

Construction of Obedient Foreign Brides as Exotic Others: How Production Practices Construct the Images of Marriage Migrant Women on Korean Television

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Love in Asia is the longest running Korean television program to portray multicultural families with emphasis on the life experiences of marriage migrant women. Since its premiere, *Love in Asia's* consistent average rating of 13–14% has made it the most watched show in its time slot and most watched documentary program in Korea. We examined how various factors such as work routines, financial constraints, language barriers, and genre conventions affected the construction of popular images and narratives regarding marriage migrant women on television. We found that *Love in Asia's* construction of marriage migrant women as obedient brides who conform to Korean patriarchal norms reflects the creators' adaptation to work routines and production practices.

Keywords: media representation, Korean multiculturalism, marriage migrants, production studies

Although South Korea (hereafter "Korea") has long deemed itself ethnically distinct and homogeneous, it is now witnessing unprecedented diversity in its racial and ethnic composition. As of December 2015, foreign residents constituted approximately 3.7% of Korea's total population (Ministry of Justice, 2016). Migrant workers made up the largest group of foreign nationals in Korea (approximately 42%), and the second largest consisted of migrants married to Korean spouses (approximately 10.2%).

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According to Statistics Korea (2013), marriages between Koreans and foreign nationals were only 3.5% of newly registered marriages in Korea in 2000, but by 2012 that figure had grown to 8.7%. In 2008 these matches, commonly referred to as "multicultural families," numbered approximately 340,000, a tally expected to reach one million by 2020 (Cho, 2013).

Television has responded to the transition from a solely ethnic-Korean society into a multiethnic, multicultural one by producing programs such as *Asia Asia* (which ran on MBC in 2003); *Chit-Chat of Beautiful Ladies* (KBS 2006–2010); *Nice to Meet You, My In-Laws* (SBS 2007–2008); and *Face Each Other and Smile* (EBS 2010). Of all programs on multiculturalism, *Love in Asia* (2005–), produced by the public Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), is the longest running Korean television program to emphasize the life experiences of *marriage migrant women* in Korea (women who migrate to Korea to marry Korean men) in portrayals of multicultural families. Since its 2005 premiere, *Love in Asia* has consistently achieved an average rating of 13–14%, proudly attaining the status of most watched show in its time slot and most watched documentary program in Korea. In recognition of its contribution to Korea's multiculturalism, *Love in Asia* has received several awards, including the Best Program Award for Gender Equality, and the Cultural Diversity Program Award from the Korea Communications Commission. As the longest running regular television show to focus on international marriages, the *Love in Asia* is arguably the central shaper of the public's imagination regarding multicultural families in Korea.

Although the show may be praised for keeping multiculturalism on the public agenda, scholars have criticized *Love in Asia* for its construction of marriage migrant women as "exotic others" who mainly conform to Korean cultural norms as part of their service as "obedient brides" (Kwon, 2013; Lee, 2006). The show depicts how marriage migrant women, having successfully assimilated into Korean culture, live as faithful wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. Every episode portrays a family trip wherein the married couple visits the migrant woman's exotic homeland (mostly rural). Her tearful reunion with her parent(s) is always depicted. In expressing a strong desire to "Koreanize" foreign brides, *Love in Asia* fails to acknowledge their complex life experiences and struggles negotiating cultural differences, and therefore obscures the patriarchal ideology underlying Korean multiculturalism.

This leads to questions: Why do the consistently stereotypical depictions of multicultural families on *Love in Asia* persist, and how do they relate to the show's production practices? Through what practices and processes are marriage migrants continually portrayed as obedient brides who conform to Korea's patriarchal norms? Previous studies on multiculturalism and the Korean media focused predominantly on the social and cultural contexts in which textual meanings are constructed (Kwon, 2013), and there is a relative dearth of work to identify production contexts that lead to the emergence of stereotypical images. Through in-depth interviews with creators of *Love in Asia*, we examined how various factors, including work routines, financial constraints, language barriers, and genre conventions, affect how popular images and narratives involving marriage migrant women are constructed on television. This case study on *Love in Asia* may be seen as a distinct example, but it can also offer insights into the cultural implications of television production practices in multicultural Korea.

Multiculturalism in Korea: A Brief Background

Korea, long one of the few ethnically homogeneous nations in the world, is now undergoing an unprecedented transformation into a multiracial and multiethnic society. On April 26, 2006, President Roh declared that Korea had irreversibly become a multicultural state and subsequently implemented multicultural programs and policies (e.g., the Multicultural Family Support Act) meant to integrate migrants into Korean society (Han, 2007).

In Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, aging populations, low birth rates, and labor shortages in so-called 3D (difficult, dangerous, and dirty) industries have expedited intra-Asia migration (Ahn, 2013). Migrant workers and marriage migrant women form two large categories of newcomers to Korea. Once considered a labor-exporting country, Korea has become a labor-receiving country in the interests of its economic survival. One driver of this flow was the industrial and technical training program the Korean government introduced after the 1988 Seoul Olympics to recruit temporary workers from overseas (Watson, 2010). During the 1990s international marriages between native Korean men and foreign, mostly Asian women steadily increased, and the number of these marriages has risen considerably since the 2000s. Collaborating with commercial international marriage brokers, the Korean government promoted international marriage because marriage migrant women were perceived as "the most easily mobilized resource to solve the various family crisis and care-work burdens facing Korean society" (Kim, 2007, pp. 107–108).

However, the emerging multiculturalism has heightened Koreans' anxieties that the influx of foreigners and surge in international marriages will dilute Korea's cultural purity, thereby undermining its national and ethnic identities (Watson, 2010). Though the Korean government's proactive multicultural initiatives appear to depart significantly from deep-rooted ethnic nationalism, Korea's state-led multiculturalism, as a provisional strategy for regulating the foreign population, maintains Korean ethnic superiority and patriarchy (Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2007). Kim (2007) claimed that Korean multiculturalism is "a counter-concept to Korea's violent mono-ethnicity, rather than its general meaning of recognizing or having a mutual understanding of cultural difference" (p. 103). Two features attest to the paternalistic nature of Korean multiculturalism.

First, state-sponsored multicultural policies and programs focus almost exclusively on marriage migrant women and multicultural children, excluding migrant workers. Even as the government actively promotes international marriages between foreign women and Korean men, it prohibits migrant workers from attaining permanent resident status. Under Korea's employment permit system, which replaced the earlier trainee program in 2004, temporary foreign workers are subject to limits on the duration of their stint in Korea. Meanwhile, support programs for foreign men married to Korean women are almost nonexistent. The paternalistic underpinning of Korean multiculturalism holds foreign brides as worthy only because they marry Korean men and can give birth to Korean children.

Second, whereas Western countries' multiculturalism emerged to replace older forms of racial and ethnic hierarchy with a new form of demographic citizenship (Kymlicka, 2012), Korean multiculturalism aims to assimilate racial/ethnic others into a dominant Korean culture (Ahn, 2011;

Watson, 2010). Across the country the government funds numerous multicultural centers offering education in Korean language and culture, Korean cooking classes, and child-rearing counseling services, all intended to Koreanize foreign brides. As Kim (2007) noted, Korean multiculturalism works to “create specific types of migrant women subjects” (p. 105) by culturally coercing foreign brides to become properly incorporated into Korean society as obedient wives and daughters-in-law who conform to the patriarchal system.

Korean Media Representation of Migrants

In response to Korea’s emerging multiculturalism, a national discourse on Korea’s multicultural society has grown rapidly since the mid-2000s. The media, which form the primary frame through which issues of Korean multiculturalism are discussed and relayed to the Korean public, have also provided effective tools enabling Korean society to cope with migrants as a social challenge to ethnic homogeneity. These media have not much reflected Korea’s social realities, but rather the way Koreans would like to see their multiculturalism represented (Lee, 2014; Shim, 2012).

Scholars have discussed migrants’ positioning in the racist, gendered, and classed discourses in the Korean media. Overall, the media display two representational strategies that symbolically control marriage migrant women and migrant workers, who all are considered contaminants of ethnic purity and a challenge to patriarchy. Just as Korean multiculturalism focuses on marriage migrant women, the multicultural discourses of the Korean media take the foreign bride as their primary concern. Discussions of marriage migrant women in Korean newspapers are predominantly concerned with economic benefits, such as how marriage migrants help offset low birth rates and prevent the breakdown of Korea’s rural communities (Lee, Park, & Chang, 2012). However, the media rarely address foreign brides’ aspirations or their struggles coping with new customs and traditions in Korea (Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2012). Marriage migrant women with diverse backgrounds and desires are lumped together and reduced to a monolithic minority group that is expected to comprise homogeneous characteristics. More importantly, marriage migrant women are constructed as faithful daughters-in-law, obedient wives, and hardworking mothers, embodying model minorities who uphold Confucian Korean values and patriarchal bloodlines (Lee, 2014). The discourse of marriage migrant women in popular films such as *Failan* (2001) and *Wedding Campaign* (2005) attempts to restore the Korean patriarchal ideology through nostalgic constructions of traditional gender relations and family patterns (Kim, 2009). The positive behaviors that the media assign to marriage migrant women struggling to fit into Korean families (e.g., learning the Korean language, cooking Korean food, respecting elders) help Koreans overcome the fear of losing their ethnic identity. Media representations render foreign brides into docile subjects who must adapt to Korean patriarchal family culture to avoid being disciplined and punished.

The media representations of migrants present intriguing intersections of race, gender, and class. Kim, Park, and Lee (2009) observed global hierarchies across a matrix of race and national origin in two television shows. *Chit-Chat of Beautiful Ladies*, a talk show featuring foreign women residing in Korea, highlights mostly White women from Western countries who are beautiful and sufficiently self-confident to critique Korean culture. In contrast, *Love in Asia* portrays dark-skinned, lower-class foreign brides, primarily from non-Western countries, who are expected to abide by Korean norms. In his analysis of

interracial couples in the documentary series *Human Theatre*, Shim (2012) observed that foreign husbands from affluent Western countries were frequently depicted, whereas those from the Third World were mostly absent. White foreign husbands on the show asserted their own cultural identities and maintained Western lifestyles, asking Koreans to recognize cultural differences; however, all the foreign brides, regardless of their race, conformed to the Confucian norms of traditional Korean society. The differential treatment of foreign spouses based on race, gender, and class demonstrates how the racial hierarchy shapes patriarchal gender privilege in the media.

Unlike marriage migrant women, who are seen as valuable resources for Korea's future, migrant workers receive little attention from the media because Korean society views them as temporary residents, permanent outsiders, or sojourners (Won, 2014). Despite making up the largest foreign population in Korea, migrant workers are almost nonexistent on Korean television (Shim, 2012). Their exclusion from media representations is problematic because their absence leads to their omission from Korean public discourse. In other words, the Korean media can diminish the social status of migrant workers because, as Gerbner and Gross (1976) noted, "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (p. 182).

Media stories that do include migrant workers construct them as threats to Korea's economy and society. Newspapers, including progressive newspapers such as *OhmyNews*, consistently depict migrant workers as a problem, for example by attributing higher crime rates to influxes of migrant workers (Ko & Kang, 2013). The essential quality of racial and ethnic otherness that is achieved by juxtaposing terms such as "migrants," "homicide," "illegal," and "sex crimes" both constructs xenophobic fear and symbolically undergirds official justifications of violence against migrant workers. Although some newspaper reports have discussed workplace violence and harassment of migrant workers, they have portrayed the workers as either helpless, incompetent victims or objects of pity and sympathy, thereby perpetuating Korean ethnic superiority (Im, 2012). Mainstream films such as *Banga? Banga!* (2010) and *The Punch* (2011) often portray migrant workers as active social actors rather than passive outsiders, but by representing migrant workers as lower-class people working in a harsh environment, these films also potentially reinforce Koreans' sense of superiority (Won, 2014).

Studies have been done on the cultural implications of multiculturalism in Korean television, but they have rarely explored the production context of the televisual representation of Korea's multiculturalism. The underlying assumption is that a desire to control any threat to Korean patriarchy and ethnic purity naturally structures the way the media create raced, gendered, and classed meanings of migrants. This study seeks to contribute to the literature on Korean multiculturalism and the media by identifying the relationship between television production practices and the controlling images of the multicultural family.

Love in Asia: Textual Characteristics

Love in Asia premiered in the mid-2000s, when international marriages were rapidly increasing in Korea. The show's purpose is to promote positive understandings of multicultural families by depicting how foreign spouses adapt to life in Korea. The program website states that *Love in Asia* "unfolds stories

about interracial families and their love which transcends national borders." Each episode lasts approximately 50 minutes and starts with a portrayal of the daily life of a marriage migrant woman that emphasizes her relationships with family members and, if relevant, her boss and coworkers. Next the show depicts the couple's visit to the wife's homeland, during which the couple visit the wife's family. The woman then appears in the television studio, where the program hosts ask her about her trip and overall life experience in Korea.

Far from providing viewers with an unmediated access to the real world, television constructs certain versions of reality (Hall, 1997). Critical engagement with media representations is a way to explore how power and ideology underlie the constructions of meanings within media texts. Critical textual analysis of *Love in Asia* can therefore aid identification of how certain types of ideology are coded in the show's representation of Korean multiculturalism.

Scholars have argued that the characters and narratives of *Love in Asia*, through their construction of obedient foreign brides conforming to Korea's patriarchal norms, reflect Korean society's desire to overcome a fear of diluted ethnic purity (Kwon, 2013; Lee, 2006). As a popular show on multicultural families in Korea, *Love in Asia* attempts to maintain Korea's stable identity by interpellating migrant women as exotic and different, yet fulfilling traditional gender roles. Three predominant discourses run throughout the episodes.²

First, the recurrent stereotype of marriage migrant women on the show affirms the ethnic superiority of native Koreans. Most of the migrant women on *Love in Asia* are poor and have darker skin, and their poor Korean-language skills signify that they are neither competent nor intelligent. *Love in Asia* constructs the foreign brides' exotic otherness by disproportionately featuring migrant women from Southeast Asia, who are visually more distinct from Koreans. The largest ethnic groups among the marriage migrant women in Korea have been Chinese (40.2%), Vietnamese (26.3%), Japanese (8.3%), and Filipinas (7.3%)(Policy Brief, 2015). But even though women from nearby China and Japan make almost half of marriage migrants, a content analysis shows that Filipinas, Vietnamese, Thais, Mongolians, and Indonesians have appeared most often on *Love in Asia* (Choi, 2009). *Love in Asia* barely recognizes the cultural and ethnic differences among migrant women while also confining them within the stereotype of being poor and exotic. Exoticization, defined as "the process of making someone seem exotic, strange, or different in ways that call attention to certain identity characteristics" (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005, p. 588), functions in a context of unequal power. Representations of racial minorities as the exotic other were instrumental in historical perpetuations of racism and ethnocentrism, particularly in the West (Said, 1978; Srivastava, 1997). *Love in Asia's* promotion of one-dimensional stereotypes is most salient when it portrays couples' visits to the wives' hometowns. Instead of providing depictions of rich local cultures and

² Though our discussion of the textual features of *Love in Asia* is based primarily on existing scholarly accounts of the show, we also examined numerous episodes to identify the show's representational patterns. We looked at the most recent episodes, aired in the three months preceding the start of the study, as well as randomly selected episodes from 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012. Our discussion of the textual characteristics of *Love in Asia* is meant to facilitate international readers' understanding of the show.

traditions for the educational benefit of Korean audiences, the show tends to highlight exotic neighborhoods and poverty-stricken parents and siblings,.

Second, the construction of the obedient foreign bride maintains the patriarchal social order and dictates the imperatives facing migrant women assimilating to Korean norms. Most families on the show are less affluent and live in rural areas or small cities. Most of the foreign brides on the show live in extended families where patriarchal values remain robust. Patriarchy exists when a social unit such as a family is ruled by a male or a group of males (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Regardless of their different backgrounds, most migrant women on *Love in Asia* faithfully fulfill the traditional female roles that today's Korean women seldom strive to embody: "selfless mom," "docile wife," and "obedient daughter-in-law" (and often, "hardworking employee"). In one episode, a migrant woman from Cambodia attends a Korean language class because "as a mother of Korean offspring," she states, she hopes to teach Korean to her children. In another episode, a bride from China devotedly nurses her ill father-in-law, garnering compliments from Korean neighbors. Through a nostalgic construction of traditional gender and family relations, *Love in Asia* attempts to restore patriarchal values. The show suggests that there is a homogeneous group of marriage migrant women who strive to assimilate into Korean culture at the expense of their own. The program does not comprehensively portray the migrant women's own cultural practices or their struggles to negotiate cultural differences in Korea. Notably, foreign men married to Korean women are, with very few exceptions, invisible on *Love in Asia*.

Last, *Love in Asia* depicts international marriage solely in terms of a transcendence of love across national borders, thereby distracting the public's attention from the structural barriers that multicultural families encounter. The typical, melodramatic narrative of *Love in Asia* positions the migrant women as the heroine of a love story. On the show, the migrant women are always welcomed by their husbands' families and do not experience conflict with their in-laws. These conditions differ vastly from Korean women's overall experiences and relationships with their husbands' families. Whereas *Love in Asia* does portray hardships endured by migrant women—child-care difficulties, financial troubles, language barriers—it rarely depicts structural issues such as racism, cultural isolation, acculturative stress, and experiences of domestic violence. Ultimately, the migrant women on the show always successfully overcome their difficulties and become proud members of Korean society. The complex social issues that surround international marriage and diasporic identities are reduced to personal love narratives (Lee, 2006).

Method: A Production Studies Approach

The critical trajectory informed by production studies offers a useful framework for our study. Production studies explore how macro-level institutional issues (e.g., audience size, funding structure, regulations, competitive environment, and economic imperatives) and micro-level industrial practices (e.g., production routines, processes, constraints, cultural norms, and audience expectations) have consequences for textual content (Caldwell, 2008; Levine, 2001; Lotz, 2004). By investigating various forces at work throughout the pre-production, production, and promotional processes of a media text, production-centered research can illustrate how the discursive and ideological features of a particular text are constructed.

Many studies have described the processes by which media industry workers externalize their concerns about various pressures they are forced to negotiate, and the ways that the pressures compromise their creative freedoms and artistic visions. Scholars generally agree that media industry workers are confronted with obstacles that limit their creative desires (Caldwell, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). The production studies pioneer Turow (1978) observed that various organizational constraints, such as reward systems, time constraints, and work routines, can cause producers and casting directors to rely heavily on typecasting, thereby perpetuating monolithic images of minorities. Wei (2012) found that reality-program creators often compromise their artistic integrity, and that they manufacture drama (e.g., by casting the most eccentric people) to remain commercially viable and achieve success.

Analyzing the interconnection between institutional operations, production practices, and textual creation helps reveal a holistic picture of the inseparable, mutually constitutive relations between the media industry, texts, audiences, and social contexts (Haven, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009; Lotz, 2004). By demystifying industrial practices and production dynamics, production studies enable media scholars to expose media messages as constructed rather than real or natural, and can also "alert media activists to vulnerable points at which to intervene" (Levine, 2001, p. 32).

We used a case study method to illustrate how production conventions, practices, and routines in television industries, as well as Korea's prevailing cultural values, translate into textual content about marriage migrant women. We conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with creators of *Love in Asia* who have been or are now involved in the production of the show. Five producers and five writers participated in this study (a producer in Korea is typically both a producer and a director). We interviewed producers and writers because they oversee the entire production process. Both are closely involved in many production tasks including scheduling, selecting families, filming, script writing, and determining what footage is included or edited out. All respondents had at least 10 years of experience in broadcasting at the time of the interviews, and the duration of their involvement in the production of *Love in Asia* ranged from six months to four years. Among the 10 respondents, two had become involved in *Love in Asia* during its formative years and two were working for the show at the time of the interviews.

Although some scholars of production have used ethnographic participation in industry practices as an effective method (Caldwell, 2008; Levine, 2001), we relied solely on in-depth interviews. Like the media industries in the U.S. and elsewhere, the Korean television industry is difficult for media scholars to access and penetrate. Accessing media workers' honest views and understanding their subjective experiences behind closed doors requires a high level of mutual trust (Wei, 2012). Since a member of our team had previously worked as a writer for *Love in Asia* for more than a year and was familiar with the production processes, we were able to ask various questions about the complex institutional and cultural forces operating throughout the show's production. The many advantages of investigating a culture as an insider include an ability to quickly establish rapport between researcher(s) and respondents, a greater level of access, and deeper levels of understanding (Labaree, 2002). Our interviewer's perceived status as a television industry insider gave us privileged access to information that was otherwise difficult to obtain and helped respondents feel comfortable about participating in open discussion of *Love in Asia*.

Table 1. Interviewee Information.

| Position | Gender | Experience in Television Production | Involvement in <i>Love in Asia</i> |
|-----------------|---------------|--|---|
| Writer 1 | female | 17 years | 3 years |
| Writer 2 | female | 12 years | 2 years |
| Writer 3 | female | 11 years | 2 years |
| Writer 4 | female | 14 years | 1 year |
| Writer 5 | female | 10 years | 6 months |
| Producer 1 | male | 25 years | 3 years |
| Producer 2 | male | 18 years | 6 months |
| Producer 3 | male | 14 years | 6 months |
| Producer 4 | male | 25 years | 1 year |
| Producer 5 | male | 17 years | 4 years |

Scholars, however, have linked insiderness to ethical concerns and methodological dilemmas, such as false representation of an organization, either real or perceived (Labaree, 2002); resistance to an unsympathetic critique of an organization (Taylor, 2011); and the limitation of reflexivity (Adkins, 2002). Despite these concerns, we argue that as regards our study, the strengths of the insider approach outweighed the potential weaknesses; furthermore, two of the co-authors had no television industry experience and helped overcome the corresponding limitations by maintaining an analytical distance and interpreting the data collaboratively.

During the interviews, the respondents were asked about production processes; the participant selection criteria; challenges and structural constraints commonly encountered during production, as well as efforts to overcome such obstacles; and their views on *Love in Asia's* cultural influence in Korea. Each tape-recorded interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and the interviews, conducted in Korean, were later transcribed for thorough analysis. All interview excerpts presented in the following analysis were translated into English by the authors. Our critical analysis of the respondents' accounts focused on two subjects: the production context or the conditions within which the cultural agents operate; and the way production routines, cultural values, and tacit assumptions mandated by the television station informed television crews' everyday practices.

Analysis

Limited Pool of Participants

The casting process explains why nearly all of the episodes of *Love in Asia* present stereotypical images of multicultural families. During the formative years of the show, the creators persistently contacted local governments and multicultural family-support centers across the country to recruit participants. However, casting difficulties arose because marriage migrant women generally expressed

reluctance to appear on a television show, aware of prevalent stereotypes attached to their situation: elderly and incompetent Korean men in rural areas had registered to be matched with foreign brides through international marriage agencies (Lee, 2008). Consequently, the show's creators have had to rely heavily on the limited pool of visitors to the program website who voluntarily sign up to appear on the show.

Our respondents stated that participants' incentive to sign up for the casting calls is that *Love in Asia* offers the opportunity of an expenses-paid visit to a bride's homeland. Participants on the show must commit substantial time (the filming takes two to three days in Korea and a week in the brides' homelands) and endure the discomfort associated with an invasion of privacy, so most families responding to the casting calls are struggling with financial difficulties, live in rural areas or small cities, and are willing to disclose the details of their private and family lives to a national audience for the sake of the free trip. The casting process explains why the brides on *Love in Asia* have been overwhelmingly of a lower class and have darker skin: They are from South Asian countries that are less affluent than Japan or China.

Over time, the creators have come to prefer specific types of families for the show. First, an extended family in a rural area or small city is preferred over a nuclear family in a big city, as the producers aim to evoke traditional Korean families. The respondents stated that stories about extended families help achieve high ratings because the show's main target audience (50 years and older) can relate to such narratives. Second, the ideal family type is destitute, so the foreign bride has not visited her home country in a long time. By showing a poor bride unable to afford a trip home who finally sees her parents after many years of separation, the show presents a heartbreaking story with a tearful family reunion. Poverty is useful material for creating eye-catching images and dramatic narratives. The creators can portray what they call "lots of tears, really powerful emotions" to captivate audiences. Because the producers select participants who are experiencing poverty, *Love in Asia* ends up highlighting the lives of impoverished multicultural families and persistently reproducing stereotypical images of foreign brides (e.g., poor and rural) that reaffirm Korean ethnic superiority.

The cast's limited Korean-language skills influence the portrayal of the marriage migrant women on *Love in Asia* as lacking competence. Their economic status has precluded proper educational opportunities in Korea for most of the migrant women on the show, who therefore cannot express themselves fluently in Korean. Although *Love in Asia* gives foreign brides chances to speak for themselves in interviews, the language barrier prevents full utilization of such opportunities. Significantly, the Korean television industry commonly shows migrants from Anglo-American regions being interviewed in their native language with Korean subtitles, whereas migrants from other regions (mostly the Third World) are interviewed in Korean (Shim, 2013). The practice of interviewing in Korean not only restricts the foreign brides' ability to speak freely, but also constructs the racist perception that dark-skinned migrants are incompetent and unintelligent. Instead of hiring a translator who can help the brides express more subtle, nuanced feelings, the writers of *Love in Asia* draft a voice-over based on presumptions of the brides' feelings that is crucial to conveying the story to the audiences. A few writers themselves even expressed doubt as to whether the voice-over narrations truthfully reflect the brides' thoughts and feelings:

You can't really get in-depth information when you first visit the participants' homes for several hours and try to understand their lives; so, writers often supplement background information through phone calls. But, it is hard to have a good conversation with migrant women due to the language issue. Without good communication, we can't really know 100% about that person. (Writer 3)

The creators often manipulatively mold the raw material into touching stories. Casting choices are based on the producers' perceptions of the ideal candidate, and unanticipated negative aspects are often discovered during filming (e.g., a violent Korean husband who beat his wife, a bride who had an extramarital affair, and a migrant woman who appeared very shy in Korea yet was eccentric in her homeland). When such unexpected revelations of the cast's true personalities unsettle the production process, the creators must use manipulative editing to maintain character consistency, adjusting the story lines to fulfill the show's primary purpose of depicting a story about a multicultural family replete with love and dreams.

Production Constraints and Routines

Various organizational constraints, such as time limits, shared routines, and reward systems, contribute to consistent patterns in the representation of minority groups (Turow, 1978). Our study indicates that production constraints and routines also limit the extent to which *Love in Asia* constructs the conventional narrative about multicultural families. All the respondents talked intensely about a tight production schedule that constrains their creative autonomy. At the time of the interviews, seven producers and four writers were working simultaneously on different episodes. A producer has four to six weeks to produce an hour-long episode, including preproduction (casting, research), production (domestic and overseas shooting, and studio production), and postproduction (script writing, editing).

Being constantly under pressure to meet deadlines, creators find an in-depth exploration of a multicultural family difficult to accomplish. Documentary filmmaking typically requires sufficient time to establish a rapport with the subjects, observe their daily lives, and film them with an unobtrusive camera. As one respondent commented, though, "the creators of *Love in Asia* produce this show as if it were a scripted drama," because each task must be executed in a time-saving and efficient manner.

We return to Korea on Wednesday after filming abroad, and the preview (of the final cut) is scheduled for the next Monday. We have no time to discuss how the narrative will be constructed. We work all night long to write a documentary script and edit the footage. (Writer 5)

The tight production schedule and the prioritization of efficiency above all else have encouraged the creators to depend on a typecasting-based, conventional storytelling approach. In advance of the actual production of each episode, the creators first pick and choose a specific character type for the episode's main participant (e.g., devoted daughter-in-law, newlywed foreign bride, hardworking mother, eldest daughter-in-law in a traditional extended family), and they then construct storylines based on the assigned character. Since the creators craft footage, conduct interviews, employ narrative devices, and

write voice-over scripts with a specific character in mind, each episode leaves little room to convey the complexity of the foreign brides' life experiences. The limited production time necessitates heavy reliance on Asian countries as filming locations because they are substantially closer to Korea than are countries on other continents (thereby conserving travel time and funds). The creators do not have time to explore the local culture of the foreign brides' homelands; instead, they highlight the visual spectacles of the exotic or impoverished lives of the brides' parents, which ultimately signify their foreignness and inferiority. These production constraints work to strengthen the textual meaning that most foreign brides are poor and dark-skinned, and therefore ethnically inferior to Koreans.

According to our respondents, at least a year or two passed before the creators became critical of the discrepancy between the complex life experiences of the multicultural families and the stereotypical images *Love in Asia* reproduces, leading to a feeling that the show's representation strategies needed change. A few respondents mentioned a need to include foreign grooms and discussed urgent issues such as discrimination and the bullying of children from multicultural families. The creators' will to change the show, however, is hampered by frequent rotation of the production crew. With a few exceptions, in the Korean television industry the creators of a show are typically assigned to a different show every one to two years. Being in charge of a show for so brief a period, creators have difficulty achieving high levels of expertise regarding multiculturalism, so newcomers routinely replicate what their predecessors did instead of trying something new. Most of our interviewees admitted they were not necessarily knowledgeable about Korea multiculturalism even though they were creating the most popular show on multicultural families in Korea.

Intriguingly, the broadcasting station's identity also affects how multicultural families are constructed. Some respondents were keen to emphasize that KBS, as a public broadcaster, has the role of fostering multicultural harmony by creating favorable images of multicultural families. One respondent asserted that KBS's public broadcaster status obliges it to portray "model foreign brides" who strive to assimilate into Korean norms, as such images do not alienate the Korean public and thus promote positive attitudes to multiculturalism. The respondents also stressed that highlighting sensitive subjects relative to multiculturalism (e.g., domestic violence, divorce, conflict arising from cultural differences, identity crisis) can hurt both parents and children in multicultural families by provoking antipathy to the notion of international marriage. The creators stated that negative views about marriage migrants are still so strong that not only are likeable characters and heartfelt stories (despite the persistence of stereotyping) needed to counter negative public perceptions, but they also serve the public good.

The interviews also suggest that the genre of *Love in Asia*, a unique Korean genre of the human documentary (a documentary form of melodrama), sets representational boundaries to the way the show's stories are told. As a genre that emphasizes family values and paternalism, Korean melodrama has consistently maintained traditional gender stereotypes by presenting passive, if not submissive, women who are often saved by men (Park, 2014). Human documentaries, which often adopt the happy-ending narrative of melodrama, portray heartfelt stories about individuals, focusing on the processes by which they overcome various obstacles in their lives. One respondent remarked that the genre norms and initial purpose of the show compelled the creators to compromise their critical lens and conform to conventional narratives:

Some of the creators complained that we only portray heartfelt stories, not critical pieces. But in reality, a critical approach to multicultural families isn't suitable for a show like *Love in Asia*. Such stories should be dealt with by news magazine programs such as *60 Minute Report*. We should adhere to genre conventions. (Producer 4)

The genre convention dictates that critical issues of multiculturalism, such as rising divorce rates among internationally married couples and adjustment problems, are muted, and that foreign spouses' struggles to negotiate cultural differences are rarely discussed on the show. On *Love in Asia*, a marriage migrant woman's only worry is her poor family back in her homeland. The family reunion's centrality to the show's narrative suggests that family separation is the only issue multicultural families need be concerned about.

Audience Considerations

The audience figures implicitly and explicitly in many aspects of the show's production. First, the solid ratings explain why the routine practices for the representation of foreign brides remain unaltered. *Love in Asia* enjoys widespread popularity, with an average rating of 13–14%. Despite being a public broadcaster, KBS considers commercial success important because approximately 40% of its revenue comes from advertising sales (Bong & Han, 2013). The creators are reluctant to develop unconventional characters and stories because *Love in Asia* is comfortably successful. Scholars have noted that producers do not risk innovation unless they are experiencing trouble competing or extraordinary problems (Lotz, 2004; Turow, 1982).

The audience demographics of *Love in Asia* also explain why the stereotypical narrative regarding multicultural families persists. According to the respondents, viewers aged 50 to 69 constitute over 70% of the show's audience. The respondents said the main audiences like to see traditional families wherein rigid gender roles are enforced; moreover, the *Love in Asia* narratives that older audiences most enjoy watching concern the overcoming of difficulties. The main audiences can relate to the foreign brides' poverty-stricken families because the show arouses nostalgia and memories of a postwar Korea overwhelmed by poverty:

People in their 40s are considered young viewers for *Love in Asia* because the main viewers are in their 50s, 60s, or 70s. These older-generation viewers experienced harsh living environments in the past. They suffered from shortages of electricity and many other resources. Many Koreans experienced unwanted separation from their children due to economic hardship, and they sent their kids to the U.S. for adoption so that the children could lead a better life in America. For these reasons, old Koreans can identify with the marriage migrants and their poor families on *Love in Asia*. (Producer 4)

There are two implications regarding the dominance of elders in the show's viewership. First, to cater to the main audiences, the producers of *Love in Asia* have consolidated a tear-eliciting narrative depicting a foreign bride who has journeyed from a poor family in the Third World to Korea in search of a better life and, after a prolonged wait, is reunited with her family back home. It excludes mention of

serious structural issues associated with international marriage (e.g., frequent imposition of xenophobia on immigrants in their everyday lives) and presents international marriage solely as a romantic love that transcends cultural differences. Negotiations of race, gender, class, and other differences are reduced to domestic matters resolvable through individual effort and family support.

Second, the audiences' conservatism encourages the creators to construct a specific kind of multicultural family that does not alienate these audiences. When *Love in Asia* first launched, the creators dealt with a relatively wide range of participants, including an Indian migrant worker who had been severely injured in Korea and a Pakistani single father who had divorced his Korean wife. Shortly after these episodes aired, however, the program website was inundated with critical comments and offensive language, and the creators received numerous phone calls from viewers who felt uncomfortable with depictions of dark-skinned foreign husbands:

We garnered a lot of criticism from viewers when our show featured a story about a Pakistani husband who divorced his Korean wife, yet raised a child by himself. I thought that the story was really touching, but I guess audiences felt uncomfortable with foreign men who came to Korea and partnered with Korean women. (Producer 1)

It is uncertain whether most of *Love in Asia's* audiences would find the stories of foreign husbands uncomfortable, but whether or not the audiences would actually embrace stories about foreign husbands and Korean wives is unimportant because, as Lotz (2004) argued, creators' perceptions of audiences often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Despite issues of subjectivity and at the risk of being unscientific, producers' intuitive beliefs and speculative knowledge about audiences are central to their decision-making practices (Ang, 1991). Although multiple anecdotes about audiences' unfavorable reactions to foreign husbands in earlier episodes do not necessarily account for most viewers' perspectives, they discouraged the creators from featuring foreign husbands and ultimately led to the depiction of marriage migrant women only. The creators seldom portray foreign grooms, believing such stories only ruin the audience's viewing pleasure and cause unwanted discomfort. The perception that unconventional stories would not sell well promotes self-censorship, exclusion, and the invisibility of a very significant migrant population among Korea's multicultural families (i.e., male migrants from non-Western countries). Audience-based considerations suggest that the show's creators are constrained by broader social discourses about race, class, and gender that undermine any potential subversion the unconventional families may trigger. *Love in Asia* therefore fails to offer an expansive representation of international marriages along with explicit discussion of issues and problems of multiculturalism—instead, the show contributes to Korea's raced, classed, and gendered norms.

Conclusion

Love in Asia's heartfelt stories about healthy, functional, model multicultural families appear to merit compliments because they purport to promote favorable attitudes to multiculturalism among Koreans. However, seemingly favorable images of well-behaved foreign brides and idealized multicultural families can be harmful in that they set a tolerance limit: As Brown (2008) claimed, marking subjects of tolerance as deviant and marginal has regulatory effects because it can justify "dire or even deadly action

when the limits of tolerance are considered breached" (pp. 13–14). The recurrent construction of obedient foreign subjects suggests that marriage migrant women can rightfully be punished for challenging Korean patriarchal norms. In addition, the show's focus on romantic narratives of love transcending national borders conceals the foreign brides' complex life experiences and the barriers they encounter. Such concealment can cause marriage migrant women to be blamed for any failure to meet society's expectations of their assimilation into Korean culture and abandonment of their own cultures.

From the perspective of a production-centered scholarship, we analyzed the production process of *Love in Asia* and discussed how production factors relate to the textual construction of marriage migrant women. We concluded that *Love in Asia*'s construction of marriage migrant women as obedient brides who conform to Korean patriarchal norms reflects the producers' adaptation to work routines and production practices. Analysis of the production environment revealed the constraints creators face during production and their struggles to negotiate their goals within the confines of Korean public television. This case study illustrates how a production context in the Korean media does not lead to destabilization of stereotypes and assumptions about marriage migrant women, but to their perpetuation instead.

We argue that given the constrained structure of television production practices, it seems implausible to expect popular television shows like *Love in Asia* to contribute to the larger sociocultural dialogue about Korean multiculturalism. The creators of *Love in Asia* are granted creative autonomy in constructing the show's narrative, but their autonomy is nevertheless limited. Some producers in our study problematized the work routines and representational practices, saying their desires were rarely realized because of practical concerns involving the television industry's risk-averse structures that constrain their activities. The practical need to maintain the show's high ratings frustrates the creators' efforts to incorporate and provoke more serious discourses about Korea's nascent multiculturalism. Though some of our interviewees were self-reflexive about their production practices, they nevertheless justified their representational strategies by emphasizing the mandates of a public television station and the genre's conventions regarding the portrayal of heartfelt stories. Our findings correspond with the observations of previous scholarly production studies: Although producers acknowledge the freedom offered by the cultural industries, this freedom is complicated by the considerable anxieties, insecurities, and pressures that affect production practices (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

We believe this study contributes to the literature on multiculturalism in Korea by offering insight into the interconnection between production practices and the media representation of marriage migrant women. The production constraints, as well as the demographic and economic considerations, are ultimately cultural factors shaping fundamental aspects of television texts. As Lotz (2004) stated, considerations that "would normally seem purely economic . . . play a considerable role in the creation and dissemination of cultural texts" (pp. 30–31). Several factors constraining the creators of *Love in Asia* appear economic and therefore noncultural in nature, but in fact these production conditions and economic factors (e.g., limited production time, audience considerations, and demographics) are inseparable from the cultural production of popular and ideological messages about multicultural families. As we discussed, the producers' need and desire to cater to conservative audiences and achieve commercial success perpetuates the patriarchal norms that underlie the representation of marriage migrant women. We suggest use of production studies perspectives in future studies to enrich the scholarship on televisual

representations of multiculturalism. Critical studies on the institutional processes of television production are important because they inform demands for more enlightened practices that are conducive to the presentation of a wider range of images of multicultural families.

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