Asian Cultural Collectivism, Acculturation, and Life Satisfaction among Ethnic Asian Brides in South Korea

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Abstract

The current study addresses the significance of cultural orientations for life satisfaction among marriage immigrants in South Korea. The subjects of our study have been selected from three ethnic groups of Asian brides living in Korea after their marriage with Korean men − Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese women. In this study, cultural orientations are classified into two parts: Asian cultural collectivism and acculturation to Korean society (openness to/liking of Korean culture and Korean language skills). Some other important predictors of life satisfaction are also included in the analysis. As the analytic strategy, this study employs the least-squares regression. One of our findings shows that the retention of Asian cultural collectivism contributes to ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society. Likewise, there is evidence that their life satisfaction rises with their growing knowledge of and attachment to Korean cultural traditions and standards. Finally, their proficiency in the Korean language is also an important factor that exerts a positive effect on their life satisfaction in Korean society.

Introduction

Marriage migration from one Asian country to another has been a noteworthy phenomenon in East and Southeast Asia during the past

two decades (Jones & Shen, 2008; Piper, 2003). So far, South Korea (hereafter, Korea) and three other Asian countries − Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore − have become popular destination countries for Asian bride migrants. As of 2009, for instance, more than 75 percent of all international marriages in Korea − 25,142 marriages − involved foreign immigrant brides, largely from other Asian countries like China, Vietnam, Philippine and Japan, marrying Korean men (National Statistical Office, 2010). On the one hand, the feminization of migration in Asia can be an important force in this large-scale arrival of ethnic Asian brides into Korea. This is because the feminization of international migration has to do with globalization and its influences on the occurrence of cross-national differences in economic and employment opportunities, the gendered division of global labor − i.e., domestic work, care work, sex work, or low-paid work in other service sectors, and reproductive labor at the global level − e.g., cross-border marriages (Constable, 2009; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). On the other hand, the recent growth of ethnic Asian brides in Korea can also to some degree be explained by efforts to arrange international marriages for Korean men by international-networking matchmaking (brokerage) firms, local governments in Korea, and international religious organizations (Lee, 2008). Our study takes a particular interest in overall life satisfaction among these ethnic Asian brides living in Korea after their marriage with Korean men. Life satisfaction is here viewed as an important component of one's subjective quality of life, also known as subjective well-being (Campbell, 1981; Diener, 1984; E. Diener & M. Diener, 2009; Michalos, 1986; Ryff, 1989; Tov & Diener, 2009). After resettlement in Korean society, securing and enhancing personal life satisfaction can be a real challenge for ethnic Asian brides.

In this study, we address the importance of ethnic Asian brides' cultural orientations for their overall satisfaction with life in Korean society. The influence of one's cultural orientations on subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, has become one of the main themes in cross-cultural psychology and other related disciplines (Brewer & Chen, 2007; E. Diener & M. Diener, 1995, 2009; Schimmack et al., 2002; Tov & Diener, 2009). More specifically, our study focuses upon two types of cultural orientations: Asian cultural collectivism and acculturation to Korean society. First of all, Asian cultural collectivism puts great emphasis on

relationship, group norms and values (interdependence, harmony and conformity), group identity (a sense of identification with others), and the priority of group goals over individual goals – e.g., commitment (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Soh & Leong, 2002; Triandis, 1996, 2001). There are two divergent hypotheses on how cultural orientations to Asian cultural collectivism will influence life satisfaction. On the one hand, a person's evaluation or public expression of his or her life satisfaction often tends to be suppressed, and even be devalued in East Asian nations in which collectivist cultures predominate over individualist cultures. As a consequence, it has been shown that life satisfaction is relatively low among Asian people compared to Westerners (Diener et al., 1995, 1999; Sheldon et al., 2004; Tov & Diener, 2009). On the other hand, some scholars have suggested the contrary argument that individual life satisfaction would be improved because collectivist norms and values are genuinely integrated with, and internalized within one's self concept (Chirkov et al., 2003; Crocker et al., 1994; Oishi & Diener, 2001). However, the question of whether Asian cultural collectivism plays a significant role for Asian immigrants' life satisfaction in another Asian country is little known so far. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine whether and to what extent ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society is affected by the collectivist cultural orientations that are deeply ingrained in many Asian societies.

Second, our study also addresses the significance of Asian immigrants' acculturation in another Asian country for their subjective well being. Here, acculturation refers primarily to immigrants' adoption of the cultural values, traditions, and standards of the host society. Acculturation has been understood as a key component and the first stage of the immigrant assimilation process in the host society (Alba et al., 2002; Alba & Nee, 1997, 2003; Gordon, 1964). By introducing the concept of acculturative stress, some studies have associated immigrants' acculturation process in a host society with mental health problems – e.g., anxiety, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, identity confusion, and feelings of alienation (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 1987; Ward et al., 1998). However, very little is known about the specific impact of Asian immigrants' acculturation experience on their overall life satisfaction in another Asian country. What we would predict is that ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men would strive to identify, and then embrace, a general mode

of Korean values and standards to better assimilate into Korean society. Here, we measure their acculturation to Korean society through knowledge about Korean history and traditions, Korean language skills, their self-identification as Korean, and so on.

In sum, we argue in this paper that these two types of cultural orientations are critical to one's life satisfaction in a new society. Ultimately, marriage migration from one Asian country to another has made it possible for ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men to retain Asian cultural collectivism and simultaneously to access a general mode of Korean cultural patterns (acculturation). Below we also take into account ethnic identity, self-esteem, and stress as the other important determinants of ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society. The subjects of our study were selected from three distinctive groups of ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men and living in Korea – Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese women – to test the research inquiries proposed above.[1]

Asian Cultural Collectivism [xxx]

Like Korea, three other Asian countries of the East and Southeast Asian regions – China, Japan, and Vietnam – have long traditions of collectivist cultures. Indeed, some patterns of these four Asian nations' col-

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[1] In 2009, the number of international marriages between Chinese women and Korean men ranked first. Among these Chinese brides married to Korean men, there were many Korean Chinese brides – called *Josunjok,* who had resided in China during most of their lifetimes, and who held Chinese citizenship. In general, these Korean-Chinese brides came to Korea by marrying Korean farmers, blue-collar workers, the self-employed, or service workers. Therefore, there is no way to distinguish their numbers from those of ethnic Chinese brides in this 2009 Chinese tabulation. According to the 2008 statistical report by the Korean government, there were 102,713 foreign spouses married to Koreans. The highest number of foreign spouses living in Korea as of 2008 were Korean Chinese (32,446), followed by Chinese (22,863), Vietnamese (19,660), Japanese (5,994), and Filipinos (4,716). This report suggests that the number of ethnic Chinese brides marrying Korean men was the second highest (Ministry of Justice, 2009). In our study of ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society, therefore, we selected ethnic Chinese brides only as our study sample by excluding ethnic Koreans brides from China who might have been familiar with Korean language, traditions, and customs. As seen in Table 1, Filipinas are the third largest group of marriages with Korean men. Because their culture has been heavily affected by Spanish cultural traditions, a sample of Filipina married to Korean men was not included in our study.

lectivist cultures have been very similar over their different historical stages, owing to their sharing of Confucian values and traditions that were introduced in ancient China. Even in these four contemporary Asian countries, Confucian values and traditions, called Confucianism, are still to some degree imbued in their core cultural modes (Guthrie, 2009; Kibria, 2000; Koh, 1996; Shin, 2005; Smith, 1996). Indeed, what these countries have shared in common is the collectivist cultural values and norms of the patriarchal family and society, in which the father (or the eldest male), as head of the family, has full authority over any other family members, and, at a societal level, authoritarian leaders exert their power and governance over other social members (Bedford & Hwang, 2003; Kibria, 1993, 2000; Lebra, 1998; Park & Cho, 1995; Smith, 1996). Moreover, people living in Asian collectivist cultures tend to put more emphasis on group goals, relationship harmony, or interdependence than on their own personal goals, needs, or independence (Triandis, 1996). At the individual level, these Asian people are socialized to define themselves in such a way that the self is inseparable from their relationships with others and their ingroup identification (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1985). Thus, they become collectivists (or group-oriented people) who appraise relational harmony and group goals as their priority, and who consider group identity as part of their personal identity. An important research question is whether such collectivist cultural orientations affect their satisfaction with life.

Past cross-national studies have shown that Asian people scored lower in life satisfaction than people from Western nations (Diener et al., 1995; Sheldon et al., 2004; Suh, 2002). Basically, we argue that Asian people's relatively lower score in life satisfaction can be understood as an outcome of their collectivist cultural orientations, which often prioritize relationship harmony and group goals over individual needs and goals. For instance, people often feel less satisfied with life at times when personal duty or obligation is enforced by external sources that aim to prioritize group goals (Chirkov et al., 2005; Sheldon et al., 2004). Therefore, Asian people's involuntary conformity with group norms can operate as a negative force on their life satisfaction. Thus, Asian people's relatively lower score in life satisfaction can have some bearing on their disposition towards self-criticism (Diener et al., 2003; Oishi et al., 2000). In collectivist cultures like those found in East Asian nations, ex-

pressions of personal interests and judgment can be considered serious impediments to group harmony and interpersonal relationships. Rather, such Asian cultures take the norm of humility and self-criticism (or self-effacement) as the most important virtues to be followed (Heine et al., 1999). This focus on personal humbleness or self-criticism can be another factor that has the potential to lower Asian people's life satisfaction.

However, as others have argued, one's collectivist cultural orientations can play a positive role in one's life satisfaction. The influence of social norms on life satisfaction in collectivist cultures like those of Asian countries might be compared to the influence of emotion on life satisfaction in individualist cultures like those of Western countries (Suh et al., 1998). For instance, a study of life satisfaction from Hong Kong found that extroverted or group-oriented personalities tend to emphasize relational harmony, which causes them to experience increased life satisfaction (Kwan et al., 1997). From a sample of Asian Americans, there is also strong evidence that the pursuit of goals for one's family and friends (group goals) is positively associated with one's life satisfaction (Oishi & Diener, 2001). Although members of collectivist cultures might think of relationship harmony and group norms as social pressures in the short run, this is not the case when they gradually and intrinsically adapt to such collectivist cultural orientations through a long-term socialization process. The internalization of collectivist cultural values and norms in human nature can be expressed by the concepts of allocentrism and the interdependent self, both of which stress the importance of one's relationships with others and ingroup identification in the construct of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1985).

To simplify, this suggests that one's life satisfaction can rise in proportion to how well integrated one's social values and norms are to one's own identity. Prior to emigration to Korea, many ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men seem to have been to some degree socialized in the values of Asian collectivist cultures. Therefore, their Asian-oriented cultural values and identity are unlikely to disappear easily even after their resettlement in Korea. Moreover, contemporary Korean society has its own collective cultural traditions, particularly Confucian traditions that underscore such principles and practices as authority, filial piety, women's subordinate status in the family, and the preference for

male offspring. In other words, resettlement in Korea cannot be seen as an obstacle for the perpetuation of Asian cultural values and norms that are part of their identity. For ethnic Asian brides, the spread of the familiar collectivist cultural environment in Korean society may mitigate cultural shock, which can play a positive role for their life satisfaction in Korean society. To sum up, the first theme of the current study is to examine whether ethnic Asian brides' recognition of familiar Asian-oriented cultural values and codes in Korean society affects their life satisfaction.

Acculturation to Korean Society

In Korea, there has been rapid influx of immigrants, whose numbers have risen from 490,000 in 2000 to 1.2 million in 2009 ‒ almost 2.4 percent of the total population (National Statistical Office, 2010). Despite this recent population shift, contemporary Korea still remains an ethnically and culturally homogenous country in which a common national heritage, language, symbols, and traditions predominate. Contemporary Korea can be portrayed as a tight-knit network society where social relationships with others and group goals have priority over individual needs and goals. Another feature of contemporary Korean society is the preponderance of nationalism in which most Koreans tend to reveal their collective sense of identity, or their strong feelings of national unity, in times of proposing or pursuing nationalistic goals ‒ e.g., national interests or security concerns from North Korea (Woo-Cumings, 2005). For those reasons, collective identification or the collective self, relative to the individual self, is characteristic of many Koreans (Alford, 1999).

A central theme of recent immigration studies in Korean academia is ethnic Asian brides' unilateral acculturation toward Korean cultural patterns (Lee, 2005; Park & Chung, 2007; Seol & Yoon, 2008). On arriving in Korea, ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men go through the acculturation process by confronting, or learning for themselves, the collectivist cultural patterns of Korean society: in particular, Korean values, norms, and identity. As sole migrants, ethnic Asian brides in Korea cannot, for the most part, acculturate "on their own." Prior to their arrival, it seems that their acculturation process is already, to a considerable extent, structured in the social institutions of Korean society. For instance,

many Korean men marrying ethnic Asian women were from traditional families with relatively low socioeconomic status and primarily engaged in less prestigious and low-income jobs, such as blue-collar jobs, daily or part-time employment, self-employment, or farming. These omnipresent surroundings and the status of Korean men give a hint that some ethnic Asian brides cannot avoid taking on the traditional women's roles assigned to them: being obedient housewives to husbands, daughters-in-law, and sisters-in-law, and the keepers of husbands' family lineage.

By contrast, some ethnic Asian women before their marriages to Korean men might have been already familiar with the Korean culture, as well as the Korean language.[2] Indeed, this is the case of the Korean wave (or the Korean fever) that has been spreading across most East and Southeast Asian countries since 2001 (Cho, 2005). The Korean wave, expressed often as the widespread popularity of Korean movies, TV dramas, and pop music by mass communications across these Asian countries, tends to generate both positive images of Korean men and a longing for life in Korea for many Asian women, some of whom eventually marry Korean men. In general, our point here is that these ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men may see commitment to and sacrifice for Korean husbands and their family members as typical Korean cultural values and norms. When people feel a great sense of attachment to their significant others, it is known that they tend to internalize group orientations and regulations (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

These principles and norms of relationship harmony in the traditional Korean family can be seen as a microcosm of larger Korean cultural patterns. Thus, ethnic Asian brides' sense of relational harmony with those intimate or distant others outside the family, like their belongingness to various social units, can further strengthen their collective self

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[2] Obviously, more improvements in global-level information, communication, and transportation technologies in the modern era have made it possible to boost international migration more frequently and easily (Constable, 2003). For instance, a short (one-week) Korean men's marriage tour to other Asian countries by the direct arrangement of commercial-marriage brokers might be impossible without improvements in modern transportation technology (e.g., jet airplanes) and its infrastructures and services (e.g., large-scale international airports and more frequent air routes).

by personifying common Korean values and norms – such as loyalty, conformity, and cohesion. Thereafter, ethnic Asian brides can have a better understanding of how Koreans develop their currently prevailing thoughts, beliefs, priorities, and expectations. From the ethnic Asian brides' standpoint, their high-level internalization of Korean cultural patterns can be also considered an indication of their deep acculturation into Korean society. This account does not deny the fact that there are rising numbers of many ethnic Asian brides suffering from experiences of domestic violence or marital dissolution (divorce) (D.S. Kim, 2007; O. N. Kim, 2006). Nonetheless, our argument here is that ethnic Asian brides' personal internalization of Korean cultural values and norms is very real indeed and strong enough to contribute positively to their life satisfaction in Korean society. This argument is consistent with the notion that one's psychological well-being can be improved when collectivist cultural norms and values become integral to one's own identity, or one's primary goals (Chirkov et al., 2003; Oishi & Diener, 2001).

Moreover, linguistic assimilation is a key component of acculturation that can have an important influence on one's life satisfaction in a new society. Thus, learning Korean is greatly important for ethnic Asian brides trying to adjust in Korean society. Their Korean language skills can even play a positive role in their evaluation of life in Korean society. Exchanges of opinions and information with the Koreans around them, by means of strong Korean communication skills (speaking, writing, and listening) can help promote their awareness of the prevailing Korean thoughts, beliefs, priorities, and expectations, including those of their Korean families and friends. Their strong Korean reading skills can also help them understand national traits, traditions, and standards of Korea, both historically and in the present day.

The Other Predictors: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Stress

Ethnic identity often refers to an individual identification with, or a sense of belonging to a certain cultural community (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). The subjects of the current study are Asian brides married to Korean men who migrated to Korea from Japan, China, and Vietnam. These three Asian countries are very different from each other in terms of historical experiences, national sovereignty, territorial loca-

tions, and cultural traditions and symbols like language, religion, and ethnicity. More importantly, ethnic identity can be a clear manifestation of differences in national traditions and circumstances among people of these three Asian countries. In some cases, ethnic identity might be indistinguishable from national identity − e.g., a sense of belonging to a large-scale collectivity like a nation-state as citizens, awareness of their national traditions, and their pride in national heritage, history and culture (Smith, 1986). As stated above, a great number of ethnic Asian adults have grown up in an atmosphere of collectivist cultures that put an emphasis on group norms and identity. Therefore, ethnic (or national) identity appears to make up not only their core social identity, but also an important part of their self-concept. The same may hold true for ethnic Asian brides who came to Korea as adults. Adult immigrants' strong sense of ethnic (or national) identity can operate as an impediment to their cultural adjustment in a new country (Berry, 1997). This further suggests that the strong ethnic identity of ethnic Asian brides might come to be seen as a negative force on their life satisfaction in Korean society. However, there is reason to think that their ethnic identity has nothing to do with their life satisfaction in Korean society. As their years in Korea go by, the weakening of their ethnic (or national) identity can occur as a result of their naturalization as legal Korean citizens, and giving up the citizenship of their home country. In addition, the scale of ethnic Asian communities in Korea is still at an early stage (Seol & Skrentny, 2009). Thus, we may also come to the conclusion that their ethnic identity is no longer a significant predictor of their life satisfaction in Korea.

Self-esteem refers to an overall feeling of self-worth and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1979). In individualistic societies like the United States, people are often encouraged to assert themselves, evaluate themselves positively (e.g., competent and intelligent), or to separate themselves from others; on the other hand, people in Eastern cultures often regard themselves less positively, or more critically, than do people in Western cultures in order to achieve relationship harmony with others through self-control and self-restraint (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For that reason, self-esteem has been seen as a more powerful predictor of one's life satisfaction in Western cultures (Campbell, 1981; Diener & Diener, 1995, 2009;

Rosenberg et al., 1995). However, some scholars doubt the importance of self-esteem in one's life satisfaction in Eastern (or collectivist) cultures (Diener et al., 1995; Kwan et al., 1997). This is because Eastern cultures like Japan tend to take one's need for self-esteem (or self-enhancement) as a barrier to one's success (Heine et al., 1999). However, others have argued that people in all cultures, including Eastern cultures, have the self-enhancement motive or the need for self-esteem (Sedikides et al., 2003). For example, Japanese students at one university in Japan rated themselves more positively than they rated most other students (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002). At this point, we have little knowledge about whether there exists a difference in the evaluation of self-esteem between native-born Asians and Asian immigrants, such as ethnic Asian brides living in Korea. Furthermore, how ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men rate themselves is also unknown. Nonetheless, whether, and in what direction, ethnic Asian brides' self-esteem affects their life satisfaction in Korean society is an important topic worth exploring here.

Immigration is a critical life event for anyone who has experienced it. For immigrants, migration can lead to stress (Pearlin et al., 1981; Thomas & Choi, 2006). In a new country, immigrants are more inclined to experience stress related to marital problems, cultural readjustment, a sense of isolation, and so forth (Mirdal, 2006). Indeed, resettlement and the accompanying formation of a family with a man of a different ethnicity in a new country must be a significant life event for an immigrant woman. It goes without saying that these marginalized immigrant women may also encounter many challenges in the new society – e.g., marital conflict, economic hardship, or cultural shock (Chin, 1994; Imamura, 1990). Asian ethnic brides married to Korean men are no exception. For instance, some ethnic Asian brides reported a lack of communication with their Korean husbands, experiences of verbal abuse or physical violence, or a readiness for divorce (O. N. Kim, 2006). Like with marital conflict, it is not difficult to predict that ethnic Asian brides will experience stress in the process of learning Korean as a new language and adjusting to unfamiliar Korean values and ways of life. Moreover, one of the major reasons why ethnic Asian brides decide to marry Korean men and live in Korea is to improve their economic well-being (Cho, 2010; M. J. Kim et al., 2006). However, many ethnic

Asian brides appear to suffer from lasting economic hardships due to their Korean husbands' low economic status and unstable sources of income. Lastly, ethnic-based bias and antagonism against Asian immigrants still exists to some degree in Korean society (Kim, 2009), which might be another possible source of stress for many ethnic Asian women, who unavoidably will interact with native-born Koreans. Overall, we must conclude that the higher the ethnic Asian brides' exposure to the major sources of stress, the lower their life satisfaction in Korean society will be.

Data and Methods

Procedure and participants

The subjects of this study were selected from three distinct groups of ethnic Asian brides living in Korea – Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese women. They were recruited from the Multi-cultural Family Support Center located at one district, one of the 25 districts in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea.[3] In 2009, the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (KMHW) launched 100 Multi-cultural Family Support Centers nationwide as a follow-up to the September 2008 Multi-cultural Family Support Act (The Central Office for Multi-cultural Family Support Centers, 2009). By and large, these Multi-cultural Family Support Centers (MCFSC) offer immigrant women a wide variety of education programs, such as education in the Korean language, education for multi-ethnic family or counseling services, visiting educational services for both Korean language and child-rearing practices, other educational services supporting job search or job training, and so on.

This Multi-cultural Family Support Center (MCFSC) designated and sponsored by the KMHW is also affiliated with the University located in the same district. A full-time faculty member at the University has kept track of how this district's MCFSC was organized from its formation. Furthermore, her five master's students worked for this district's MCFSC as instructors of regular Korean language courses, with

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[3] As of 2008, almost half of all married immigrants (63,000 out of 122,000) in Korea resided in Kyung-Ki Province, including Seoul city (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

three additional masters' students working as Korean language teachers who occasionally visited the homes of some ethnic Asian brides unable to attend regular Korean language courses. A faculty member instructed these eight Korean language teachers on the specific steps to contact the subjects, and then to conduct the survey, which was given to those ethnic Asian brides registered for the fall 2009 Korean language programs through this district's MCFSC. Her instructions included the importance of survey participants' agreement by filling out consent forms, having a clear-cut introduction of the purpose of this study, the confidentiality of their responses, and how to distribute the questionnaires and when to collect the completed questionnaires. According to these eight Korean language teachers, only a few of their contact persons were unwilling to fill out the survey – three persons declined.

A total of 313 Asian ethnic brides responded to our survey during a three-month period - September to November 2009. Of those, the five regular language course teachers contacted 251 participants and the three visiting teachers contacted the remaining 62. The five regular instructors usually collected the completed questionnaires in class within one week of distribution, while the three visiting teachers collected the completed questionnaires during their next scheduled visit to survey participants' homes. One important point here is that such a purposive sampling method raises a question about the representativeness of the survey participants. In fact, the main reason we chose to sample only within Seoul is because we considered it too difficult to collect a systematic random sample from all ethnic Asian brides living in Korea. For instance, included here are updated information on their place of residence nationwide and ways of contacting the randomly selected participants.

The questionnaire for this study was originally prepared in English. Separate bilingual experts then translated the English version of the questionnaire into Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Through discussion and consultation with these bilingual experts, translators corrected some awkward words and phrases to retain the meanings from the English version of the questionnaire. All three language-version questionnaires were pilot-tested by several brides of each ethnic Asian group to evaluate the relevancy of vocabulary and the clarity of linguistic expressions.

Measures

In this study, *life satisfaction* was assessed by the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) introduced by Diener and his associates (1985). The SWLS is a five-item scale that asks respondents to rate their global life satisfaction, also known as the cognitive component of subjective well-being. In the SWLS, respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement using a 7-point response scale. In the current study, we used a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) so as to minimize any differences between the three different linguistic expressions. Life satisfaction was measured by five items (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to my ideal," or "I am satisfied with my life"). In this sample, this measure of life satisfaction had a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .801 (see *Appendix* for all the items).

As one part of cultural orientations and one of the key independent variables, *Asian cultural collectivism* was measured by the modified statements of the seven items of the Asian Values Scale developed by Kim and his associates (1999), and by one item from the Acculturation Scale for Vietnamese Adolescents (ASVA) introduced by Nguyen and her associates (1999). The eight items measuring this Asian cultural collectivism were rated in terms of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale (e.g., "One should think about one's group before oneself" or "One should not deviate from social norms"). The complete scale had a reliability coefficient of .749 in this sample. *Acculturation to Korean society,* also known as the other part of cultural orientations and one of the key independent variables, has been classified as two dimensions: Openness to/liking of Korean culture and Korean language skills. First, openness to/liking of Korean culture was measured by seven statements (e.g., "I feel comfortable with Korean people" or "I would like to adopt or take up the Korean way of life"). The reliability coefficient for it was .778. The section of Korean language skills was measured by four items (e.g., "How well do you speak Korean" or "How well do you read Korean"). The responses for these four items were assessed on a 5-point scale, which ranged from 1 (*very poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). This was a highly reliable measure of Korean language skills (Cronbach's alpha = .887).

In our analysis, *ethnic identity* was measured by using three items of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) introduced by Phinney (1992). A sample item of ethnic identity includes "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group." The responses for this ethnic identity measure were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability for the summary scale of ethnic identity was .867. *Self-esteem* was measured by nine of the ten items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).[4] Four of them were reverse coded – e.g., "At times, I think I am no good at all." This measure of self-esteem had a reliability of .809 in this sample. Stress was measured by nine measures of stress related to marital conflict, cultural adjustment, economic hardships, and ethnic-based antagonism. Responses were on a five-point scale from 1 (*not at all stressful*) to 5 (*extremely stressful*) and the reliability of this stress measure was .811. In addition, some other control variables included in this study are: *age* (years), *the husband's age* (years), *education* (years of school completed), *length of residence* (years residing in Korea), *transnationalism* (the number of visits to home country), *religious affiliation* (yes = 1), *perceived health* (good or excellent = 1), and two ethnic groups – *Chinese and Vietnamese* – after treating Japanese as their reference category.

This study have tested the effects of the key independent variables and control variables on life satisfaction, known as the dependent variable, among the samples of ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men. To that end, our analytic strategy has used the least squares regression method to predict variations in life satisfaction.

Results

In classifying our collected sample into three ethnic Asian groups, there were 100 Japanese, 102 Chinese, and 111 Vietnamese participants. Table 1 present means for some selected demographic variables.

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[4] One item of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale – "I wish I could have more respect for myself."(reverse coded) – was deleted in the process of extracting one self-esteem variable because the correlation between this index and self-esteem factor (or component) was too low (.007).

Table 1.
Mean of selected demographic variables: 313 ethnic Asian women, 2009

	Total	Japanese	Chinese	Vietnamese
	(N = 313)	(N = 100)	(N = 102)	(N =111)
Age	32	41.2	31.5	26.3
The husband's age	42	43.9	39.6	41.9
Education (years)	12	14	13.5	10.5
Length of residence (years)	6	9.9	3.9	3.8
Religious affiliation (yes = 1)	.7	.9	.5	.7

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (two-tailed tests).
Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Differences between the means are produced by independence-samples t-tests. Asterisks indicate significant differences.

The average age of the 313 Asian women was 32 years, with a range from 18 to 56 years. Then, the average of Japanese women (41.2) in age is 9.7 older than that of Chinese women (31.5), and 14.9 older than that of Vietnamese women (26.3). Thus, independence-samples t-tests (not shown in Table 1) reveal that there exist some substantial differences in the average ages of these three Asian bride groups. The average age of their husbands, in the total sample, was 42 years, with a range of almost 40 years old for Chinese women to nearly 44 years old for Japanese women. In fact, the average age gap between Vietnamese women and their Korean husbands is nearly 15 years. In the total sample, the average years of education were 12, with a range from 10.5 years for Vietnamese women to 14 years for Japanese women: Mean differences in education are statistically significant in comparing the sample of Japanese women to that of Vietnamese women, and comparing the sample of Chinese women to that of Vietnamese women. Their average length of residence in Korea was 6 years, with a range from 3.8 years for Vietnamese women to almost 10 years for Japanese women: Mean differences between the sample of Japanese women and each sample of the other two Asian bride groups are statistically significant. For those who responded to a question item regarding their current religious status (274 out of 313 participants), almost 60 percent were affiliated with religious organizations. Interestingly, 96 of Japanese participants were cur-

rent members of religious organizations. Of those, more than two-thirds (69 percent) held a membership in the Unification Church, founded by the Korean Sun-Myung Moon; the church's doctrine strongly supports, and even arranges, international marriages.[5] In the case of Vietnamese women, almost 69 of them (65 percent) were affiliated with religious organizations: Buddhism (49), Catholic Christianity (12), and Protestant Christianity (8).

Table 2 presents zero-order correlation coefficients between the key variables used in this study, as well as their means and standard deviations.

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations: 313 ethnic Asian women, 2009

Variable	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Life satisfaction	.000	1.000	1						
(2) Asian cultural collectivism	.005	.999	.259***	1					
(3) Openness to/liking of Korean culture	.000	1.000	.301***	.310***	1				
(4) Korean language skills	.000	1.000	.139*	.078	.138*	1			
(5) Ethnic identity	.000	1.000	.116*	.505***	.115*	.226**	1		
(6) Self-esteem	.000	1.000	.285***	.016	.162**	.154**	.115*	1	
(7) Stress	.000	1.000	-.263***	-.133*	-.140*	.101	-.135*	-.219**	1

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (two-tailed tests).

We found that all six key independent variables were significantly correlated with life satisfaction. More specifically, the association between Asian cultural collectivism and life satisfaction is positive and statistically

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5 According to the website of the Unification Church introducing its main doctrines, international marriages between Korean and Japanese are seen as a way of personal-level remedy, through genuine love for the other ethnic partner, to alleviate animosity and conflicts between people of both countries for the past Japanese rule over Korea. This finding also seems to reflect an expression of their respect for the nation-state of the founder and leader of the Unification Church, Sun-Myung Moon who was born in Korea. http://www.tongilgyo.org. (*In Korean*).

significant (.259). As expected, the same holds true for the relationships between openness to/liking of Korean culture, which is known as a component of acculturation and life satisfaction (.301), and between Korean language skills as another dimension of acculturation and life satisfaction (.139). However small, ethnic identity is also positively associated with life satisfaction (.116). In addition, the correlation coefficient between self-esteem and life satisfaction shows a positive relationship with each other (.285). This suggests that ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction can rise as to the extent that they evaluate themselves positively. Stress however, is negatively associated with life satisfaction (-.263).

According to the coefficients between Asian cultural collectivism and each of two acculturation variables, the correlation between Asian cultural collectivism and openness to/liking of Korean culture is positive and significant (.310), whereas there exists no significant relationship between Asian cultural collectivism and Korean language skills (.078). In part, this might be because some features of Asian-oriented cultures overlap with those of openness to/liking of Korean culture. However, their relatively low correlation coefficient reveals that they are still distinct cultural entities. Ethnic identity is positively and significantly associated with Asian cultural collectivism, and with both measures of acculturation, respectively (.505, .115, and .226). Although it is not easy to figure out their associations at this point, there must be some common cultural ground between Asian cultural collectivism and ethnic identity. Finally, self-esteem has positive associations with each of two acculturation measures and ethnic identity, respectively (.162, .154, and .115). Except for the relationship between stress and Korean language skills, the correlation coefficients between stress and all five independent variables are in the expected direction.

Table 3 presents standardized coefficients for the multiple regression of life satisfaction on the key independent variables and some control variables from our total sample (N=313). The multiple regression method, also known as the least squares regression method, is used to predict the effects of the key independent variables on life satisfaction, net of the other control variables.

Table 3.
Standardized coefficients for the OLS regression of life satisfaction: 313 ethnic Asian brides, 2009

	Life satisfaction	
Asian cultural collectivism	.182*	(.076)
Acculturation:		
Openness to/liking of Korean culture	.186**	(.065)
Korean language skills	.243***	(.071)
Ethnic identity	-.211*	(.080)
Self-esteem	.138	(.072)
Stress	-.180**	(.065)
Age	.098	(.017)
The husband's age	-.071	(.015)
Chinese[a]	.189	(.170)
Vietnamese[a]	.324**	(.273)
Education (years)	-.048	(.040)
Length of residence (years)	.053	(.022)
Transnationalism	.140	(.020)
Religious affiliation (yes = 1)	.050	(.151)
Perceived health (good or excellent =1)	.293***	(.064)
Constant	-.654	(.712)
R^2	.368	

[a] The Japanese are treated as the reference category (an omitted variable) of "Chinese" and "Vietnamese."
*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (two-tailed tests).
Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

First of all, Asian cultural collectivism has been shown to be a significant predictor of ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society. The effect of Asian cultural collectivism on life satisfaction further suggests that retaining the common nature of Asian values and norms plays a positive role in thinking about life satisfaction. Second, both measures of acculturation – openness to/liking of Korean culture and Korean language skills – are significant in predicting their life satisfaction in Korean society. It is evident that ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korea rises when they experience more personal accept-

ance of and affinity for Korean cultural traditions and standards. The evidence also shows that their proficiency in the Korean language leads to an increase in their level of life satisfaction in Korean society. The other significant findings are that retaining a strong ethnic identity tends to lower ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction, while self-esteem exerts no significant influence on their life satisfaction in Korean society. The co-efficient for stress indicates that their life satisfaction drops as their stress level becomes more intensified. Relative to Japanese brides, Vietnamese brides tend to have a more satisfactory life in Korea. It is unclear that the score of life satisfaction among Japanese brides is lower than that among Vietnamese brides. Nonetheless, it might reflect a long history of conflictual relationships between the Koreans and the Japanese. Lastly, the positive coefficient for self-rated health reveals that perceived health is vital to ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society.

Table 4 presents standardized coefficients for the regression of life satisfaction on the key independent variables and some control variables from each sample of three ethnic Asian bride groups.

Table 4.
Standardized coefficients for the OLS regression of life satisfaction from each ethnic Asian bride group, 2009

	Life Satisfaction		
	Japanese (N=100)	Chinese (N=102)	Vietnamese (N=111)
Asian-oriented cultural collectivism	.103	.337**	.174
	(.131)	(.127)	(.189)
Acculturation:			
Openness to/liking of Korean culture	.243*	.044	.428**
	(.110)	(.114)	(.141)
Korean language skills	.086	.236	.497**
	(.117)	(.138)	(.145)
Ethnic identity	.090	-.304*	-.437**
	(.139)	(.154)	(.167)
Self-esteem	.266	.112	.073
	(.132)	(.131)	(.175)
Stress	-.195	-.128	-.250
	(.126)	(.113)	(.131)

	Life Satisfaction		
	Japanese (N=100)	Chinese (N=102)	Vietnamese (N=111)
Age	.042	.209	.135
	(.042)	(.034)	(.025)
The husband's age	-.054	-.358	.104
	(.036)	(.029)	(.023)
Education (years)	.015	-.058	-.078
	(.097)	(.076)	(.064)
Length of residence (years)	-.012	.278*	-.159
	(.034)	(.050)	(.042)
Transnationalism	.058	.036	-.078
	(.027)	(.044)	(.076)
Religious affiliation (yes = 1)	.053	.009	.174
	(.444)	(.259)	(.249)
Perceived health	.135	.308**	.315
(good or excellent =1)	(.121)	(.120)	(.130)
Constant	-.314	.644	-1.022
	(1.347)	(1.139)	(1.089)
R^2	.515	.501	.386

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (two-tailed tests).

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

Only for Chinese brides does Asian cultural collectivism still remain statistically significant in predicting their life satisfaction in Korean society. Before their emigration, they might have grown up in Confucian cultural traditions that would play a positive effect on their life satisfaction in Korean society. For both Japanese and Vietnamese brides, the coefficients for openness to/liking of Korean culture, as a measure of acculturation, show that their larger sense of confidence and familiarity with Korean cultural patterns contribute to their life satisfaction in Korean society. As the measure of acculturation, the coefficient for Korean language skills is also statistically significant in the sample of Vietnamese brides. Thus, it is likely that their proficiency in the Korean language helps increase their life satisfaction in Korean society. Moreover, it proves that for both Chinese and Vietnamese brides, their life satisfaction in Korean society tends to decline as a result of their growing sense of ethnic identity. For all three ethnic Asian groups, stress exerts no significant effect on their life satisfaction in Korean society. In the sample of Chinese brides, a longer length of residence

and good health conditions are two significant factors that serve to en-
hance their life satisfaction in Korean society. xxx

Discussion

In East and Southeast Asia, a striking aspect of cross-border migra-
tion during the last two decades has been marriage migration from one
Asian country to another. Indeed, Korea has become a country of desti-
nation for many ethnic Asian brides who were married to, or intended
to marry, Korean men. However, little has been known about the effect
of the shared cultural characteristics among Asian people on their life
satisfaction in another Asian country. Likewise, little attention has been
paid to the significance of ethnic Asian brides' acculturation on their life
satisfaction in another Asian country. Therefore, our study has ad-
dressed the significance of these two types of cultural orientations −
Asian cultural collectivism and acculturation to Korean society − for life
satisfaction among ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men and liv-
ing in Korea.

First of all, we have examined whether and the extent to which Asian
cultural collectivism would influence ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction
in Korean society. In this paper, all ethnic Asian brides' shared cultural
characteristics, prior to their emigration into Korea, have been included
in the term "Asian cultural collectivism," a term that generally empha-
sizes relationship harmony, group norms and values, and group goals
and identity over individual needs, goals, and self identity. According to
our regression analysis from our total sample, Asian cultural collectivism
has been proved to be critical for their improvement in life satisfaction
in Korean society. Our regression analysis from a sample of Chinese
brides has also revealed that their personal retention of Asian collectivist
cultures contributes to their life satisfaction. To some degree, these re-
sults confirm the argument that one's psychological well-being would
rise at a time when one's collectivist cultural orientations become one's
most important goals, and internalized within one's own concept of self
(Chirkov et al., 2003; Crocker et al., 1994; Oishi & Diener, 2001). On
the other hand, our findings run counter to those of previous studies,
in which cultural collectivism plays a negative role in life satisfaction
among Asian people or Asian Americans (Diener et al., 2003; Kang et

al., 2003; Sheldon et al., 2004).

Second, in our paper, the term "acculturation to Korean society" has been treated as the other form of their cultural orientations. More broadly, their acculturation to Korean society has been seen as encompassing one's knowledge about Korean history and traditions, one's emotional attachment to Korean people, one's self-identification as Korean, one's Korean language skills, and so on. Empirically, our study has measured acculturation to Korean society in two ways: Openness to/liking of Korean culture and Korean language skills. Looking at these two variables, we have proposed whether and the extent to which ethnic Asian brides' acculturation affects their life satisfaction in Korean society. According to our regression analysis from the total sample, there has been clear evidence that both measures of acculturation are significant predictors of life satisfaction. To be sure, ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society has also risen because of their increasing personal familiarity with Korean cultural traditions and standards. In general, these findings suggest that ethnic Asian brides' acculturation to Korean society cannot entirely be seen as the byproduct of external pressures that took place with their involuntary or inescapable acquiescence. On the contrary, it is possible to infer that ethnic Asian brides married to Korean men have attempted to integrate prevailing Korean values, norms, and emotions into their own world. Moreover, their proficiency in the Korean languages has been a factor that exerts a positive effect on their life satisfaction in Korean society. Interestingly, our regression analysis from a sample of Vietnamese brides has also indicated that both measures of acculturation have positive effects on their life satisfaction. Though not directly related to life satisfaction, these results are similar to past research showing that immigrants' preference and acceptance of the host society's culture is negatively associated with their stress (Berry et al., 1987), and that their proficiency in the dominant language of the host society is also negatively associated with their stress (Williams & Berry, 1991). In the policy context, our overall findings here imply that multicultural programs of Korean language, culture, and history for ethnic Asian brides, especially those with lower economic and educational backgrounds, can promote their level of life satisfaction in Korean society.

One of the other significant findings in our study is that the retention

of ethnic identity among ethnic Asian brides has been identified as a significant factor that lowers their life satisfaction in Korean society. Contemporary Korea, despite the recent growth of the immigrant population, is still an ethnically homogenous country where immigrants' overt display of their ethnic identity in public may cause them to become a target of discrimination that would surely influence a pessimistic evaluation of their life there. Self-esteem, as another key control variable of this study, has been not a significant predictor of ethnic Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society. However, the negative effect of stress on life satisfaction has been found from the analysis of our total sample. The regression analyses from our total sample and a sample of Chinese brides has revealed that good health conditions are another important predictor in eliciting a positive response to one's life in Korea.

There are some limitations in our current study. First, we have not investigated whether ethnic Asian brides in Korea will take steps to rediscover, redefine, or even recreate some forms and contents of Asian cultural collectivism during their lifespan in Korean society. Thus, it may be true that their redefinition and reconstruction of Asian cultural collectivism after their resettlement in Korean society can have a substantial influence on their life satisfaction. Likewise, in our analysis, there was no way to identify whether and in what direction such predictors as gender equality and women's rights, as the opposite of Asian cultural collectivism, affect their life satisfaction in Korean society. Therefore, future studies focusing on their life satisfaction will need to take into account both issues. Second, our current study is still, conceptually and analytically, less developed, regarding what specific conditions and mechanisms of the acculturation process exert a positive impact on life satisfaction among marriage migrants from one Asian country to another. Future studies also need to explore this issue more thoroughly. Third, our results need a cautious interpretation because our sample was obtained only from those Asian women participating in a Multi-cultural Family Support Center in Seoul. Thus, future studies should conduct Asian brides' life satisfaction study by including their representative sample across geographical areas. Lastly, the current research on Asian brides' life satisfaction in Korean society placed very little emphasis on feminist approaches to today's feminization of international migration that shapes patterns of international marriages and reproductive labor

across countries, gender hierarchy, and gender role expectations (Lee 2008; Piper, 2003; Truong, 1996). Future studies also should take into account this issue in examining the cultural forces of international brides' life satisfaction in their new land.

Appendix

Measures for the key variables used in the analysis

Variable

Life satisfaction: (5 items)

(1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

(2) The conditions of my life are excellent.

(3) I am satisfied with my life.

(4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

(5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Asian cultural collectivism: (8 items)

(1) One should think about one's group before oneself.

(2) One should not deviate from social norms.

(3) The wrong thing one can do is bring disgrace to my natural parents or ancestors.

(4) Children should study hard to make one's parents proud.

(5) One's achievements should be viewed as family's achievements.

(6) People should respect for anyone older than they are.

(7) I believe that my actions should be based mainly on the well-being of the family.

(8) People should take care of their old parents no matter how good or bad they have been as parents.

Acculturation

1) *Openness to/liking of Korean culture:* (7 items)

(1) I feel comfortable with Korean people.

(2) I want to speak Korean at home.

(3) I would like to adopt or take up the Korean way of life.

(4) I enjoy going to Korean gatherings or parties.

(5) I would like to learn more about Korean history, culture, and traditions.

(6) I think that my life will be affected by the Koreans close to me.

(7) As far as behaviors or values, I am "Korean".

2) *Korean language skills:* (4 items)

(1) How well do you speak Korean?

(2) How well do you write Korean?

(3) How well do you read Korean?

(4) What is your listening ability in Korean?

Variable

Ethnic identity: (3 items)

(1) 1 am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to.

(2) I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

(3) I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishment.

Self-esteem: (9 items)

(1) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

(2) At times, I think I am no good at all.

(3) I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

(4) I am able to do things as well as most other people.

(5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

(6) I certainly feel useless at times.

(7) I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

(8) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

(9) I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Stress: (9 items)

(1) I felt spouse and I haven't communicated.

(2) Spouse and I disagreed on importance of religion in family.

(3) There've been cultural conflicts in my marriage.

(4) I have felt pressured to learn Korean.

(5) I have been ridiculed because of my Korean accent.

(6) I have felt stressful because I should learn Korean etiquettes or social customs.

(7) Due to money problems, had to (or have to) work away from family.

(8) I have a long-term debt or loan paid for.

(9) Due to ethnic background people treated me badly.

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