering the indignity of having to perform such work for somebody outside of the family. Nevertheless, these women are the most likely to resent their jobs, which may involve manual work, long hours, and tasks beneath their social expectations. Some women find themselves pulled between the demands of wifely duty and their social expectations, forced either to choose or compromise.

The findings show that transition theory is a useful and appropriate concept with which to explain a Korean woman's engagement or disengagement with paid work in Australia. Transition theory endeavors to theorize how Korean women respond to change, either in their own lives or in surrounding situations, and this can involve many complex issues in the case of Australia. The findings demonstrate that a Korean woman's decision to participate in the labor market is largely dependent on 'family circumstances' during the transition process, and in particular, is strongly associated with either a husband's success or failure in business or a husband's secure employment. The findings reveal the discourse of 'family circumstances' as illustrating the changing and moving circumstances surrounding Korean women in Australia, which supports the validity of the transition theory.

An alternative feminine virtue appears to be constructed in these life stories: adaptation and responsiveness, an ability to support the family in any necessary way at any time and to subsequently move on when circumstances change (Mun & Yun, 2000; An, Lim, Jung, & Lee, 2001). The discourse of 'family circumstances' also reinterprets the role of the 'wise mother' to allow for LMP and provide financially for their children rather than performing domestic tasks. The discourse describes Korean women as always involved in the labor market to some degree, either directly participating in or supporting and training towards labor market values to open opportunities and possibilities for their husbands and children, reflecting the values of Australian society which considers LMP worthwhile for women (cf. Curthoys, 1979). This discourse highlights the female role in families as both flexible and essential, as when necessity arises, women provide essential family support and economic participation. Further, domestic, cultural, and gender-based demands impact disproportionately on some members of society, particularly women, who must negotiate these before they can even attempt to find the allocated value of their human capital in the labor market (Poiner &

Wills, 1991; Vasta & Castles, 1996).

These results parallel Park's (2007) study on Korean women in the USA, which revealed that a 'women's own agency' is triggered by participation in the labor market. Korean women in Australia actively negotiate and make their own decisions to improve their family's financial situation during the migration transition process in order to achieve a better future for themselves, their family and their children in Australia.

Conclusion and Implications

A narrative analysis of the life stories of Korean women revealed issues related to participation or non-participation in the paid workforce. The analysis reveals that Korean women's decisions to participate in the labor market are largely dependent on their personal situations, in particular, on their 'husband's business' and 'family circumstances.' The impact of gender roles on labor market possibilities has changed over time and according to family circumstance during the transition process. The impact of gender and culture on Korean women has been revealed to be complex and embedded within their lives, even influencing their ability to conceive of LMP. While a narrative analysis acknowledges that gender and culture are two constant sources of frustration and limitation for Korean women, it does not propose that these gender and cultural issues can be solved by simply altering some aspect of their domestic situation. It is not so much a refutation of labor market disadvantage theories, as it is merely a statement that they are too simple and require further explanation. Considerable social, labor market, and migration policy is based on the principles of economic efficiency. The findings of this study show that segmentation theory is limited or inadequate and remains locked in a nexus of naturalized discrimination on the basis of difference, and that transition theory is more revealing than conventional labor market disadvantaged theories to explain and understand Korean women's life experience during the settlement period.

The discussion of barriers to economic productivity on the basis of difference hides the productivity of Korean women in performing community, voluntary, domestic caring, and counseling roles, which in turn facilitate the economic productivity of others. Only certain activities are recognized and valued. A significant implication for policy makers is the

need to recognize the voluntary, unpaid, helping and caring work and activities performed by many migrant women, which are isolated and unheard. These activities have been recognized in this study through narrative analysis techniques, while other research techniques ignore this sphere of activity. Korean women may be very busy offering assistance and guidance to others while maintaining their home and traditional roles, but they are often described as unemployed and unimportant. The extent and value of their work is unrecorded, unrewarded, and unrecognized; yet the work adds much to the cohesion and harmony of society. There is little language for these activities compared with the large vocabulary for describing economic and organizational social interaction.

References

- An, B. C., Lim, I. S., Jung, K. S., & Lee, J. W. (2001). *Financial Crisis and Family*. Seoul, Korea: Mi-rae Human Resource Research Centre. [In Korean]
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The Life Story Interview, Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Castles, S., Mitchell, C., Morrissey, M., & Alcorso, C. (1989). *The Recognition of Overseas Trade Qualifications*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Chapman, B. J., & Iredale, R. R. (1990). *Immigrant Qualifications: Recognition and Relative Wage Outcomes*. Report prepared for the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Australia.
- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (1985). Immigrant generation and income in Australia. *The Economic Record*, 61(173), 540-553.
- Cobb-Clark, D. (2000). Do Selection Criteria Make a Difference? Visa Category and the Labor Market Status of Immigrants to Australia. *The Economic Record*, 76(232), 15-31.
- Cobb-Clark, D. (2002). *Public Policy and the Labor Market Adjustment of New Immigrants to Australia* (IZA Discussion Papers 620). Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).
- Cobb-Clark, D. (2003). Public policy and labor market Adjustment of new immigrants to Australia. *Journal of Population Economics*, 16(4), 655-681.
- Cobb-Clark, D. (2004). Selective Immigration Policy in Australia, Canada, and the United States. *Brussels Economic Review, Special Edition: Skilled Migration*, 47(1), 45-56.
- Cobb-Clark, D., & Chapman, B. J. (1999). *The Changing Pattern of Immigrants: Labor Market Experiences* (Discussion paper no.396). Centre for Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.
- Collins, J. (1988). *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land-Australia's Post War Immigration*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Curthoys, A. (1979). Explaining the Sexual Division of Labor under Capitalism. *Refractory Girl, December*, 61-62.
- Czarniawska-J. B. (1997). *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dowden, B. (2009). *The Metaphysics of Time: A Dialogue*. Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010).

- Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Han, G. (1999). Immigrant life and work involvement: Korean men in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 20(1), 15-29.
- Game, A., & Pringle, R. (1979). Sexuality and the Suburban Dream. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 15(2), 4-15.
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Lee, G. J. (2008). 'Korean migrant women's life and work'. In A 50th Years History of Korean Migrant in Australia Compilation Committee. *A 50th Years History of Korean Migrant in Australia*. Seoul, Korea: Jin-heung publication. [in Korean]
- Lee, G. J. (2013). 'English ain't English in the Australian workplace': a narrative analysis of Korean migrant women's labor market experiences. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 20(1), 53-69.
- Lever-Tracy, C., & Quinlan, M. (1998). *'A Divide Working Class' Ethnic Segmentation and Industrial Conflict in Australia*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mincer, J. (1974). *Schooling, experience and earnings*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Mun, S. J., & Yun, S. Y. (2000). *Marriage and Labor*. Seoul, Korea: Gyo-mun Sa. [in Korean]
- Park, K. (2007). "I Can Provide for My Children": Korean Immigrant Women's Changing Perspectives on Work Outside the Home. *Gender Issues*, 25, 26-42.
- Peck, J. A. (1989). Reconceptualizing the local labor market: space, segmentation and the state. *Progress in Human Geography*, 13, 42-62.
- Poiner, G., & Wills, S. (1991). *The Gifthorse*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Poole, R. (1984). Markets and Motherhood: The Advent of the New rights. In A. Burns, G. Bottomley, & P. Jools (Eds.), *The Family in the Modern World: Australian Perspectives* (pp. 103-120). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Richardson, S., Miller-Lewis, L., Ngo, P., & Illsley, D. (2002). *The Settlement Experiences of New Migrants: A Comparison of Wave One of LSLA I and LSLA 2*. Report prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Richardson, S., Robertson, F., & Illsley, D. (2001). *The Labor force Experiences of New Migrants*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research Methods*. Newbury

- Park: Sage Publications.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analysing human adaptation to transition. *Counselling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2-18.
- Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counselling adults in transition* (2nd ed.). New York: Springer.
- Seol, B. (2000). *Ethnicity in the process of acculturation and socio-economic assimilation: A case study of Koreans in Sydney and Melbourne*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Monash University, Melbourne.
- Shin, J. S. (2009). *Immigrant Workers, the labor market and skill formation in the Sydney construction industry: a case study of Korean tiling workers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Sydney.
- VandenHeuvel, A., & Wooden, M. (1999). *New settlers have their say: How immigrants fare over the early years of settlement: an analysis of data from the three waves of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia*. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.
- VandenHeuvel, A., & Wooden, M. (2000). Immigrants' Labor Market Experiences in the Early Settlement Years. *Australian Bulletin of Labor*, 26(1), 59-69.
- Vasta, E., & Castles, S. (1996). *The teeth are smiling: the Persistence of racism in multi-cultural Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Biographical Note: Jane Gyungsook Lee, Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Sydney, is a professor at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, at Chonnam National University, Korea. Her research focuses on female migrant and work, intercultural communication issues in multinational organizations and issues of internationalization in higher education. She has published several articles and books on the subjects of gender, place and culture on Korean migrant women in Australia. E-mail: Janelee@jnu.ac.kr