

Korean Immigrant Women's Lived Experiences in Halifax: Challenging Gender  
Relations in the Family, Workplace, and Community

By  
Nanok Cha

A Thesis Submitted to  
Saint Mary's University and Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Joint M.A. In Women and Gender Studies.

April, 2009, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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## **Abstract**

### **Korean Immigrant Women's Lived Experiences in Halifax: Challenging Gender Relations in the Family, Workplace, and Community**

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The aim of this research is to reveal Korean immigrant women's lived experiences in Halifax. It specifically looks at the changes of gender relations after immigration. This research uses anti-racist perspectives to understand the interconnection of race, gender, and class from the perspective of Korean immigrant women. Korean immigrant families experience economic decline and Korean immigrant women's paid work becomes necessary after immigration. In this context, Korean immigrant women's bargaining power in the process of renegotiation of gender relations increases as they generate income. However, Korean immigrant women's lived experiences demonstrate that discrimination against Korean immigrant women due to racism in the Canadian social structure, and ongoing patriarchal practices and ideology in and outside the family limit Korean immigrant women's challenges regarding gender inequality. Despite this, Korean immigrant women are not victims of patriarchy and racist society, but active social members who continue to challenge the status quo.

April 30, 2009

## Table of contents

I. Introduction .....	3
II. Theoretical and Historical Considerations .....	8
1. Anti-Racist Feminist Approach .....	8
i) Interconnection of Race, Gender, and Class .....	9
ii) The Interconnection of Race, Gender, and Class in Families .....	13
2. A Historical Overview of Canadian Immigration Policy .....	17
i) Racial Discrimination in the History of the Policy .....	17
ii) Systemic and Institutional Discrimination against Immigrant Women .....	20
3. Literature Review: Immigrant Women, Family, Work, and Community .....	24
i) Immigrant Women and the Family .....	27
ii) Immigrant Women and Paid Work .....	32
iii) Immigrant Women and the Community .....	40
iv) Korean Immigrant Families in North America .....	44
III. Methodology .....	49
1. The Standpoint of Women .....	49
2. Qualitative Feminist Method: Open-Ended Interviewing .....	53
3. Description of Research .....	62
4. Ethical Considerations .....	65
5. Introduction of the Participants .....	65
IV. Patriarchal Gender Relations in Korea .....	69
1. Korean Patriarchal Ideology: Confucianism .....	69
2. Coming to Canada: The Shift of Social and Economic Status .....	74
V. Family and Work: Dwelling in the Intersections of Gender, Race and Class .....	86
1. Korean Immigrant Women's Employment .....	87

2. Income Management in the Family .....	95
3. Willingness to Change Unequal Gender Relations .....	100
<b>VI. Family and Community: Reproducing the Korean Patriarchal Tradition .....</b>	<b>105</b>
1. The Korean Association of Nova Scotia: Gender Divided Roles for Ethnic Social Networking and Maintaining Korean Heritage .....	107
2. Bequeathing Korean Culture to the Second Generation in the Family and the Community.....	112
<b>VII. Challenges and Limitations: Toward More Egalitarian Gender Relations in the Korean Immigrant Family.....</b>	<b>117</b>
1. Challenges: Family Survival in a Hostile Society .....	119
2. Patriarchal Bargaining in the Family .....	127
3. Korean Immigrant Women's Challenges of Gender Inequality .....	131
<b>VIII. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>139</b>

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

This research is an attempt to understand Korean immigrant women's experiences in Halifax, Canada, and to provide practical feminist knowledge, that will be relevant to changing the status quo of society. Many feminists have argued that women in the margins of mainstream society and the feminist movement, such as black women, immigrant women, women of colour, lesbians, and so on, have been kept invisible and silent. This work represents an effort to alter this invisibility and break the silence.

The lived experiences of Korean immigrant women in Canada have not been revealed by previous research, perhaps due to a lack of recognition that Korean immigrant women are members of Canadian society and actively participate in social organizations in Canada. Moreover, feminist researchers have argued that women in sociological research have been objectified by a male dominant social view. In the same line of argument, some feminists have been critical of the fact that immigrant women have been invisible in the migration literature and research. They have argued that the immigrant family has been regarded as a unit, and immigrant women have been treated as dependent family members without recognition of their work outside and inside the family (Friedman-Kasaba 1996, Cheng 1999, Zlotnik 2000). This

research is an attempt to reveal Korean immigrant women's experiences, and to claim that Korean immigrant women are not dependent family members, but active elements in Canadian society.

More specifically, the main goal of this research is to explore gender relations in the Korean immigrant family and the social relations between Korean immigrant women and other members of Canadian society. This research aims to understand how the gender relations of Korean immigrant women in the family and other social relations they enter in the broader social system are interconnected.

The Korean immigrant women's lived experiences and their views regarding these experiences are the main sources of analysis in this research. Social relations are built among Korean immigrant women and other members of Canadian society according to the hierarchy of race, gender, and class. While Korean immigrants had privileged positions regarding race when they lived in primarily homogeneous Korea, and most of them were middle-class economically and socially, most Korean immigrants lost these privileges in Canada due to Canadian racism and capitalism. Therefore, Korean immigrants experience different kinds of social and economic pressures while engaging themselves with Canadian social institutions.

In this hostile social environment, the family is regarded as a shelter for family members and the priority of Korean immigrant households becomes the



family's survival in Canadian society. In consequence, the renegotiation of gender relations in the Korean family tends to cause a shift in the existing patterns of patriarchal order in Korean immigrant households. This research attempts to disclose the complex interconnected issues of race, gender, and class embedded in the lived experiences of Korean immigrant women, and how Korean immigrant women interact with and challenge racism, patriarchy, and capitalism in their everyday life.

In chapter II, the anti-racist feminist perspectives are introduced to explain how Korean immigrant women's experiences are interconnected with challenging social relations they face in the Canadian social system due to race, gender, and class. Moreover, a brief history of Canadian immigrant policy and the meaning of the family, work, and community to immigrant women in North America is also examined.

In the third chapter, the standpoint of women as a feminist methodological approach and the in-depth interview with open-ended questions that this research adopted is presented. This research suggests that starting from the actual lived experiences of Korean immigrant women provides more accurate analyses than those which begin with a scientist's own hypothesis.

Chapters IV through VII, the interview analyses, unveil Korean immigrant women's lived experiences in terms of the shift of gender relations in Korean immigrant families and its challenges and limitations. Topics discussed include family

survival in a new social setting, Korean immigrant women's employment, renegotiation of gender division of labour in the family, Korean traditional patriarchal ideology, racism, and the impact of ethnic community influences.

More specifically, chapter IV details the Korean traditional patriarchal ideology, originating in Confucianism, to illustrate the gender relationships that the Korean immigrant families in this research had in Korea. It also examines the family decision-making process regarding immigration to Canada, and provides evidence that, in most cases, decision-making was not joint but highly gendered.

Chapter V examines the changes of the social and economic status of Korean immigrant families in a new society, and the renegotiation of gender relations in these households accordingly. The chapter suggests that there are social factors inside and outside of the family which influence the parties' bargaining power in those households regarding housework, income management, and decisions on family matters. For example, Korean immigrant women's contributions in providing and managing family income, and a willingness to change patriarchal practices in the family, are discussed in detail to understand the change of gender relations in the family and whether immigration to Canada has brought about more egalitarian gender relations in these families.

Chapter VI introduces immigrant women's roles in the Korean community,

and examines their extensive caregiving obligations as wives and mothers in the ethnic community, imposed through Korean traditional patriarchal practices.

Korean immigrant women's lived experiences show that they are active family and social members who challenge the discriminations against them due to race, gender, and class in Canadian society. Chapter VII illustrates that the renegotiation of gender relations in Korean immigrant families in Halifax and the Canadian social system are not irrelevant to this challenge. Racism and working class status in Canadian society limit Korean immigrant women's actions regarding unequal gender relations in the family. Moreover, this chapter shows that the primary issue for Korean immigrant women is the survival of the family unit within the difficult social structure of Canada. Through the lived experiences of Korean immigrant women, this research demonstrates that gender inequality is not a singular issue to be solved for women's liberation, as the mainstream white middle-class feminists have advocated. The experiences of the Korean immigrant women in this chapter also illustrate that they have challenged the discrimination against them due to their race, gender and class in Canada.

The concluding section presents a summary of this research and its limitations. It suggests issues which should be dealt with in future research on Korean immigrant women in Canada.

## **Chapter II**

### **Theoretical and Historical Considerations**

#### **1. Anti-Racist Feminist Approach**

“From the margin” of the feminist movement among academic scholars, activists and by black women, women of colour, and immigrant women, anti-racist voices have arisen, arguing that there are different social structures, beyond gender, causing different women’s experiences of oppression. For example, the racial discrimination in the social system impacts on the lives of women of colour and black women in addition to the gender oppression they experience. Therefore, there has been vigorous discussion among feminists in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture and class and their connection with women’s oppression.

These feminists “from the margin” have been critical of the fact that white mainstream feminists have mainly focused on the concept of gender, and ignored different women’s experience of oppression due to other social structures and relations, such as race, sexual orientation, class, culture and generation. They have also argued that because of those other social structures, different women have experienced different gender relations in the family, workplace, and community (Dua 1999, Lim 1997, Morokvasic, 2000, Stasiulis 1987). Anti-racist feminists especially have stated strongly how race, gender, and class are interconnected to each other, and

influence the everyday life of women in minority groups such as black women, women of colour, and immigrant women.

### **i) Interconnection of Race, Gender, and Class**

Anti-racist feminists have been critical of mainstream white feminists who have ignored the fact that racism has something to do with women's oppression. That is, black women, women of colour and immigrant women have claimed that the racist social system is a locus of women's oppression. hooks(1982) argues that there are confrontational perspectives between white women and Black women within feminism, which come from racism:

The force that allows white feminist authors to make no reference to racial identity in their books about "women" that are in actuality about white women, is the same one that would compel any writer writing exclusively on black women to refer explicitly to their racial identity. That force is racism. (p.138)

Bannerji (1987) also critiques that whereas white middle class women have emphasized gender inequality as the main locus of women's oppression, they have overlooked the interests of other women in lower classes and minority groups, thus deepening their oppression. Bannerji (1987) urges that it is important to understand the interrelation of gender, race, and class and to challenge different oppressive circumstances in different women's lives:

If the middle class women's interests are those of all of us, then we must drown ourselves in their version of the world and their politics. This gives them a solid base to wage their own hegemonic

fractional conflict with bourgeois males, while we intensify our own oppression. If we were actually to advance our own position, we could not but show that organization by race (or racism) is a fundamental way of forming class in Canada, and that this formation of class is a fully gendered one (p.12).

As Bannerji argued above, the anti-racist feminists have emphasized the interconnection among gender, race, and class to explain different women's experiences of inequality in different social situations. Spelman (1988) stated that a woman does not stand as just a woman in society, and we cannot explain other factors of social oppression separately from gendered ones while a woman experiences all of these combined. In her words:

But insofar as she is oppressed by racism in a sexist context and sexism in a racist context, the Black woman's struggle cannot be compartmentalized into two struggles- one as a Black and one as a woman. (p.124)

In a similar argument, Glenn (1999) insists that feminist researchers need to examine gender in specific social contexts where different women are situated. Gender relationships are not shaped purely by the dichotomous meaning of gender, or only men and women. That is, people are not situated in a specific society only as a woman or man. Glenn argues that a more accurate explanation of gender relations has to be sought also in other social structures and relations such as class, race and generation:

The meaning of Asian American is subject to constant re-examination and a continuing tension between specific ethnic identity and general Asian American identity...Class, ethnicity, generation, and other axes of difference interact to shape heterogeneous genders (p.31).

As the interrelation of social categories such as gender, race, and class in the anti-racist feminist thought has been regarded as an important epistemological direction to reveal different women's experiences in a racist, sexist and capitalist social system (Dua, 1999), it has been argued that these categories are not abstract analytic tools existing separately, but are social relations embedded in a specific social system. Tastsoglou (1997) argues that:

Gender, ethnicity and social class do not simply have an additive effect on individual identity; they cannot be separated, either at the level of the lived experience or of the social relations that organize and frame both identity and experience (p.121).

Ralston (1988) demonstrated in her research on South Asian immigrant women in Halifax that South Asian immigrant women's lived experiences in Canada are not primarily individual matters but rather social interactions with other members of Canadian society. In this case, race, gender, and class are the social traits which bring about different consequences within the social relationship between immigrant and other Canadians:

Being South Asian refers not so much to the personal qualities of individuals (who come from specific territories outside Canada), but rather to social characteristics which are constructed and maintained in the relationships between South Asians and other members of Canadian society...In this conceptual framework, gender, ethnicity, race, and class are also understood as social attributes which are defined and constructed in the historical and ongoing processes of social relationships, not as individual attributes. (pp .64-65)

While Ng (1993) states that the historical development of capitalism and Canadian

nation building was the very process of a sexist, racist, and capitalist formation, she presents the essential interconnection of gender, race, and class as shaping unequal social relations in the Canadian social system. In addition, she suggests that these factors affect social relations and the practices of people's daily life in specific social settings. Ng states,

The development of capitalism and the emergence of Canada as a nation-state cannot be separated from racism and sexism as systems of domination and subordination... By examining class as an actual activity (rather than as a purely theoretical category) in the building of Canada as a modern nation state, my analysis shows that class cannot be understood without reference to race and gender relations. (p.57)

Anti-Racist feminist approaches try to interconnect knowledge and reality, as anti-racist feminist scholars have denied the legitimacy of knowledge produced by dominant groups in a society which shows reality in a fragmented way, and have developed an epistemological approach which is capable of scrutinizing the system of oppression through the social relations in it, while recognizing the interconnections of social structures, such as race, gender, and class.

It is also important to point out that lived experiences of immigrant women are irrelevant to the status of immigrant women in a receiving country. Receiving countries have their own aims in attracting certain people from other countries.

Kofman (2006) pointed out that the recent trend of immigration in many European



states is to attract economic class immigrants as “deserving migrants”, neglecting the family related migration, or “unwanted migration,” which consists of women and children (p.5). Consequently, it is connected to the social exclusion of immigrant women and children as they are not the primary concern of immigration policy. Moreover, these policies, emphasizing the integration of immigrants into the mainstream society, seem to contradict the development of strong ethnic communities, which have been seen as bastions against assimilation. Thus, the social policy constrains the growth of ethnic communities (p.12). Therefore, the status of immigrant women in a receiving country also has to be considered to analyse immigrant women’s experiences. Even though they are legally accepted, it does not mean that immigrant women are socially accepted and integrated into the larger society.

## **ii) The Interconnection of Race, Gender, and Class in Families**

Anti-racist feminists also claim that the critique of the concept of the nuclear family developed by Marxist and radical feminists has heavily focused on gender inequality in the family and the workplace in the historical development of capitalism. Therefore, they have neglected different experiences of women in the family due to racism. Dua(1999) argues,

Unfortunately, as the attention of writers became focused on exploring either patriarchy or capitalism, the possibility that racism

may also have played a role in the emergence of the nuclear family was not considered. (p.239)

Moreover, Glenn (1999) argues that Marxist feminists in the 1970s and 1980s focused on women's reproductive labour in the home as the center of women's oppression. In other words, they argue that gender division of reproductive labour in the home generates women's unequal treatment in paid work. Therefore, women have been regarded as "reserve-army." However, according to Glenn, Marxist feminists have overlooked other social factors such as race and ethnicity to explain that women experience differently gender roles in the family and the workplace, according to other social relations in which they are implicated due to their race, ethnicity and class.

According to Glenn,

Using a race-gender lens reveals that reproductive labor is divided along racial as well as gender lines, with white and racial ethnic women having distinctly different responsibilities for social reproduction, not just in their own households but in other work settings. (p.16)

Stasiulis (1990) pointed out that Black feminists have challenged the dominant feminist view, which regarded the family as the primary space where gender inequality exists, and have pointed out the failure of this position to recognize the roles of the family in different households in the context of a racist social system. That is, the family is a shelter for Black women as well as Black men in a hostile social system. The family members prefer to build solidarity in the family, as they continually face racial discrimination outside of the family. Stasiulis (1990) states that,

The attention given to the family as a site for women's oppression and its particular conceptualization in white feminism are regarded by Black feminists as highly problematic. They argue that first, in racist societies, the family is commonly experienced by Black women as the *least* oppressive institution; rather, it functions as a site for shelter and resistance, and offers opportunities for egalitarian relations between oppressed minority women and men that are denied in major social institutions, imbued as they are with racism. (p.284)

Furthermore, Stasiulis claims that it is important for feminist theories to recognize women's racial and ethnic differences interlinked with gender and class, and its consequence when explaining women's oppression would be to develop a realistic feminist political theory.

The recognition that race and ethnicity, in addition to class, play a central role in defining the nature and extent of relative privilege and oppression of women, renders simplistic and misleading the very notion of 'women's oppression'. (p.288)

In short, anti-racist feminist approaches are meant to shed light on different aspects of women's oppression due to their gender, race, and class. Gender inequality is presupposed to be the common experience of all women. To claim that, anti-racist feminists seek to understand the dynamics of gender in a racist and capitalist social structure. To understand it, they also suggest that gender, race, and class should be seen as social relations which are interconnected. Anti-racist feminists demonstrate that patriarchal practices and ideology in the family are interconnected with women's challenges in the labour force and gender inequality in and outside the family.

However, they also argue that for some women such as immigrant women, women of colour, and black women, the family in a racist society takes an important role as a shelter.

Anti-racist feminists, however, have also argued that different socio-economic conditions affecting immigrant families, such as gender and racial discrimination in society at large, and consistent patriarchal ideologies in the family have to be considered, when attempting to measure the meaning and role of the family. That is, even though the family to many immigrant households acts as a shelter in a hostile society, racial and gender discrimination in the workplace have marginalized immigrant women who are concentrated in poorly paid jobs, and it leads these women to depend on the man in the family, who is the primary bread winner. Moreover, patriarchal practices and ideologies in immigrant households certainly demonstrate the family not as a shelter, but as a locus of oppression. For example, Tastsoglou and Miedema (2005) point out that the discrimination against immigrant women in the workplace not only marginalizes their paid work, but also exacerbates their dependency in the family:

Non-recognition of foreign credentials often provides the context of the “choice” to do something else for immigrant women, be it in the form of retraining or raising children as stay-home mothers or some combination. This illustrates how a form of racist discrimination is intertwined with gender roles in ways that result in

reduced opportunities and, ultimately, limited choice for women (p.217).

Therefore, in some cases, immigrant women depend on the family as a shelter because they have few realistic alternatives. To understand this complex mechanism of oppression in and outside the family is to reveal the social relations which immigrant women have built in Canada and the interconnection of gender, race, and class which is embedded in the lived experiences of immigrant women.

## **2. A Historical Overview of Canadian Immigration Policy**

### **i) Racial Discrimination in the History of the Policy**

It has been claimed that Canadian Immigration Policy has been selective regarding race and ethnicity in terms of deciding who can immigrate<sup>1</sup>, and mostly white Europeans are favoured. Racial discrimination in the immigration regulations was clearly shown in many cases from the earliest years of Canadian history to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ng (1981) criticized the government institutions involved in Immigration policy, in that they already set up their agenda on who and what they want from immigrants in a very selective manner. It shows that the Canadian immigration policy defines who immigrants are in such manners even before the immigrants land in Canada.

In the law and regulations of the Department of Employment and Immigration and the Citizenship Branch of the Secretary of State, there are clear stipulations on who an immigrant is, and at what point an immigrant becomes a citizen. Thus, prior to a person's arrival in Canada, her/his legal status, as an immigrant, as different from people who are Canadians, is already determined for her/him. (p.100-101)

early twentieth century. Szekely (1990) pointed out some racist immigration regulations such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923), practiced in Canadian history.

We can find reports of racism in Canada from centuries ago. Documents from 1628 suggest that early in the seventeenth century, Quebec tried to solve the problems of its inadequate labour force by slavery (Head 1981). The Chinese Exclusion Act, which was in effect from 1923 until 1947, barred entry to all Chinese people with the exception of students and merchants. In 1939 Canada was one of the countries that refused entry to the 937 Jews on board the *St. Louis*, while British women and children were welcomed excitedly as “our little war guests” (Toronto Star, 2 August 1987). (p.127)

People from the underdeveloped countries, the so-called Third World, were allowed to enter Canada as a necessary source of cheap labour in the mining and lumber industries and railway (Estable 1987, Das Gupta 2000). The economic growth after World War II and the adaptation of the point system in immigration policy in 1967 have broadened the source of immigrants from various countries. However, Dua (1999) argues that in the Canadian history of nation-building, nationalists have adhered to building a racialized nation, by reinforcing white middle class women’s reproductive role in the nuclear family, recruiting white settlers and limiting the immigration of people of colour.

In these cases, nationalist projects were based on the creation of a white settler society. Foremost, this involved the marginalization of indigenous peoples from the emerging body politic, which involved legal, residential, and social separation. This included legal regulations of interracial sexuality. They also were characterized by settlement and immigration policies that recruited suitable “white” settlers and excluded people of colour. (p. 253)

A limited migration from the Third World was allowed to fill the labour market shortage at specific times and for specific reasons. Men from Asian countries had migrated to Canada as a source of cheap labour in the railway, road building, lumber industry, and mining. According to Das Gupta (2000), in the late 1800s, about 15,000 Chinese men migrated to Canada to work in building the new railway across Canada. Once the railway was completed, Canada limited any increasing population from China by raising a head tax from \$50 to \$500 per head by 1903. Das Gupta states:

The head tax was a way of systemically excluding a group of people because of race, ethnicity, and sex... Moreover, women from the South Asia and East Asia were able to enter Canada only in the limited condition. According to Das Gupta, South Asian women were allowed to enter Canada by 1919 only as wives. Chinese and Japanese female domestic workers were permitted to work only for Asian families. (pp. 158-165)

In the decades after World War II, as Canada experienced tremendous economic growth, the source countries for immigration were broadened, but Canada still limited immigration from the Third World countries, maintaining a white majority population influx through the immigration quota system (Estable 1987, Ng 1993, Thobani 2000). However, a “point system” was introduced in 1967 to meet the specific requirements of the labour market, allowing immigration based on an applicant’s characteristics such as age, education, and occupation, regardless of one’s

nationality (Ng 1993, Thobani 2000).

According to Estable(1987), since 1971 the number of immigrants from the Third World and non-white source countries has greatly increased. Through the modification of the Immigration Act in 1976-1977, the legislation is supposed to be the basis for a non-discriminatory immigration policy, and the Act has remained effective into the late 1990s with numerous amendments. The Act contains a clause of “non-discrimination” based on “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion or sex,” and maintains major categories of immigration, most important of which are the independent class, who are the main applicants of the point system, the family class, who are family members of the main applicants, and refugees (Ng 1993, Thobani 2000).

## **ii) Systemic and Institutional Discrimination against Immigrant Women**

Many feminists have argued that Canadian immigration policy has consistently been unfair to female immigrant women who have entered Canada as cheap labourers, refugees, and as dependent family class members (Arat-Koc, 1999). The Immigration Act (1976) and its adopted “point system” has been criticized for its ‘hidden’ aspects of patriarchal practices, as well as racist discrimination through the regulations. Immigrants who are not from Britain and the United States are institutionally discriminated against, as their education and work skills have not been



recognized by the Canadian government and employers (Arat-Koc, 1999, Man 2004).

The new Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) was introduced in 2002, replacing the Immigration Act of 1976. Man (2004) argues that the IRPA emphasizes the recruitment of highly skilled immigrants and business personnel who embody competitive human capital (p.135). However, as is shown in the history of selective Canadian immigration policy, this tendency reinforces the hardship of immigrant women's situation. Tastsoglou and Miedema (2005) point out some discriminatory aspects of current immigration policies against immigrant women that exclude and prevent them from participating in the Canadian labour force. That is, there are few support programs for immigrant women to improve their career skills. Moreover, even though language training programs are provided for sponsored immigrants (mostly women and children since 1992), those subsidies and training allowances have, in reality, been reduced (pp. 208-209).

Canadian immigration policy and the labour market have not recognized immigrant women's education and skills from their own countries while they are primarily accepted as a dependent member of the main applicant, their spouses. In her research, Man (2004) argues that:

...contrary to the state's assertion that the new economy requires highly skilled labor, these skilled Chinese immigrant women in the paid labor market do not fare well in the context of a new political and economic environment. (p.136)

Immigrant women in general are marginalized in the labour market, but many of them must find employment to make ends meet for the family. These jobs are usually manual labour and poorly paid. Moreover, they take the main responsibilities of unpaid work in the households, besides being the secondary income earner. Thus, the social and economic situations of immigrant women reinforce their vulnerability and isolation in the labour market and the family (Morokvasic 1984, Ng 1993). Ng (1993) discusses how the marginalization of immigrant women is systemic due to the racist practices of Canadian institutions.

The fact that women who received their educational credentials from Britain and the United States were given preferential treatment suggests racist assumptions in the accreditation process as well as in Canada's dominant relation to less developed parts of the world...[T]hese procedures help to keep immigrant women in marginal positions in the paid labour force, and they contribute to their sense of dependence, isolation, and powerlessness. (pp. 284-287)

By promoting the independent and family class, the immigration regulations encourage a sponsor's control, which is mostly men's power over the sponsored wife and children. Moreover, as the skills and education of members of the family class have not been recognized in the process of immigration, and the sponsor agrees to support the dependents financially for several years, immigrant women's paid and unpaid work in Canada has been neglected, and their contributions to the family and the broader Canadian economy have not been totally recognized, while isolating them

systemically (Das Gupta 2000, Morokvasic 1984, Ng 1993, Thobani 2000).

According to Das Gupta (2000), the independent category of the Immigration Act has this patriarchal implication in it.

As soon as immigrants are defined as “family class,” it is assumed that they are not good enough to work outside the home (hence the lack of insistence on earning points) and that their primary responsibility is with child care and housework. Another “family class” assumption is that women are not destined for the labour force. This in effect reproduces traditional gender ideology, even though the majority of immigrant women participate in the paid labour force (in the most ill-paid and insecure sectors) at a greater rate than Canadian-born women. (p.176)

It is also emphasized by many that sponsored immigrant women are isolated, since Canadian immigration policy ignores their contribution in the process of immigration and settlement inside and outside of the family. Therefore, sponsored immigrant women as a dependent member of the main applicant in the process of immigration are apt to be vulnerable in an abusive situation. According to Thobani (2000):

Although sponsored immigrant women make very tangible contributions through their paid and unpaid labour, immigration categories make this reality invisible. In this, the state “produced” women as dependent immigrant women and created the conditions under which they could become easily isolated and more vulnerable to violence and abuse (IMA 1994). (p.19)

Feminist scholars have brought to light immigrant women’s invisibility in the process of immigration. In the case of immigrant women who enter Canada as “family

class,” they are vulnerable in the process of immigration and settlement. Sponsored immigrant women are supposed to be a dependent member of the main immigrant applicant. Their work ability has not been recognized in the process of immigration, even while they are an active economic provider for the immigrant family (Man, 2004, Ng, 1993).

Immigrant women in this category are unable to have social assistance such as social welfare outside of the family, as they are sponsored by the main applicant for several years (Ng, 1993). Moreover, their legal status as a dependent does not protect them when they lose their status by possible separation with their husbands, and that drives them into a more vulnerable position in a new social setting.

As will be elaborated on later, six out of nine participants in this research came to Canada as “family class” immigrants. These critics of this patriarchal aspect of Canadian immigration policy reveal that their lived experience in Canada are not private matters, but public, in that the racist and patriarchal social system is embedded in their daily life as immigrant women in Canada.

### **3. Literature Review: Immigrant Women, Family, Work, and Community**

Szekely(1990) argues the racist history of Canada is closely related to the definition of the term, “immigrant.” According to Szekely, most immigrants from the United States and Great Britain are not treated as immigrants. However, even though they were born in Canada, second generations of immigrants from Third World countries are still seen and treated as immigrants (p.127).

More specifically, Ng (1993) defines the term “immigrant women” in the practice of racism. She points out that the term “immigrant women” has been used in Canada for women of colour from Southern Europe and the Third World. Normally they are identified as women who speak little English and have occupied low paying jobs. Ng states that “In other words, the common usage of the term presupposes class and racist biases” (p.281).

Feminists in the field of immigration have argued that immigrant women are not seen as active participants in the process of migration, since migration has been seen as a labour force movement in response to a competitive global economic system (Cheng 1999, Friedman-Kasaba 1996, Stasiulis 1987). Criticizing the simplistic accounts of international migration theories<sup>2</sup> of the dynamic power relationship in the process of migration, Cheng (1999) suggested that feminist theoretical approaches brought to light a different aspect of migration, namely the gendered and intersectional perspective. Immigrant women and men not only experienced different situations in the work place, but they also tended to renegotiate gender relations in the household accordingly. Moreover, those diverse experiences were interrelated to the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Cheng (1999), neoclassical theory interprets international migration as a result of labour supply and demand among different countries. On the other hand, the World system theory explains it as a result of unequal global capitalism. Alternatively, the Network theory on international migration sees it as social networking among people across national borders. (p.39)

social structure of the receiving country, as well as the country of origin:

Gender dynamics within the household also dictate that negotiations occur constantly among members of different sexes and generations. In short, this important organizing principle of power shapes the particular contours of the migration process as well as the diverse experiences particular to people situated in different locations along social hierarchies. Besides, it also interacts with other systems of stratification, such as race and class, and with the larger socio-economic and political contexts. (p.40)

As Cheng pointed out, immigrant households in Canada face changes of their economic and social status in the new social setting. In this process, gender, race, and class as social relations alter the established family forms, entailing renegotiations.

Gender relations in the family thus come to be renegotiated in the different social context. Ng (1993) argues that the concept of the family has to be redefined in immigrant households, since their social and economic situations differ from other families in Canada.

To understand immigrant families, it is important to realize that the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal system of Canadian society is very closely interrelated and underlies the daily life of immigrant families. Friedman-Kasaba (1996) also points out that the literature on migration generally has disregarded the women's part in the migration process. She believes that the immigrant women's economic contribution in the market place and in the household, unequal gender relations, and social networks such as friendships, ethnic communities, and local political networks that women

organize or in which they participate, have not been adequately investigated (p.28).

There are diverse consequences within the immigrant households due to migration. To reveal the reality of invisible immigrant women in the households, it is important to examine the changes of gender relationship such as a shift of power and the renegotiation process made necessary by different social and economic conditions.

### **i) Immigrant Women and the Family**

There are many studies done by feminists to examine gender power relationships in the family. Feminist researchers have shown unequal gender power relationships in the family by providing evidence of the various aspects of gender relations in the family, such as the gender division of labour, men's control over money and other family matters, gender differential expenditures and so on.

Wilson's study (1987) examines how the income levels of the households affect women's bargaining power. Wilson noticed in her research that most women in low income marriages had the general marital ideology of "sharing," but they experienced unfair sharing of housework in reality. Through her research experience, she points out that the positions of family members and their bargaining power in the decision-making process over income, resources, and housework are related to their positions outside the household generating unequal gender relations. Therefore, Wilson insists that economic and social conditions which are based on class, regional

differences, life stage and so forth, must be understood and analyzed to explain gender inequality.

Woolley (2000) conducted research on gender power relationships in the family in 1995. The main question she raised in this study was “Who gets what?” which dealt with the issue of who controls money in the household. The research done by Woolley and Madill in 1995 was based on a sample of 300 couples in the Ottawa-Hull region in Canada. The research showed that males with higher income exerted more control over money, and that younger women and women with income had a relatively better bargaining position in terms of managing money such as withdrawing cash, writing checks, recording transactions, and keeping track of the balance. The outcome of the study demonstrates that men with income have better bargaining power over controlling money and this, consequently, results in an unequal gender power relationship.

On the other hand, Kibria(1984) argues that social transformations such as modernization and migration change the resources available to women and men in the family and they have to renegotiate, as the status quo is no longer a viable option:

Social transformations, such as those implied by modernization and migration, often entail important shifts in the nature and scope of resources available to women and men. A period of intense renegotiation between women and men may thus ensue, as new bargains based on new resources are struck. (p.10)

As mentioned earlier in this research, the conventional concept of the family



has been challenged by several feminists who focus on different forms of family with different gender relations. Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) posited that various perspectives on households of neoclassical economics and Marxism share the notion that the household is a “moral economy” led by altruism. Such perspectives assume that a household operates as a homogeneous unit characterized by shared preferences and pooled incomes to maximize family utility. Therefore, the assumptions of these neoclassical economists and Marxists tend to limit the pressure of external forces, such as the capitalist economic social structure and patriarchal practices affecting the characteristics of family, and the different experiences of gender relations in the family and the work place that have not been recognized.

Moreover, Grasmuck and Pessar state that ethnographic studies on immigrant households, for example, have demonstrated that migrant women are not always victims of patriarchal and capitalist social structures. In addition, the interests of family members for the allocation of resources and budgeting are different, and therefore, family members have to negotiate with each other within their limited income and resources. Thus, viewing families as primarily altruistic dismisses the reality of the power relations existing within families. Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) demonstrate that internal and external factors such as cultural and patriarchal practices which affect household strategies must be considered to examine the family.

We must take care to avoid a number of faulty assumptions found in the current literature. First, the social-solidarity view of the household must be tempered. While household members' orientations and actions may sometimes be guided by norms of solidarity, they may equally well be informed by hierarchies of power within households; thus the tensions and coalition-building these hierarchies produce must be examined. Second, the notion of household strategies must be broadened to include cultural considerations and not merely material or economic ones. Ideologies of kinship and gender, as well as production and consumption possibilities, condition the range of strategies available to households. (p. 138)

For example, Lim (1997) conducted her research on Korean immigrant families in Austin and Dallas, Texas. The issue in the research was how Korean immigrant women's employment affected women's challenge to unequal gender relationships such as a male-dominant decision-making family structure and women's responsibility for housework (p.209).

Lim (1997) discovered that even though Korean immigrant women's economic power generated by working outside increased women's bargaining power in the family, Confucian patriarchal ideology in the Korean immigrant family and the family survival strategy as a minority group in the United States constrained women's challenges against gender inequality. Her research presents a more complicated family situation by outlining specific social conditions different women face, and also demonstrates that we should regard various aspects of the women's lived experiences regarding the patriarchal culture, economic conditions, and racist social system that

are implicated in terms of organizing unequal gender relations in the family.

“Family” in these immigrant households is experienced as a survival unit in the new and hostile social environment. Within that unit, much negotiation ensues between family members to build the economic and social stability for the unit in the new society. Therefore, the family is not merely a place where gender inequality exists, but it is also a shelter (Kibria 1984, Tastsoglou 1997, Morokvasic 2000).

Morokvasic (2000) demonstrates that the family in a repressive social system functions as a refuge in immigrant households.

In a hostile environment they many also feel ‘in the same boat’ as their husband or partner and look for compromises rather than change through conflict. These findings run counter to all those views in feminist research which put the central focus on the family as the primary and most significant site for women’s oppression. A migrant family, on the contrary, often serves the function of a refuge. (p.107)

The meaning of the family in immigrant households, therefore, has to be examined in their many contexts, including the economic and social changes such households are undergoing. For immigrant women, the family is not solely a place of gender inequality. The family survival in the hostile society would be the priority for immigrant households, and immigrant women might not want to challenge patriarchal gender relations for fear that they would undermine that priority. Moon (2003) in her research on Korean immigrant women in New York State argues that those Korean immigrant women are aware of racism toward Asians in America, and as a result they

see their family as a unit for survival against the racist social system. Therefore, they would endure the patriarchal order in the family, feeling their husbands are in a similar situation.

The context of immigration, however, weakened the immigrant women's perception of the conjugal conflict as a problem of gender inequality. These women showed varying degrees of awareness of racism against Asians in American society. As a result, they felt a sense of solidarity with their husbands in their efforts to protect their families by performing their roles as mothers and wives. (p.853)

The study by Moon indicates that gender power relations in the family cannot be explained without any interpretation of the broader societal context. Different social relations of immigrant women and men, within and outside of the family, due to race, gender, and class should be taken into account when attempting to understand immigrant households.

## **ii) Immigrant Women and Paid Work**

It has been assumed that married immigrant women do not work outside of the family as the immigration policy has defined them as dependents of the main applicant, mainly their husbands, in the process of immigration<sup>3</sup>. However, feminist researchers in the field of migration have pointed out that immigrant women have high rates of economic activity outside the home whether they are married or not

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<sup>3</sup> The problem of the dependency of immigrant women on their husbands in the process of immigration is also discussed above, at section 2- A Historical Overview of Canadian Immigration Policy.

(Kibria, 1984, Lim 1997, Ng and Estable, 1987, Zloinik 2000, Jones-Correa 2000).

Moreover, many feminists argue that immigrant women have provided cheap labour in the Canadian market, and there are several reasons for this phenomenon.

First of all, education received in their home countries is not formally recognized in Canada. Second, most immigrant women who came to Canada as the family class have less chance to attend job training and English learning programs in settlement organizations. Third, the racist attitude and practices in the work place and racial biases of Canadian employers make it difficult to get jobs they deserve. They are forced to take semi-skilled or manual and physical jobs with low wages (Elabor-Idemudia 2000, Das Gupta, 1987, Man 2004, Ng 1993, Ng and Estable, 1987, Ralston 1988). Ng and Estable (1987) state that,

Despite popular conceptions and the official expectation that immigrant women do not work outside the home, in reality, most immigrant women do join the paid labour force due to financial necessity... Immigrant women occupy the lowest positions in the Canadian labour force, and are the most disadvantaged contributors to the Canadian economy. (p.30)

Man (2004) points out in her study that the Canadian immigration policy based on a point system results in the devaluation of Chinese immigrant women's education and skills developed in their home country. Moreover, racist practices and job segregation in the market place discourage immigrant women's employment and in many cases force them into unskilled and manual jobs, rather than employment appropriate to

their credentials.

When asked about their employment experience, the women in my studies echoed the difficulties that other immigrant women of color have voiced, i.e. those posed by requirement of “Canadian experience”, by employers’ reluctance to recognize immigrant women’s qualifications and experience from their own countries and by racism in the labor market. (p.141)

While recognizing that immigrant women do work outside of the family and they provide cheap labour in the Canadian market place, it is noteworthy that immigrant women’s economic activities are closely related to the family need for secondary income as the economic situation of most immigrant families declines after immigration. Therefore, for these women, their participation in the market place has to be examined in the context of the financial well-being of their families. Zlotnik (2000) suggests that immigrant women’s participation in the economic activities outside of the family has to be explained by the immigrant family’s specific economic and social situation.

Immigrant women are important economic actors and their participation in economic activity is closely related to the needs of their families, so that the choices that migrant women make regarding work cannot be understood without taking into account the situation of their families and their roles within them. Women are increasingly becoming migrant workers in order to improve the economic status of their families or at least to ensure that their basic survival needs are met. (p.43)

Feminist researchers in the field of migration also argue that as many immigrant women have engaged in economic activities, gender relations in the family

have begun to change. Women and men in the immigrant family experience the changes of resources available to them as immigration shifts their economic and social standing. While immigrant women's employment tends to expand their resources and increases their bargaining power in the family in many cases, which leads to more egalitarian gender relations, many feminists have argued that there is a limit to that change.

That is, immigrant women are exploited in the market place as a cheap source of labour<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the patriarchal ideology in the family and ethnic community and the hostile social system due to racism and capitalism limit their abilities to challenge gender inequality (Kibria 1984, Moon 2003, Morokvasic 2000). Morokvasic (2000) argues that migration certainly raises a question of gender relations. According to Morokvasic, the patriarchal behaviours might change, but the attitudes may still exist beneath the actions. Moreover, women's opportunities of employment do not guarantee equal gender relations or women's improved status. There are gains and losses depending on other social factors affecting the gender power relationships (p.109).

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<sup>4</sup> Das Gupta (1987) states that,

We (Immigrant women) are a cheap source of labour, a captive labour force to be drawn on at will and rejected when necessary. This condition of powerlessness and degradation is reproduced by discriminatory relations and structures of racism, sexism and class exploitation, frequently operating simultaneously. (p.13)

Feminists have pointed out that income generation for the family has provided immigrant women with a psychological as well as material independence from men (Jones-Correa 2000, Lim 1997). Jones-Correa (2000) argues that women who work outside of the family gain the power to challenge the gender relationship.

Having their own means of income allows women to escape the feeling of obligation to men, to be able to enter into relationships with men on their own terms. This extends, as well, beyond relationships with men to those with the family in general. (p.369)

Pessar (1984) noticed in her research that as immigrant women work outside of the home, men and women in the family renegotiate the gender relations toward a more egalitarian norm. In many immigrant households, patriarchal authority, gender division of labour, and income management are renegotiated (p.1190). Moreover, immigrant women gain self-esteem and independence as they work outside.

On the other hand, many feminist researchers have argued that immigrant women's employment does not always lead to more egalitarian gender relations in the family. Social factors such as racist discrimination and the economic instability that accompanies the lower working class have influenced gender relations in the family. In addition, the high level of patriarchal ideology in the family limits the challenge of unequal gender relations (Elabor-Idemudia 2000, Kibria 1990, Lim 1997, Moon 2003, Pessar 1984). Elabor-Idemudia's research presents the concept that the exploitation of immigrant women's labour outside of the family reinforces the dependency of the



immigrant women in the family and ethnic communities rather than challenging it.

Elabor-Idemudia (2000) points out:

The burden of the double day is intensified when the workplace becomes a place where immigrants experience segregation and isolation. Many of the women thus turn to their homes or ethnic communities for refuge from an alien environment. (p.102)

There are limited challenges to gender inequality in the family and the ethnic community because the patriarchal structures not only enhance their power against the hostile environment outside of the family, but also are valuable to improve the economic and social status of the family. Therefore, patriarchal gender relations and ideology in immigrant households are supported to build economic stability in the new social setting. In this regard, immigrant women often see their employment as temporary, and work outside as long as it does not conflict with their role as a mother and a wife. (Kibria 1990<sup>5</sup>, Lim 1997). Lim (1997) argues that:

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<sup>5</sup> In her research, Kibria (1990) noticed that the traditional patriarchal family system is valuable for immigrant households attempting to improve their economic stability in the new society. She states,

On the one hand, migration has weakened men's control over economic and social resources and allowed women to exert greater informal family power. At the same time, the precarious economic environment has heightened the salience of the family system and constrained the possibilities for radical change in gender relations. For the moment, the patriarchal family system is too valuable to give up as it adds income earners and extends resources... because they expected to gain important economic status and benefits from allegiance to the traditional family system, by and large, the Vietnamese women of the study were a conservative force in the community, deeply resistant to structural changes in family and gender relations. (p.21)

Some women's challenge to gender inequality at home also may be constrained by their family circumstances. For example, among immigrant families who face a precarious economic environment, wives' employment is not a means for achieving independence from their husbands. Rather, it is an obligation for family survival and sacrifice necessary for the collective interests of the family. (p.35)

The research conducted by Haddad and Lam (1994) was aimed at examining whether there was a dramatic change of the sex-based division of family work or not when the social-economic and socio-cultural environment was changed by migration.

They interviewed 20 working class Italian immigrant couples to find out the change of gender division of labour in their households before and after they came to Canada. According to the researchers, when the researchers asked questions related to the gender-based division of labour in their family, the answers strongly revealed a clear division of labour in participants' households both before and after the changes of social and cultural situation. Even though women started to work outside to contribute to family income, they performed more domestic work than men. The husbands described home as a place to rest after they came back from work, while women still had to do unfinished housework, even though their husbands were relaxing.

Some feminist studies show that when women make money for the family, they tend to gain more power over family matters and resources. However, the above study indicates that other social factors such as a cultural aspects and education affect

gender relationships in the family, and therefore, gender power relationships in different families are varied and complicated.

Kibria's research (1990) also demonstrates that the patriarchal ideology in the family and an ethnic community influence gender relations in the immigrant family in that it limits women's challenges regarding inequality. Kibria's research (1990) on Vietnamese families in Philadelphia discussed Vietnamese women's collective power to cope with patriarchal authorities in their immigrant households and their community. According to her, the shift of socio-economic status of immigrant women and men generated gender conflicts in the Vietnamese households. For example, women's employment reduced their duties of domestic work, and it generated quarrels over housework between spouses in the Vietnamese households. In this situation, informal Vietnamese immigrant women's groups supported troubled women when there were disputes in the Vietnamese immigrant households. However, those groups helped Vietnamese women only when the problems were not matters violating Vietnamese traditional norms. For example, they were unwilling to help women who were engaging in extra-marital affairs, thus damaging the family unit.

In short, immigrant women's employment and its consequence for gender relations in the family cannot be explained in a simplified way. Many feminist researchers have noted that immigrant women's employment has increased their

bargaining power in the home leading to more egalitarian gender relations. However, they have also acknowledged that racist discrimination in the larger society, the economic stability of the family unit as a prioritized agenda for immigrant households, and the extent of patriarchal ideology existing in the family have to be considered to explain the gains and losses of immigrant women in their new social setting.

### **iii) Immigrant Women and the Community**

Bannerji (1999) argues that the formation of ethnic communities in Canada has been brought about in “othering” by the racist Canadian social structure, creating a divide between people who are supposed to be true Canadians and others. At the same time, ethnic communities are constructed as a defensive move against the Canadian racist social system. In this process of the formation of an ethnic community in response to the demands of a specific population, an ethnic traditional culture which is hierarchical and patriarchal has been constructed to ideologically legitimize itself. Also, the patriarchal practices within the community have often not been criticized as they are supposed to be a “different culture.”

Needless to say the notion of a traditional community rests explicitly on patriarchy and on severely gendered social organization and ideology. These are legitimated as an essence of the identity of these communities. This traditional (patriarchal) identity, then, is equally the result of an othering from powerful outside forces and an internalized Orientalism and a gendered class organization. (p.264)

Coming from the colonized countries and entering the West, communities formed by the immigrants characterize themselves as “traditional,” asserting cultural autonomy and adopting the colonial discourse of difference and diversity in Canadian multicultural policy. Bannaeji refers to those communities as “mini-cultural nationalities.” Therefore, the communities, or mini-cultural nationalities and the “othering” of the Canadian state through Canadian multicultural policy both obscure and maintain the oppressive social relations based on gender, race, and class within and outside these communities (pp. 271-272). Bannaeji offers a clear blueprint of perceptions of ethnic communities to be explained in the context of internal and external forces, such as patriarchal ideology and conservative internal cultural practices, and the isolation and exclusion of immigrants in society by “othering” in the Canadian racist social structure. In this social context, the roles of ethnic communities including associations, businesses, and religious organizations are important in that they offer support networks for immigrants, especially for newcomers, to get useful information regarding employment and other resources (Hondagneu-sotelo 1992, Jones-Correa 2000, Tastsoglou 1997). Hondagneu-sotelo (1992) criticized the focus on immigrant households in previous migration studies which overlooked the importance of immigrant social networks to explain social relations immigrant women and men have built after migration. Moreover, she

pointed out that immigrants actively build social networks to reduce costs of employment research and other resources. In this process, immigrant women and men have sometimes engaged in different social networks (p.396).

In her study of Greek immigrant women in Ontario, Tastsoglou (1997) presented the complex role of the Greek ethnic community in the context of internal and external forces. The community was a source of patriarchal practices as well as a source of social networks for Greek immigrants.

Similarly, the Greek ethnic community, although experienced as restrictive and oppressive, especially by the most vulnerable working-class women, provided women employment and facilitated settlement in Canada... [T]he Greek community networks and Greek ethnic economy were instrumental in providing the immigrant families with immediate relief upon arrival. These networks also provided teaching, social work and interpretative and administrative jobs...(p.139)

In researching Latin American Immigrants in New York, Jones-Correa (2000) found out that ethnic organizations are important for male immigrants to regain social status they had in the origin country, while they suffer the decline of their social and economic status in the receiving country.

Because of the role ethnic institutions play for men in validating their social status, and because this social status is tied to the home country, men are generally not interested in seeing ethnic institutions shift their orientations towards the receiving country... Leadership positions in ethnic institutions are almost entirely filled by men and male leaders... for their positions of status in the immigrant community. (pp. 364-365)

In her research on South Asian immigrant women in Halifax, Ralston (1988)

demonstrates that there exist gender divided roles in the family and community.

Immigrant women are expected to transmit the culture and language to the second generation, and roles of mother and wife are practiced in the ethnic communities.

Immigrant women are expected to cook traditional food for ethnic events, while men hold high positions within ethnic and religious organizations.

The women reconstructed very forcibly through their activities the culturally specific gender roles of wives and mothers who cook and nurture the men and the children, and take responsibility for educating the youth in the cultural tradition... Not only were women and men separated in religious gatherings and in many social gatherings, but women occupied a position of inferiority in that men were usually the office-bearers and leaders of the organizations...[W]omen are expected to transmit the gender roles and relations of the home culture to the second-generation Canadian-born or immigrant children. Participation in religious and cultural organizations is a major means fulfilling these expectations. (pp. 76-77)

Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003) present an important aspect of immigrant women and community activism. In their study on community development by immigrant women in the Canadian Maritimes, Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003) argued that even though immigrant women started community organizing in and outside of the ethnic communities individually and for personal reasons, their long-term involvement and active participation have contributed to community development and brought about social change (p.220). For example, in their study, one of the “ethnic reasons” that immigrant women participate in groups and

community activities is to establish their ethnic identity and hand it down to their children. One of the participants started language classes for their children, and she enlarged her activities to include programs for immigrant women's isolation and seniors in the community.

Women like her may start their activities by trying to cater to immediate personal needs, yet the impact of the programs they assist in may be felt by the entire ethnic community and the larger Canadian society (e.g. language programs, seniors programs, daycares). (p. 223)

Ethnic communities are generally considered to be groups where people identify themselves as the same or similar in terms of ethnic backgrounds based on their culture, nationality, and religion, etc. However, anti-racist feminists claim that ethnic communities have to be understood in the full context of their political and social meanings in the scope of a racist, capitalist, and patriarchal system inside and outside of those communities. Through this, we can also attempt to explain the gender power relations within ethnic communities regarding gender unequal relations, such as immigrant women's responsibilities to practice and pass on ethnic culture and traditions within the community and the family. However, as the research by Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003) pointed out, immigrant women do not just take passive roles in the community, but develop their activism resulting in social change.

#### **iv) Korean Immigrant Families in North America**

Many feminists have recognized that women's situations often differ from one



another due to their race, ethnicity and class (Ng. 1993, Bannerji, 2000, hooks, 2001).

Moreover, those social factors are shaped depending on where women are situated geographically. For example, Korean immigrants' ethnicity did not affect their lives in Korea because they were situated in their home country, which is relatively homogeneous compared to Canada. However, with their immigration to a multicultural and multiracial country, such as the United States or Canada, their ethnicity became an important social factor to shape their lives as they are now identified as Korean immigrant women.

Compared with the extensive research on the Korean immigrant family which has introduced the lived experience of Korean immigrant women and men in the United States, it is difficult to find any such research on the Korean immigrant family in Canada. Some of the American research has explored gender power relations in the Korean households after they migrated to the USA.

Moon (2003) and Kim (2006) especially focused on the change of Korean women's role as a mother after immigration in their studies. Moon (2003) focused on a comparison of the mothering between two different generations of Korean immigrant women in New York State. One of the differences found is that while the mothering of the older generation Korean immigrant women has been isolated and privatized without any social networks such as extended family members, the younger

generation Korean immigrant women could share the mothering with their extended family members, such as their own mothers or mothers-in-law. As older generation Korean women were detached from extended family by immigration, they were released from patriarchal duties such as the duty of a daughter in-law to take care of her in-law family. However, they had to face marital conflicts over sharing mothering without support from outside of the family (p.853).

On the contrary, the younger generation Korean immigrant women had to deal with the patriarchal attitudes of mothers in-law even though they received much assistance with actual mothering. Moreover, facing job segregation due to racism and sexism in the workplace, the Korean immigrant women were willing to withdraw from their careers and take over mothering (p.856).

Kim (2006) did research on the changes of mothering in Korean immigrant families in Philadelphia, USA. Using the qualitative method based on the qualitative interview method, she interviewed 22 Korean immigrant working class women. In their findings, they presented data on Korean immigrant women, who had lived in the USA for less than 10 years and work outside for the family's economic stability. The change of being a working mother required them to share the housework with other family members, including their children. Therefore, the heavy weight of mothering in Korea as a full-time housewife has been reduced while the children are treated as

“small adults.” On the other hand, Korean immigrant women who have lived in the USA longer than 10 years have a long-term goal, which is their children’s success in the United States. They utilize their time and money to support their children’s education.

Similar to the focus of Lim’s research introduced above, Min’s study (2001) presents the changes of gender relations and its effect on conjugal relations in the Korean immigrant family. The research is conducted in New York City with 297 Korean immigrant women by a telephone survey, and 31 married and divorced women and men by in-depth interview. In the findings, Min noticed that the necessity of women’s employment for economic stability has an effect on challenges regarding unequal gender relations in the Korean immigrant households. Korean immigrant women demanded more egalitarian gender relations in the family (p.312). They also realized that their career is as important as their gender role as a mother and wife at home. However, holding a high level of patriarchal ideology based on Confucianism in Korea, there emerged conjugal conflicts in those households (p.317).

Min (1989) also did research on the role of Korean churches for Korean immigrant communities in the United States. According to Min, Korean churches in the United States provide “fellowship for Korean immigrants,” maintain “the Korean cultural tradition, and offer social services and social status for Korean immigrants”

(pp. 1371-1372). Especially, as their social and economic status declines as a result of immigration, most male Korean immigrants attempt to regain their social positions within Korean churches (p.1390).

There are different ways that immigrant women experience unequal gender relations, and it depends on where they are situated in society. That is, their economic position in the market place, social status as “immigrants,” cultural differences, and the priority of family survival in a new setting affect their position in that family and society. Feminist research endeavours to reveal different women’s life experiences inside and outside of the family in specific social contexts, and to realistically reflect the challenges these women face. This research is an attempt to explore Korean immigrant women’s life experiences of negotiation and challenge regarding gender relations in their families, work and community in the Canadian social structure. As each element of feminist research represents, women’s lived experience are complicated and cannot be interpreted thoroughly from a simple proposition such as women’s economic independence leading to equal gender relations in the family. To explain gender relations in the family, one must consider that there are internal factors, such as women’s employment and patriarchal ideology within the family and external factors, such as racism and capitalism that condone and facilitate elements of gender inequality.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **1. The Standpoint of Women**

Feminist research has revealed diverse aspects of women's lives. As was discussed in the literature review of the previous chapter, feminist researchers use various methodologies, as necessitated by their research projects. Feminist research is distinguished by its epistemology from the conventional sociological research (Hesse-Biber and Leckenby 2004). One characteristic of feminist research is that it is oriented toward changing women's oppressive reality in practical ways. Christiansen-Ruffman (2007) argues that, "A feminist "change orientation" is needed to end the discrimination against women which persists in every institution of society in almost every society in the world (p.114)."

Emphasizing women's experiences as the main source of feminist knowledge, feminist research aims to reveal women's life experiences from their point of view. Harding (1987) argues that scientific knowledge generated by white middle-class men creates partial understandings of social life, and defines what has to be done in reality.

However, feminist research challenges the conventional scientific knowledge of reality, and provides social understandings starting from women's own experiences:

One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested. (p.7)

Stanley and Wise (1990) explain that women's different experiences are the basis of feminist knowledge, given the assumption that women share the common experience of oppression by naming. Denying that there exists a single 'women's oppression', which in the past has represented only the experiences of mainstream white, privileged, middle-class women (p.22), they emphasize that we should admit that there are different standpoints of women, since women are situated in different social contexts due to race, class, sexuality, and so on:

We are driven to recognise the existence of not only 'a' feminist standpoint but also those of black women, working-class women, lesbian women, and other 'minority' women, and also those women who combine these oppressions. Once we admit the existence of feminist *standpoints* there can be no a priori reason for placing these in any kind of a hierarchy; each has *epistemological* validity because each has *ontological* validity. Here we have contextually grounded *truths*." (p.28)

Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that women's real experiences in society have been silenced in a male-dominated social structure and that women have been represented by men. Therefore, there is distinction between women's real experiences and the way they are socially presented:

The forms of thought, the means of expression, that we had available to use to formulate our experience were made or controlled by men. From that center women appeared as objects (p.50).

Centering the standpoint of women in a social inquiry, Smith argues that a sociology for women has to begin with the women's standpoint and what they experience socially and physically in their everyday life. From the standpoint of women, women become not mere objects of a "ruling apparatus," including the established sociology, but the subjects of what they know (p.88).

Smith also argues that when we talk about the standpoint of women, it does not mean only a general viewpoint of women. It is a perspective on the social organization where oppressive relations have been established, and it is based on the experience of actual women living in the everyday world. As a sociological researcher places the experience of women in society in the center of inquiry, she or he endeavors to reveal the mechanism of oppression in social structures and social relations. Therefore, in "a sociology for women," women are no longer objects to be explained, but subjects who reveal oppressive social relations through their own experiences.

The knower who is construed in the sociological texts of a sociology for women is she whose grasp of the world from where she stands is enlarged thereby. For actual subjects situated in the actualities of their everyday worlds, a sociology for women offers an understanding of how those worlds are organized and determined by social relations immanent in and extending beyond them (p.106)

While the feminist methodological approach has centered women's experiences in the research, feminists have argued that we need to understand different women's experiences from their points of view. To understand different women's experiences, feminist researchers argue that we have to understand the mechanism of oppression in different women's specific social situations and relations due to different social factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class (Christiansen-Ruffman 2007, DeVault, 1995, Marx 2000, Ng 1981, Riessman 1987, Tastsoglou, 1997). DeVault (1995) stated that social scientists who have criticized the objectivism in the research have paid attention to social relations which underlined the structural inequality due to different social factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class and the approach has brought positive effects.

The objectivity of science has, however, been challenged in recent years.... These critics assert that social position matters in the constitution and application of scientific knowledge; their writings are generating increasing interest in the significance for scientific work of the structured inequalities of racial-ethnic positions and cultures, as well as those associated with gender, sexuality, and social class... [A]ttention to racial-ethnic dimensions of social organization will produce a more complete and accurate science. (p.612)

In a similar perspective to Smith's, Ng (1981) emphasizes that when social scientists conduct research on immigrant women in Canada, the task is to reveal social relations in the experiences of these women from their own perspective, and not just



to describe their situations as social phenomena. That is, when we conduct research on immigrant women, their situations due to their ethnicity and gender have to be considered as socially constructed. Being an “immigrant” as well as “woman” is practiced every day by immigrant women (p.100). According to Ng, based on the perspective of immigrant women and their experiences, a researcher can understand the impact of social relations and organizations in Canadian society, embedded in the immigrant women’s everyday life.

Our task is not simply to describe, define and package social phenomena into neat conceptual categories, which are then used in theorizing. It is aimed at discovering the social relations and processes which generate the specific character of the phenomena that we make the subject of inquiry.” (p.106)

Listening to Korean immigrant women’s lived experiences from their own standpoint, this research tries to understand the social relations that Korean women experience in Canadian social organizations, where these women live their everyday lives. That is, this research tries to understand the Korean immigrant women’s experiences, not in terms of personal difficulties, but in terms of unequal or discriminative social relations that have been formed and practiced because of Korean immigrant women’s race/ethnicity, gender, and class in the Canadian social context.

## **2. Qualitative Feminist Method: Open-Ended Interviewing**

This research adopts Smith’s concepts of the standpoint of women, in that it is

based on the knowledge of Korean immigrant women's life experiences from where they stand in their everyday world, and it hopes to explore the mechanisms of oppression in Canadian social system. To reveal and understand these experiences, this research uses a qualitative method- a semi-structured interview method<sup>6</sup> with open-ended questions.

Many feminist researchers have criticized conventional sociological research in terms of its emphases on objectivity of the research environment and findings, a detachment between the researcher and participants, and a preference for collecting and analyzing numbers in the research process (DeVault, 1995, Mies 1981, Harding 1987, Sharlene et al., 2004). According to Sharlene, et al (2004), the epistemological positions of the conventional sociological research guided by positivism and androcentricism has been criticized by feminist researchers in that it overemphasizes objectivity and detachment between a researcher and the informants of a social research. Moreover, they point out that the history of science shows male dominant biases such as masculinity associated with objectivity (pp.5-7).

In addition, feminists argue that conventional sociological research methods ignore that the power relationship between the researcher and participants in the field

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<sup>6</sup> According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), there are many ways to define or distinguish qualitative interview methods. In general, the qualitative interview can be shaped as two different formats. One is an unstructured format which a researcher introduces the subject for the discussion with few detailed questions that interviewees lead the conversation. The other is a semi-structured for format which a researcher guides the interview with the specific questions. Qualitative interviews vary between more or less structured between the two formats (p.5).

is unavoidable by nature; therefore, the ideal of objectivity and a value-neutral researcher is not realistic (Lyons and Chipperfield 2000, Marx, 2000, Ribbens 1989). On the other hand, feminist research tries to build an interactive relationship between a researcher and the participant, creating an open environment which facilitates subjects speaking for themselves (Mies 1981, Harding 1987, Reinharz 1992, Ribbens 1989, Smith 2000).

As feminist researchers have been aware of the different power relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee, some feminists emphasize that if a feminist researcher could build a friendship or have a closer relationship with the interviewee, the difference between them due to different cultural, racial and class backgrounds would be reduced in feminist research.

Oakley (1981) demonstrates that one characteristic of the in-depth interview method is building a rapport between a researcher and the participant. Building a rapport is important because if an interviewer does not show any confidence in the first interview, it is difficult to conduct repeated interviews. In addition, importantly, an interviewer and interviewees cannot be detached from each other as social members. According to her, the active participation of interviewees is the result of a non-hierarchical relationship, encouraging interviewees to regard the researcher as “a friend rather than as a data-gatherer.”

However, Lyons and Chipperfield (2000) raise questions on building rapport between a researcher and the participants. According to them, building a rapport leaves out the interviewee's own understanding in the interview setting and it might create an unnatural interview environment by ignoring actual power relationships between them. Lyons and Chipperfield point out that many feminist research outcomes show the differences among women due to structured inequalities by social factors such as race, class, sexuality, and culture:

And more recently, attention has focused on the ways in which differences between women may impinge upon the interview outcome. These studies show not only that women do not share the same experiences and interests, but also that the structural inequalities that divide women can act as powerful barriers in the interviewer's attempts to establish rapport (Stacey, 1988; Ribbens, 1989). Such barriers may include race and ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age and status. (p.36)

Lyons and Chipperfield (2000) argue that both an interviewer and interviewee can exert power in an interview setting. An interviewer is apt to exploit interviewees in the friendly interview environment in that it permits limitless interviewee's self-exposure and creates greater expectation from the interview. On the other hand, an interviewee can control an interview by withholding information and changing their stories (pp.39-40).

Ribbens (1989) argues that an interviewer has to be informed regarding her or his role in the interview setting, and must realize the effect of that role on the

interview. A certain power relationship and cultural differences between an interviewer and the interviewees exist when they set up the interviewing situation.

Interviewers have to be aware of their own personal dynamics, to avoid projections and to respond to both what the interviewee says and what lies behind it... Particular social characteristics imply different cultural backgrounds as well as a different power relationship within the interview itself. (p.581)

Moreover, there may exist a lack of understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee, due to differences of class, race, and culture. Harding (1987) recognizes the visibility of the researcher in the process of research as one of distinctive features of feminist research. Revealing the researcher's social position by presenting the researcher's assumptions and beliefs of race, class, culture in the process of research, the researcher comes to be situated as an individual who has her/his own interests not as "an invisible, anonymous voice of authority (Harding, 1987, p.9)." In addition, the narrators of the interviewees are apt to shorten the narratives of the interviewees to "be readable" (Riessman 1987, p.189). While analyzing narratives of the participants, I realized how much power I have over their statements. Even though attempts were made not to abridge their life stories, it was impossible due to the requirement that the narratives must be contained in a research paper.

It is assumed by some feminist researchers that interviewing women by women is better to articulate women's oppressive experience as they share the same

gender<sup>7</sup>. However, even though I shared the same gender and ethnic background with my interviewees, I came to realize how different I am from them, and how different they are from each other due to variations of class and generation. When I started this research, I was an international student. I shared Korean immigrant women's experiences mostly when they talked about what it would be like to be a woman in Korea, and had similar experiences of racial discriminations such as being judged by poor English and asked "Where are you from?", and further, "Are you Chinese?", assuming all Asians in Halifax are Chinese. These comments always made me feel like an outsider in Canada.

Having the same ethnicity and gender certainly helped me to understand their experiences. However, I could not share their experiences as a Korean Canadian and immigrant woman in Canada as I was still a foreign student in Canada. Moreover, I had to admit that there was a generational gap between them and me, in that we

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Kremer (1990) argues that feminist research must be conducted for women and by women. Rejecting men doing feminist research, she argues, "If the issue of feminism is transcendence for women, the right to freely define the world through women's knowledge of it, then the consideration of what is for women must be left to women... And where ambiguities arise- in research concerning Chicano women's health needs, for example, would a Chicano man perhaps be preferable to a white woman? – the real concern should be why there aren't more Chicano women in a position to do the work (p. 465)." On the other hand, Harding (1987) argues that if men have feminist perspectives, they can do feminist research too. According to Harding, it is not gender, which is important doing feminist research but the feminist epistemological and methodological approach to design feminist research. (pp.11-12)

experienced a different social context in Korea. For example, some older participants assume that married women in Korea still do not have to work outside of the family, which has changed as dual incomes have become necessary and desirable because of the present high standard of living in Korea.

DeVault (1995) stated that one disadvantage of speaking with outsiders is that sometimes truths may not be revealed as they keep silent about their differences. For example, "If ethnicity is not made explicit, for example, outsider listeners may miss its significance entirely... In some situations, leaving truths unspoken may be understood as a kind of resistance to outsiders' unwelcome intrusions." (p.626). I was confident that I would be somewhat welcomed because we shared the same ethnicity. In some ways, I felt I was one of them and spoke about similar experiences. However, I did not have a full understanding of what it would be like to live in Canadian society, not as an international student who would eventually leave the country. Now that I have become a permanent resident in Canada while working on this research, their daily issues became mine and I could understand and reflect on their experiences better than previously.

Whenever I encountered racist attitudes, I would comfort and counsel myself to be patient because I was going back to Korea and I would not be treated like a minority then. However, as I became a Korean-Canadian, racial discrimination

became not temporary, but an everyday matter to me as it is to them. Therefore, my understanding of racism in Canada has deepened and that helped me understand their lived experiences better. However, I am still an outsider in the Korean community as I am married to a Canadian. Korean immigrants see me as different in some ways. I agree with McCormack (1989) that we are both insiders and outsiders when we interconnect ourselves with other people as a researcher, writer, social policy maker and so on (p.13). There is no clear border between insiders and outsiders, as we share some issues and sometimes remain as strangers.

It is argued that the practice of listening and giving women their real voices can help them to articulate hidden oppressive experiences, raise women's collective consciousness, and eventually result in social changes. Then the feminist methodological approach becomes practical in helping to change women's oppressive lives (Mies 1981, Hesse-Biber and Leckenby 2004). Characterizing some of the features of qualitative feminist methods, Hesse-Bibber and Leckenby (2004) describe the important aspect of listening in the process of feminist research. Not only do open-ended questions lead to in-depth interviews between the interviewer and an interviewee, but they also require the interviewer to be an attentive listener in the process of the interview, in order to discern the subtleties and nuances within the dialogues of the interviewees.



These open-ended questions are the grounding point, but inherently the interviewer must listen during the interview to clues and openings that can be pursued further. The interviewer is not a passive receiver of the information, but rather an active participant in the interview process... Listening is an active process for these researchers, not just during the analysis stages of research but also during the collection process, often allowing them to see what might be hidden and silenced through traditional means of data collection. (pp. 216-217)

In conducting this research on Korean immigrant women in Halifax, a qualitative interview method was particularly useful to reveal hidden life experiences. Using an in-depth interview focused on open-ended questions, the researcher believes that listening to Korean immigrant women's experience from their perspective sheds light on the invisible aspects of these women's lived experiences. These aspects include important social and political issues of Korean immigrant women, social relations in their everyday world, and the locus of oppression they experience in Canada.

Debates and concerns among feminist researchers on the power relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee, building a rapport, and a researcher's power in the process of analysis and writing guided me throughout the process. Even though a qualitative interview method would give a better tool, employing open-ended questions, a researcher has to be conscious of differences between her/him and the participants due to different social structures and social relations, such as race,

class, and so on.

As DeVault (1995) suggested, building a rapport is not enough and we need to move beyond a debate on insiders or outsiders. This research is a feminist research project which may challenge the status quo of social structures, that is, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy, by providing practical knowledge based on women's lived experiences. In addition, this researcher believes a qualitative interview method guided by a feminist methodological approach would better reflect the realities of Korean immigrant women.

All of us are both; we are insiders and outsiders, shifting back and forth between these two modes of cognition just as, on another level, we involve ourselves in some issues and remain apart and satisfied to observe others. At the same time we are capable of reflecting on ourselves, correcting our own errors, recognizing our own biases, and selecting future directions. What we do then in our professional roles in the sciences is a more reflexive and systematic version of processes which go on normally and naturally throughout our lives. (McCormack, 1989, pp.13-14)

### **3. Description of Research**

In conducting this research on Korean immigrant women in Halifax, a qualitative interview method is used to explore their hidden life experiences. Korean immigrant women's voices have long been silenced. Employing in-depth interviews in this research is an attempt to make these voices heard in Canadian society.

The main purpose of the interview is to explore the gender relations between

Korean immigrant couples in the family and their community. The interview questions are constructed to discern any significant changes of gender relations within the family units as compared to their relations in Korea, especially when their economic and social situations are altered by migrating to Canada.

There are four sections of open-ended questions. First, participants are questioned about their backgrounds regarding marriage, family, jobs, and immigration. Second, interviewees are asked how they manage housework, income, and important decisions among family members, and if they have experienced any changes regarding those issues, compared to their time in Korea. Third, the participants are asked about their social circles and participation in the Korean community, such as the Korean churches and Korean Association, to explore their societal networking and their gender roles within the Korean community. They are also asked more specifically if they have experienced any racial discrimination, and if they feel they have been treated equitably in terms of employment and settling in Halifax. Finally, there were open-ended questions regarding their satisfaction with immigration and their broader identity changes in Canada.

Interview participants are selected by individual contact. According to the Korean Association of Nova Scotia, Korean immigrants began settling in Halifax in the 1960's, and there are now approximately 170 Korean immigrant households in the

province. According to census figures, there are 795 Korean immigrants in Nova Scotia, and 620 live in Halifax. The urban population of males and females are approximately equal, with 305 Korean male immigrants and 310 Korean females in Halifax (Statistics Canada 2006).

This in-depth research was conducted with nine Korean immigrant women in Halifax. These first generation immigrant participants were selected through snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted in their homes or workplaces, and the researcher's home, and they were carried out in Korean and/or English as each participant wished. Interviews done in Korean were translated into English by the researcher, whose first language is Korean.

The interview transcripts were carefully coded and analyzed according to the main themes, such as women's economic participation and its effect on gender relations, gender division of labour and income management, and decision-making systems for family matters. Gender power relations and patriarchal attitudes in the community and their effects on relations in the family were also explored.

Each participant was interviewed for 60 to 90 minutes and in multiple sessions, and all interviews were recorded by audiotape. The interview setting adopted a semi-structured interview guideline, with open-ended questions designed by the researcher to promote open discussion regarding the life experiences of Korean immigrant

women. The interviews were reviewed with participants for any corrections or changes.

#### **4. Ethical Considerations**

Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time from this study. Confidentiality of the participants was significant in this research, because of the nature of the qualitative interview method and the subject matter that this research will adopt. This researcher was aware of the fact that the interviews on gender relations in the family and the ethnic community may be taken as an intrusion into their private sphere. Therefore, the participants were informed about the purpose of this research and asked to sign a consent form in which the confidentiality of the participation material used in this study was assured.

The interview audiotapes containing participants' information for this research were used only for this study and will be destroyed completely if they wish after they are transcribed. Participants were given opportunities to correct and alter their statements as part of the interview review process. In addition, the research outcome will be provided to participants when requested.

#### **5. Introduction of the Participants**

There are nine participants in this research. The names are anonymous, and

they are introduced below with pseudonyms. In Korean culture, the older generation's first name is not used by younger generations. Therefore, this research used Korean last names in a polite way following Korean culture. Revealing their income levels is a sensitive matter in Korean culture. Therefore, their standard of living is measured by their careers and property. Middle class status indicates that they have a high standard of living in Canada and lower middle class is to be said below middle class level but higher than working class. Three out of nine Korean immigrant women are in their 60s, three in their 50s, and three in their 40s. Since revealing individual age might disclose their identities, this is avoided. The careers of some participants are discussed in other chapters, but there are no indications of specific employment in connection to interviewees.

Ms. Lee got married in Korea. Ms. Lee as well as her husband graduated from one of the leading universities in Korea. After graduation, she started her career. Ms. Lee practiced her occupation until she came to Canada in 1967. Ms. Lee worked outside of the family in Canada. However, she quit her job and took care of her young children in the home. Ms. Lee's family maintains a middle class status in Canada as they had in Korea.

Ms. Kim came to Canada in 1967 by herself as a skilled worker. She met her husband in the workplace. Ms. Kim as well as her husband graduated from a

university in Korea. Ms. Kim practiced her profession until she retired in Canada. Ms. Kim's family with two income earners has attained a middle class status in Canada.

Ms. Shin also came to Canada as a skilled worker in 1970, and met her husband in the workplace in Canada. Ms. Shin had a university degree from Korea. She and her husband have professional jobs and their family status is middle class.

Ms. Kang's family came to Canada in 1996. Ms. Kang graduated from university and had a career until she got married in Korea. Ms. Kang restarted her employment while they were settling in Halifax. Ms. Kang still works outside of the family. With two income earners, they maintain a lower middle class status in Halifax.

Ms. Yun and her family migrated to Canada in 1996. Ms. Yun's family worked in a family business owned by her in-laws, and she also took responsibility for housework and childcare while they were living with her in-law family. When Ms. Yun's family settled down in Halifax, they started a small business and she also started her profession. Her family is considered working class in Halifax.

Ms. Choi's family came to Canada in 1999. Ms. Choi and her husband have university degrees from Korea. Ms. Choi had a professional job, but quit it when she had a baby and stayed home as a full-time housewife. When they came to Halifax, she and her husband started a small business and have run it until now. They are lower middle class, as they were in Korea.

Ms. Park came to Canada in 2002 with her family. Ms. Park as well as her husband got a bachelor degree in Korea and she had a job until she got married. Ms. Park and her husband have run a small business in Halifax since they came to Canada. Their standard of living is working class.

Ms. Song came to Canada in 1996. Ms. Song graduated from university and had a professional job in Korea. When Ms. Song got married, she stayed at home as a full-time housewife. Ms. Song does not work in Halifax, and takes responsibility for housework and childcare. Their living standard is middle class.

Ms. Han's family migrated to Canada in 1996. Ms. Han graduated from high school and got a job before getting married in Korea. When they came to Halifax, they started a family business. Their standard of living is lower middle class.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Patriarchal Gender Relations in Korea**

#### **1. Korean Patriarchal Ideology: Confucianism**

To understand the changes and challenges of gender relations in the Korean immigrant family caused by immigration, it is crucial to understand the traditional patriarchal gender relations that the Korean family had in Korea. Strong patriarchal gender relations in Korea originated from Confucian philosophy, which was adopted from China during the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910) as the Korean social norm (Lim 1997).

Modernization and industrialization since the 1960s have led to the rise of the nuclear family and women's employment in Korea. Even though many civil rights groups and the women's movement have consistently challenged the patriarchal ideology originated from Confucianism inside and outside the home, the changes are slow, and strong patriarchal gender relations due to Confucianism have been practiced consistently over time (Kim and Hurh 1988, Lim 1997, Min 2001).

Some gender oppressive practices advocated by Confucianism are as follows. Men are expected to be the breadwinner in the family; women are supposed to take responsibility for housework and serve their husbands and husbands' families. In addition, the education of children is regarded one of the most important

responsibilities for married women. Their success in life is often measured by the success of their husband and children. That is, their goals are attained as wives and mothers. As Kim (2006) explains one of the gender oppressive principles in

#### Confucianism:

Chosun doctrines required a woman to abide by the 'rule of three obediences': subordination to (1) her father before marriage, (2) her husband after marriage, and (3) her son(s) once she is widowed (Cho 1988). Such a Chosun system of male family headship has persisted to the present day despite the countervailing demands of industrialization and of women's movements. (p.523)

The values and beliefs of Confucianism in Korean society have been inherited in the traditional culture and have guided Korean social norms. Some Confucian practices have enforced male superiority in Korean society while they have encouraged Korean women to take responsibility for the family. As Choi Caruso (2005) states:

The social position of Korean men under traditional Confucianism is one of being superior to women. Social and political participation and institutional support for Korean women were limited under traditional Confucian practice... In Korean society, women are honoured for their dedication and self-sacrifice by raising children and serving the family. Self-sacrifice and marriage were the primary means of survival for women in traditional Korean society. (p.73)

The traditional patriarchal gender relations imposed on contemporary married women a norm to be good wives and mothers.<sup>8</sup> While gender segregation in the labour force

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<sup>8</sup> An interesting aspect of Korean women's economic participation is its occurrence by age group. There was a dramatic decrease in women's economic participation during their marriage and infant

persists, this norm has discouraged women from keeping their jobs after marriage. As

Kim and Hurh(1988) states,

The dominant pattern in the Korean labor market is still for female workers to leave their jobs after marriage. Those women who are continuously employed after marriage experience severe discrimination in wages, promotion and other opportunities and consequently are excluded from responsible positions... this forces them to stay at home as full-time housewives. (pp.152-153)

Most participants in this research had a university degree and employment before they got married. Ms. Song was a nurse but quit her job and stayed home after marriage. Her husband was able to provide enough income for the family; therefore, he did not want her to work outside. “I liked working but my husband did not like me to work outside. We lived next door to my parent in-laws. I took care of my mother in-law until she passed away” (Ms. Song).

Ms. Kang had a job before marriage. However, when she had to move to another city to settle down for her husband’s employment, she quit the job. Ms. Kang

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(child) care years (ages twenty-five to twenty-nine). In fact, women’s careers are often interrupted in their middle and late twenties for marriage and childcare (Kwon and Park, 2003, p.245). According to Statistics Canada, 58% of Canadian women were in the paid workforce in 2004, up from 42% in 1976. The proportion of employed men actually fell during this period, from 73% to 68%. As a result, women accounted for 47% of the employed workforce in 2004, up from 37% in 1976. On the other hand, according to Statistics of Korea, 50% of Korean women are in the labour force while Korean men participate in the paid work force up to 78% (2008). Women’s economic participation in the both countries has increased over time. However, 9 out of 10 Korean men in their 30s participate in the paid work force. On the other hand, only 5 out of 10 Korean women in their 30s work outside the family. Korean women’s economic participation drops because of marriage and children (2004).

explains that she did not have time to restart her employment as she then had her first child: “I worked for three years teaching children drawing. I loved it but as I got married and moved to Seoul, I couldn’t have time to work outside.” As Ms. Kang’s main role after she got married was managing the family and her income was secondary, even though she liked her job, she did not have time to go back to teaching.

Ms. Park graduated from university and got a job in Korea. However, she quit her job after marriage and accepted her ‘moral duty’ as a full-time housewife and mother. Her husband was the main breadwinner and the children were busy studying for university entrance exams while she stayed at home as a full-time housewife. Ms. Park says,

Mom does everything for their children in Korea. Daddy works so hard that mom prepares and serves from his suits to foods. Kids also study hard all day and then feel pity for them. In addition, as children have to concentrate on study, you don’t want to disturb them. Thus, mom treats them as a prince and princess and that is the best way mom can do (Ms. Park).

On the other hand, Ms. Choi had kept her job for a while after she got married. However, as her husband had to go abroad for his job, she had to quit her job to go with him. When they came back to Korea, she had a second child and Ms. Choi stopped working outside the home:

I continued working for four and a half years after I got married as we had a helper for housework. However, our kids’ dad was transferred. I couldn’t fill the five year contract with the school I

worked with at that time. As I had a second baby when we came back to Korea, I had to make a decision whether to work or not outside the home. I could not rely on the baby-sitter we had. Thus, I decided to stay home. The principal of the school who offered me a job said, 'you are throwing away a great opportunity because you are so in love with your newborn baby!' It was hard to get a position in a school at that time. I like children. Even though it was hard, I liked teaching (Ms. Choi).

Ms. Choi's case shows that even when a married woman keeps her job, her employment is supposed to be flexible and secondary, so that they are apt to quit their jobs according to the changes in other family members' situations. Even though Ms. Choi had decent employment in Korea, she had to give up her career due to her husband's job situation and the need for child care.

Men in middle class families in Korea want their wives to stay home and take care of the family while they take financial responsibility (Shin and Shin, 1999). At the same time, generally the men avoid any responsibility for household chores and raising children. However, living in an environment of such a strong patriarchal ideology, women in Korea tend to accept it as normal to make the decision to quit their jobs after marriage. When a Korean woman says that she quit her job because her husband does not want her to work, it is by and large perceived not as oppression, but as having the good fortune to meet a competent husband who is able to support his family by himself.

Ms. Park had the typical lifestyle of middle-class wives in Korea. As she quit

her job and dedicated herself for the family as a wife and mother, she spent time with other mothers who are in the same situation, while other family members were working and studying.

Well, I had an easy life in Korea. Normally, Korean moms... they enjoy leisure activities while the husband and kids are out all day. I heard it is different now that a lot of couples both work outside. But my husband could earn the family income by himself in Korea. I did what I enjoyed- exercise or whatever I wanted to learn, and drove with other moms to the suburbs of Seoul to have a nice lunch... Well, it was because I had a long day by myself as my husband went to work at dawn and came back home very late. Staying at home by oneself is the biggest reason to get depression. When my kids went to school, they would come home at night... so the best way to get through a day was doing leisure activities (Ms. Park).

However, when they came to Canada, the core roles of the Korean women as a wife and a mother in a middle-class Korean family changed, corresponding to different social and economic conditions in Halifax. While Korean women in my research quit their job and stayed home in Korea, most participants in the research found a job or started a small business with her husband when they came to Halifax.

## **2. Coming to Canada: The Shift of Social and Economic Status**

Canada has accepted many highly skilled workers from the Third World since the 1960s (Estable, 1987; Stasiulis, 1990). Stasiulis (1990) states,

Since the early 1960s, Canadian immigration policy has sought to recruit Third World immigrants with high levels of education and professional and technical skills, yet has also brought in many less skilled and -educated family members of primarily male immigrants (p.292).

Three Korean immigrant women out of nine participants came to Canada in the late 1960s. All of them were skilled workers such as a nurse and a doctor. They were the few women among the trail-blazers of the new Korean immigrants in Nova Scotia.

There were few well- educated women in Korea in the 1960s. Either they were born into a rich family and privileged to have an education or perhaps they were fortunate to be given a chance to get into a school with hard work. With the high level of patriarchal social norms and the economic hardship after the Korean War (1950-1953), men in Korea were the preferred recipients of higher education and were expected to help the family prosper.

Marriage was supposed to be the main goal of a woman since a certain age was seen as proper for women to get married. When each daughter reached that age, parents would look for the right suitor. Ms. Lee was born into a middle-class and well-educated family. However, she was judged by others for not getting married at the proper age, not for achieving her professional goals:

As my younger sister was about to get married while I was attending a university, people started to gossip that I had a personal problem possibly losing 'my turn' to get married first and still studying. Back then, people had those kinds of thoughts. There were few women who went to university at that time. After graduating from high-school, women were to get married and the best man to marry was a soldier after the Korean War. I had to hurry to get married two years after my graduation, so my younger sister could finally have her turn to get married (Ms. Lee).

Ms. Lee and her husband graduated from university in Korea. Ms. Lee practiced her

profession in Korea for a short time. They came to Canada to receive further job training in the late 1960s. She and her husband planned to go back to Korea after several years' experience in their fields in Canada. However, as her husband had a good contract offer, they decided to stay in Halifax.

Ms. Kim came to Canada as a professional health worker. According to Ms. Kim, a lot of Korean health workers went abroad to fill a labour shortage in western countries in the late 1960s. Some of Ms. Kim's friends went to work abroad and she wanted to have a similar experience as they did. In addition, the wages in Canadian institutions were much higher than those in Korea.

First of all, everybody around me was going abroad to work. I wanted to see how people work in other countries and wanted to learn English. In addition, they offered a lot of money. It could not be compared with the money I earned in Korea. At that time, the wages for health workers in Korea were very low. I also didn't like the Korean social system. You were respected in Korea if you were rich. If I had been born into a rich Korean family, I could live OK in Korea. However, I was one of the Koreans who grew up poor after the Korean War and tried hard to get educated (Ms. Kim).

Ms. Shin came to Canada in the 1970s. She was also a health worker in Korea and worked for a charity. The charity was supported by Christian groups in North America, and had orphanages and a hospital for people with leprosy, which was a common disease in Korea after the war. That experience increased her ambition to study further and help the sick. For her goal, she needed money to study and working abroad was her choice to achieve it.



From 1964 to 1967, I worked for people with leprosy and kids in orphanages. Sometimes, I went to isolated islands to help them out. I should write a book about it. I also worked with mentally challenged people. Then, I made up my mind to study further and work as a public health care worker to help them better. I had to work abroad to make money because I could not afford to study with my low wages in Korea (Ms. Shin).

Ms. Shin applied to US hospitals but could not get a job. Then with the help of her friend who had a Canadian boyfriend, she applied for two positions in Nova Scotia.

Ms. Shin got an offer from both institutions, but it was easy to choose, since only one paid for travel expenses.

According to the participants, the commonality of Korean immigrant people who came here over thirty years ago was that they were all well-educated and skilled workers, such as nurses, doctors and professors.

25 years ago, there were less than 20 Korean households in Halifax. There were very few Korean students either. Then, most Korean people who settled down here had professional jobs such as doctors, nurses, and professors. If a Korean had come to Halifax then without a profession, he or she could not get a job and had to move to Toronto. There were few Koreans in Halifax who had low paying jobs at that time (Ms. Kim).

Canadian immigration acceptance policy has been criticized because of its overly selective bent, and in that vein, skilled workers could easily be accepted at that time according to demands of the Canadian labour market in the late 1960s. Ng (1993) noted,

While Canada's immigration policy has always been racist, in that white English-speaking immigrants are preferred, non-white

immigrants have been allowed to enter the country when there were demands for particular kinds of skills, and as Canada established trading relations with non-European nations... it (the federal government) introduced a “point system” in 1967 as a labour recruitment strategy. Since that time, immigrants have been selected on the basis of points they earn in nine areas such as education, language, and occupations. (pp. 281-282)

Labour shortages in the professional fields opened the door of immigration for Korean people who had higher education and professional jobs in the late 1960s. Three participants in this research, who immigrated as skilled workers in the late 1960s, maintained a middle class status through their professions in Canada.

There has been an increase in the numbers of Korean immigrants in Canada after the Immigration Act was introduced in 1967 based on the “point system”. Many people agree that the “point system” made it easier for people of the Third World to enter Canada as immigrants while white people from certain European countries such as England and the United States were the dominant class of immigrants before the 1967 Immigration Act (Estable 1987; Ng 1993; Arat-Koc 1999). Moreover, as the Korean economy developed, many middle-class families had an opportunity to travel to western countries and they started to contemplate living in North America. With the economic crisis of the late 1990s, many middle-class Korean families have migrated to North America (Kim 2008).

Six Korean immigrant women interviewed came to Canada about ten years

ago. While all Korean women who came to Halifax 30 to 40 years ago in my research had professional jobs when they came to Canada, and two of them came by themselves as skilled workers, the Korean women who came to Halifax in the late 1990's were accepted in Canada as a family member of the main applicant, their husband.

Moreover, in comparison with their economic and social status in Korea where their husbands were white collar workers and the Korean women were all full-time housewives, the Korean immigrant households started small businesses such as laundromats, ethnic grocery stores, or restaurants. Kim (2006) suggested that the Korean immigrant family has experienced downward mobility in their economic and social status and both spouses, in many cases in the USA, have to work outside.

In the U.S. context, Korean immigrants experience downward mobility despite their mostly college-educated, middle class, and professional origins. To compensate for downward mobility, usually both husband and wife must work (p.523).

In my research, the findings suggest a similar pattern, in that Korean immigrant women in Halifax work with their husbands and, in some cases, they have secondary economic activities.

Kyun-Jin Kang, her husband, and their son came to Canada in 1996. The idea of immigration to Canada was suggested by her husband and there was no reason for her to disagree.

It was just the idea of living in a different place. That was all. Our kid was too young to worry about his education while a lot of Korean people come to Canada for the education of their kids. I was not too much into immigration but had no reason to oppose the idea (Ms. Kang).

Her family settled down in Toronto for one year. However, her husband's job search was not progressing, while they were living on the savings that they brought from Korea to pay the rent and other living expenses. After one year, they visited a friend in Halifax and were pleased to find that they could live in a large, clean apartment there, with much less money.

We started our life in a good condominium in Toronto but the expense was too high. We searched for a cheaper apartment but they all seemed to have bugs inside. I thought those cheap apartments were too dirty that I could not live in them. We had to move to a suburb if we wanted a cheap and clean apartment. At that time, I was spoiled. I am willing to live in those cheap and dirty apartments now. Nothing was going right at that time. We spent most of the money we saved in Korea and my husband's job searching was not going well. We needed an alternative. Then, when we visited our friend in Halifax, we found out that we could live in a nice apartment with only 600 dollars! (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Kang's family could well afford their living in Korea when they immigrated to Canada in 1996. Both of them graduated from university, and they could manage their living expenses in Korea with only her husband's income. Her remarks on the cheap apartment in Toronto, how she was not pleased with those places, and how she realizes that she is willing to live in a cheap and dirty apartment now, show that her family's living standard and her perspective on life have changed

over time in the process of immigration and settlement, as their economic situation worsened. With the difficulty of rebuilding the economic stability of the family in the process of settlement, Ms. Kang's family experienced a change of their social and economic status in Canada.

Ms. Yun also came to Canada in 1996. The decision on immigration of Ms. Yun's family was based on several factors. They could not cope economically in Korea, and were negative about the education system for the future of their kids.

Several reasons...We thought that there was no promise for our future in Korea. In the beginning of our business on a poultry farm, we set up a purification system but the government didn't have any knowledge on the system. Therefore, we had little support from the government while having the expensive purification system. We were discouraged by the system as nobody really cared about the importance of purification in poultry farming. Moreover, a good school for my kids was far away from the farm. Some people had two homes, one at their farms and a second near the kids' school. We could not do it because we didn't want to leave the farm worrying about animals during our absence. Even though we left the farm and went a place such as Gang-Nam Gu area for our kids' education, we were not sure if our kids would do much better in their education competing with smart kids from rich families in that area. For several reasons... I feel it was the right decision on immigration at that time. If we were there now, we would suffer from debts, and my kids wouldn't dream about studying science. Here, kids can dream about going to medical school and it depends on their ability not their family background or money. We are ready to support our kids if they want to go to medical school. That is possible in this country (Ms. Yun).

Ms. Yun's statement illustrates that the Korean social system in the course of capitalist development has marginalized and given little opportunity to the rural working class.

This is what forced Yun's family to immigrate to Canada. Ms. Yun saw that her children would not have better opportunities to build and achieve their dreams through the education system in Korea, which is highly competitive. Also children in wealthy families get better education through advanced schooling and private tutoring. Moreover, with little support from the Korean government and low wages, children whose parents can afford their tuition have better opportunity to succeed in this competition. Ms. Yun is satisfied with her decision to come to Canada, because she believes that her children will fare better in the Canadian educational system.

Ms. Choi's family landed in Canada in 1999. Ms. Choi's husband worked for one of the largest corporations in Korea, in which level of competition for advancement is generally very high. As he could not get a promotion after he had stayed for many years with that company, he decided to quit his job. Then Ms. Choi's family had to weigh different options, and immigration to Canada was one of them. When they visited several cities in Canada doing their research for the best place in advance, Ms. Choi favoured Halifax the most.

As my kids' dad said he was going to quit his job, I thought, 'Well, life is short. My husband goes to work watching his kids sleeping and comes home watching them sleeping. He does not know how they grow up. What kind of life is that we have now anyway?' ... After we finished our medical exam for immigration, we had to decide what city we wanted to go to. While my kids' dad wanted to live in Vancouver since he had more opportunities for his business, I insisted on living in Halifax. We were not in a bad situation

economically. I thought money was not the concern for us to immigrate to Canada. It was about having a better life so that he did not have to drink until late night for business matters and we could watch our kids growing up together. What difference would it make if we chose to move to Vancouver, a big city like where we were and not living in Korea? (Ms. Choi)

Ms. Choi and her husband had university degrees, and they were a middle-class family in Korea. Even though the motivation for their decision regarding immigration was economic instability and his position in the company, Korean immigrant families seek better chances for the well-being of the family in terms of making a decision where to settle down. In the case of Ms. Choi's family, Ms. Choi's caregiving role for the family took on the important role of choosing where she felt the family would be better off. This case shows that women's caregiving role brings about positive choices for the family.

The family of Ms. Park immigrated to Canada in 2002, and her husband worked in one of the very large companies in Korea as well. They did not have any economic problems in Korea. However, Ms. Park's extended family in the United States influenced her to consider immigration to North America. Her sister mentioned about the education system in North America, with less stress and less competition for kids compared to that in Korea. At first, her husband did not want to leave Korea. As Ms. Park was determined, he made a trip to Canada and the USA to consider her suggestion. Ms. Park's concern regarding the life of her family in Korea was similar

to that of Ms. Choi. Both women were not satisfied with the Korean economic and social system affecting their family's lifestyle. These generally are their primary concerns as wives and mothers.

You know the Korean education system... My kid is not that competitive and I worried that she would be discouraged by that while living in Korea. I thought if she could do whatever she likes and if the chance was given in other countries, I would immigrate to North America. So...I persuaded my kid's dad (Ms. Park).

Overall, in the case of the Korean women who came to Canada within the last ten years and were housewives in Korea, the decision regarding immigration was based on the job situation of the husband in Korea and concerns about the education of their children. Therefore, family decisions on immigrating to Canada were mostly based on gender roles in the family. Women were regarded as flexible and of secondary importance in the process of immigration, as they did not work outside the home, and the Korean households have traditionally held strong patriarchal gender relationships.

However, the Korean immigrant women's participation in the process of immigration was substantial. Korean immigrant women who participated in this research demonstrated that their beliefs regarding the well-being of the family had influenced the decision of where to immigrate. Ms. Yun is satisfied with where they are now, as she believes that her children have better opportunities in Canada. Ms. Park actually insisted on immigration to Canada as she did not want her children to



live in such a competitive society. Ms. Choi stated that what was important for her family was not wealth, but healthy living for all family members. Taking an important role as wives and mothers, Korean married women considered primarily their children's education and better family relations overall when choosing immigration to Canada.

## Chapter V

### Family and Work: Dwelling in the Intersections of Gender, Race and Class

Kandiyoti demonstrates the dynamics of patriarchy which bring about different outcomes of gender relationships in the process of power negotiations. According to her research, women in different contexts experience different forms of patriarchy, and bargain within it, with differing levels of power:

“Patriarchal bargains” in different social conditions shape gender ideology and gender relationships constraining the range of women’s resistance. They are not immutable but modifiable by social transformation generating renegotiation of gender relations (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.275).

Some of the research on Korean immigrant families with respect to gender relations in North America highlights the important factors, internal and external, toward understanding the changes in gender relations. (Lim 1997, Min 2001, Moon 2003). That is, there are internal and external factors influencing Korean immigrant women to renegotiate unequal gender relations in the family. Some important internal factors are women’s employment, women’s control over income, and women’s determination to change patriarchal attitudes. In addition, external factors also play an important role in assessing how immigration reinforces or weakens the hierarchical gender relations in Korea. These factors can include the existence of social networks, and the presence of extended family members as helpers and/or gatekeepers of the Korean traditional patriarchal practices, the role of the ethnic community, such as

Korean churches and businesses, and concerns of family survival in the capitalist, sexist, and racist Canadian social system. Moreover, the gender and racial discrimination against immigrant women in the labour force and immigrant women's dependency in the family complicate the renegotiation process of gender relations in the Korean immigrant households.

### **1. Korean Immigrant Women's Employment**

Six out of nine Korean immigrant women had a job before they married, and then quit their jobs after marriage in Korea. However, they restarted work outside the home as their family faced economic decline after immigration. As Korean immigrant women in the family became one of the income earners in the household and their working time replaced part of their time for housework, they came to renegotiate gender division of labour in the family, and to challenge patriarchal gender relations in the family. In the findings of her research, Moon suggests that women's employment changes men's patriarchal attitudes in the family. Moon (2003) stated:

The perception of the family's need for a wife's full-time employment can modify a husband's conservative gender ideology and change his attitude toward the gender division of labor. (p.850)

The main roles of Korean women as mothers and wives changed, corresponding to different social and economic conditions their family faced in Halifax. According to the participants in this research, there are some positive changes in some Korean immigrant families as women had to work outside the home. For

example, when Ms. Han's family arrived at Halifax in 1995, they had little idea what business they could get into. Then, Ms. Han volunteered at a restaurant while learning how to manage the business. She started it to learn English; however, Ms. Han learned a great deal about how to manage a restaurant. Then, Ms. Han and her husband started a small restaurant for mostly breakfast and lunch:

For about two months, I volunteered in the kitchen of a restaurant. I told them I would peel all the potatoes they had. That was what I could do. Then, I got to know how to take an order and how to serve food. Cooking was not hard but speaking English was the hardest. I have a good memory. When we started a restaurant, I knew which customer liked what kind of food. Even when there were 15 people lined up, I could tell what each of them liked and didn't like. They liked that I remembered the food they liked. We had the business for two years (Ms. Han).

Ms. Han and her husband bought a motel after two years. The motel has a small restaurant and she manages most aspects of the business, including the restaurant:

Then, we started this motel. It has been several years. My kid's dad and I ran a farm in Korean together for 10 years. Same thing here. Well, my kid's dad set up this business and then I got to know how to run it. After all, I manage 70-80% of this business as we have a restaurant in this motel too. Maintenance such as fixing things and financial management are done by my kid's dad. I am not good at them (Ms. Han).

Ms. Han feels that her husband changed his Korean traditional patriarchal attitude and started doing so-called 'women's work' when they settled in Halifax. The change was brought on by their new family business. Ms. Han's family had no choice but to make use of her husband's labour to profit from their business:

He changed a lot. Men did not do housework in our generation in Korea. In Korea, when I really had to stop cooking because I was too sick, he would rather eat instant noodles than cook rice. I would rather be sick after I cooked rice for him. I haven't seen him washing dishes in Korea. However, he suggested that he would do the dishes in our shop in Halifax. I had tons of other things to do for our business. I rejected his offer to help me first but I could not keep up with the work load. He had done piles of dishes and cleaning the shop. He became a different person. Of course, there was no choice for us. I have worked for everything in our shop because our business is a sort of women's work. However, as I could not handle all the work loads, I had to ask for his help because it was a business not housework (Ms. Han).

As Ms. Han took an important role in their family business, Ms. Han and her husband needed to renegotiate the gender division of labour in their family. Her husband not only does the dishes in the business, but takes care of housework, doing laundry and vacuuming for the family:

He helps me a lot in the business and in the house. We help each other. He is completely changed. I heard young people in Korea have changed, so that men do housework too. Nevertheless, I could not even dream of it in Korea. If his mother saw him doing woman's work, I would be...(simulates hand cutting her throat). Well, she would understand it, as his son is doing it as part of the business (Ms. Han).

Ms. Han sees the positive change of gender relations between her and her husband in Canada. Since her work in the family became the main source of family income in Canada, unequal gender divisions of labour in the family have changed in a positive way. Ms. Han still works hard, but as their family recognizes the importance of her work, her bargaining power in the family has increased, so that she can demand

that her husband and children take responsibility for work in the family and the business.

Ms. Yun's family came to Canada in the 1990's. Ms. Yun and her husband started a small business as soon as they settled down in Halifax:

We were one of few Korean people who started a business that early after immigration. Other Korean people who came here around the same time told us that they did not understand us why we started a business as soon as we got here. They would say that we could relax about one year and start a business later on. Our basic principle when we got here was to have a business first not to play around with the money we had. We did not like the idea which a lot of Korean people here did... bring \$10,000 or 20,000 and wasted money for leisure. We haven't been to Quebec and Toronto yet. When we arrived at Vancouver at that time, we stayed 3days in that city and haven't been there since. P.E.I and Cape Breton are the only places we have been to so far, after being in Canada for several years (Ms. Yun).

While she was working with her husband in the shop, Ms. Yun attended ESL classes.

Ms. Yun did not want to run the business forever. She started looking for an alternative and then decided to study to get a professional job. It took her one year to prepare to enroll in the school, since Ms. Yun had to study the profession in English while she was not confident with her English:

I wanted to start something else because I didn't want to run the business for my whole life and I didn't want to run a grocery store either. I thought about what I could do here... after two and a half years since I got here, I entered the vocational school. It was after I learned some English. At that time, my son said "Mom, can you do it with your poor English?" (Ms. Yun).

One year later, Ms. Yun visited the school and impressed the principal with the study

she had done on her own. She was accepted into the school when Ms. Yun showed the principal her notebook in which she wrote down the text book passages with every word translated in Korean. As Ms. Yun had set her own goal and the chance had been given to her, she challenged herself to achieve it. As she entered the school, Ms. Yun renegotiated gender roles in her family:

As soon as I started school, I declared to my family that I was not going to take any phone calls from Korean people and in September that year, I told them not to expect me to prepare a good meal for them and I was going to only study until I finished the school, so they had to take care of themselves. The winter that year went so fast because I was so deep into study. Our customers in the store were curious why I studied so hard saying the Korean lady always sat at the counter and studied. I think they thought I was studying to get into a university. (Ms. Yun)

Ms. Yun further challenged the traditional gender role in the family as she graduated from school and found employment. Ms. Yun provides the secondary income now and cannot manage time to do both work and housekeeping together. Even though most cooking is done by her and cleaning by her and her husband, they made a dish-washing rule that everybody cleans their dishes after a meal, compared to her doing it before.

Whereas she did all the housework such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children, husband and in-law family in Korea, Ms. Yun feels that some of her responsibilities in the household such as housework and looking after children have been re-distributed to other family members in Canada because she has a job. "My

kids still have Korean traditional ideas. So I am the one who does housework the most, but I require them to help me, by saying, 'I am making money for your education and my hands have to relax for that at home.'” (Ms. Yun)

According to Ms. Yun, since she now hardly stays at home, her children became more independent and do things for themselves. Compared to her gender-based role as a wife and mother in Korea, Ms. Yun has challenged patriarchal relations in her family, demanding equal responsibility for housework. This became possible for her because she found employment outside the family.

Ms. Kang works at a store in the daytime while her kids are in school. She also has a busy schedule in the evenings, as she attends ESL classes and teaches Korean in the Korean Heritage School. Ms. Kang sees her husband's participation in housework as inevitable for the family. According to her, her family has divided housework fairly among family members. Compared with when Ms. Kang was a full-time housewife taking all responsibility for the house, Ms. Kang's economic and social activities outside, and no aid from extended family, have changed unequal gender relations in her family:

Many things are changed. I am so busy so that he has to help me. I am not home in the evening four days a week as I have to go to English classes and the Korean Heritage School. I cook dinner but my kid's dad does everything else for the evenings such as cleaning and washing dishes. I go grocery shopping because he hates it. One of us does the laundry on Sundays but four of us, including my two



kids, fold and put away the laundry together. My kids clean the bathroom too. The house chores have been divided fairly in our family. I heard that there are a lot of Korean men here who have never done any housework even though they have been here over ten years. But our situation has been set up here such that he cannot avoid it. In addition, there is no reason he cannot do the housework. He is not a kind of guy who would do the housework voluntarily. But, there is nobody who can help us here. (Ms. Kang)

It is not only the gender division of labour, but also women's self-confidence to express their opinions that one of my interviewees saw as a change of gender relations in the family. In Korea, there is a famous patriarchal saying, "When the hen (woman) in the family cries, the family will be ruined." Women are not to speak out or be loud.

Ms. Kang realized that she speaks up and gives her opinions to her husband and other men more than she did in Korea. Ms. Kang thinks she has changed since she obtained a degree and her own job in Canada:

When we make an important decision on family matters such as immigration, we consider both opinions. But I found that my voice became bigger in the family in Canada... about my opinions, I realized that there is no wrong opinion or a good opinion. You know what I mean. In Korea, women just sat in the table eating silently while men made all the conversation while eating. I hated it so much... It has changed here. I talk more and give my opinion to men easily. I have changed a lot. It is not because I think my opinion is a right one but because I want to show people my existence. I enjoy talking rather than just sitting in silence. I think I gained self-confidence as I graduated from college and started my job here. I feel that I am more equal to my husband than I was in Korea. (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Yun also mentioned how she enjoys being independent from her husband, while

having her own time and space at her workplace:

I was always with my husband for 365 days a year working at the farm in Korea. I found my own time while working here. When I start a day in the working place, my aching arms just stop aching and I enjoy working until it's time to go home (Ms. Yun).

As some of the participants in this research took an important role to create family income after immigration by either working in a family business or having a job, the unequal gender divisions of labour in the family they faced in Korea have been challenged. Compared with Korean women emphasizing the women's role as a mother and wife, looking after their children and husbands, they have demanded other family members to participate in housework. Therefore, Korean immigrant women's participation in economic activities and creating family income has certainly increased Korean women's bargaining power and changed unequal gender relationships in the family. In addition, the absence of extended family members in the Korean immigrant households supported the renegotiation of gender divisions of labour in the family. As Ms. Kang mentioned, there was no choice but that her husband share the housework in the context of lack of support from extended family members in Canada. Moreover, as Ms. Han stated, it was easier for her and her husband to renegotiate their gender relations because they had no impact of patriarchal authority which would have come from extended family members in Korea. For example, Ms. Han's interview implies that her mother-in-law would not be

happy if she saw her son doing housework.

## **2. Income Management in the Family**

The participants who were full-time housewives in Korea used to budget their family income, where most women tend to take responsibility for the family budget. It has been common in a Korean family that a husband makes money and a wife stays home and manages the household with the money her husband earns. However, it does not mean that Korean married women would have control over the income. It is more to manage it for the family expenses, and they tend to sacrifice the items they want for personal use, such as buying their own clothes.

Ms. Song's statement gives an example of how a wife would manage the family budget in Korea. According to her:

When our kid's dad made 300,000 Won 20years ago in Korea, my kid's preschool tuition was 70,000 Won and we had to pay for the rent and condominium fee. In addition, we gave 100,000 Won to my parents in-law every month. To give the allowance to his parents with the income..., I couldn't visit my parents in-law at times because I did not have the bus fare, 500 Won. I didn't say anything about it. I gave the allowance until I came here. I couldn't afford to give even 10,000 Won to my own mother as I had to give it to the parent in-law (Ms. Song).

Since they came to Halifax, the patterns of income management have been changed, and some of the participants mentioned that their contribution to the family seemed recognized more in Canada. Ms. Song was a housewife in Korea and did budgeting and banking of the family income earned by her husband. However, even though she

is still a housewife in Halifax, her husband manages the income, as she feels uncomfortable to do banking with her lack of English. In spite of that, she has the same control over spending income for herself and family matters:

My kid's dad budgets the income and does the banking but it is not like he gives me an allowance every month. I use the same bank card for our joint account. He has never asked me where I spend the money. He is a nice husband. (Ms. Song)

As her husband has a decent job in Canada as he did in Korea, she did not have to change their life style in Canada. Since her husband wished it and she agreed, Ms. Song is a middle- class housewife who does not have to work and devotes herself as a wife and mother as she was in Korea. Ms. Song stated that Canadian social policy recognizes married women's rights as to the property a couple shares:

Men are the main actor to buy a new car or a house in Korea. But my husband cannot do anything without my signature, such as buying a house here. Many things cannot be done without the signature of a wife. It does not matter to have a wife's signature or not in Korea to purchase a car or a house. If a husband wants to buy a house, then he can go ahead in Korea but I have an equal position here. He cannot sell the other house we possessed here without my signature. Our bank requires both signatures of us too. In our case, I don't care if he needs my signature or not as we trust each other, but it could be really important for some people when they have a dispute (Ms. Song).

Ms. Park was also a full-time housewife in Korea. However, Ms. Park and her husband started a small business together in Halifax. As in the case of Ms. Song, Ms. Park managed the family income earned by her husband in Korea. Ms. Park used to give a certain amount of monthly allowance to her husband according to the family

budget. The difficulty of income management of her family in Canada, according to Ms. Park, was eased since they had to hire a lawyer and financial accountant to manage their small business. Her name is on the business registration and she gets 50 percent of earnings. Ms. Park sees it as reasonable since she works as much as her husband does now:

I was in charge of budgeting in Korea. The situation was that I gave an allowance to my husband every month. Now, we do it together as we have a joint account. Each of us has a 50% share of what we earn from our small business as I am listed as the business partner. In addition, we have co-signing for bank matters. I think it is the fairest way to be (Ms. Park).

Ms. Yun was also a full time housewife in Korea. Her husband worked in his father's poultry farm and his father controlled all the money they earned together. As stated by Ms. Yun, she was never given money in her hand while living with her husband's family. Even though she identified herself as a housewife in Korea, she was just one of the family members who had to provide her labour for the farm whenever it was demanded:

Well, everybody in the family worked everyday and at the end of the day, my father-in-law got all dressed up and went to the bank carrying a lot of money all the time. Once, my oldest child asked me, 'Why are we the ones who work hard and why is my grandfather the one who gets all the money?' I told my child that he would give us money later. So, when I worked in the family poultry farm in Korea, I lived everyday without feeling any accomplishment while living with in-laws, father-in-law, brothers-in-law, and a daughter-in-law. If my daughter-in-law said, 'I love your cosmetics,' then I would say, 'have it.' There was nothing for myself. Hence, I like

living in Canada very much (Ms. Yun).

Even though she had to work for the poultry farm and did all the housework for her own family and the extended family, not only would Ms. Yun not be paid for her work in the farm, but she always had to sacrifice her own time and materials for the more than seven family members she took care of. Her devotion to her in-law family was taken for granted by the Confucian ideology that when a woman gets married, she has to take care of in-laws, accepting them and caring for them as her own family.

Kim and Hurh (1998) notes:

Korea has traditionally maintained a patrilineal family system based on the Confucian philosophy. This family system provides a well-defined set of marital roles. The husband is expected to command his wife, while the wife is expected to obey him. She is also expected to devotedly serve her parents-in-law and other members of her husband's family, and finally to be an instrument to perpetuate her husband's family lineage... Such marital roles still persist in Korea. (p.152)

Therefore, Ms. Yun's work in the poultry farm and in the house was accepted as her moral duty as a daughter-in-law, not as a labourer, and she was given no reward for her work. When Ms. Yun began her own career in Canada, she felt strongly about having her own bank account. When her husband suggested putting the income that Ms. Yun earned into the bank account under his name, she argued, "the money that I earned is mine and that you earned is yours (laugh)." She said it is enjoyable to make money, because Ms. Yun can see the results of her hard work:

My kid's dad handles paying bills and banking. However, my salary goes to my bank account and most expenses are paid by the income from the small business. Well, some of expenses are paid from my account too. We cannot really claim my money and his money because it is obvious that we have to spend most of it on basic necessities (Ms. Yun).

Besides Ms. Yun allotting her own income equally for her family's living expenses, Ms. Yun derives satisfaction from her own bank account which she feels that she deserves, which was not possible in Korea. Because her family needed a second income, her role as an income earner became important for their survival.

While her labour in the family and the poultry farm was not recognized or appreciated in Korea, her professional job and the income she earns not only gives her a sense of satisfaction and achievement, but has also changed her position in the family.

Overall, the experiences of the participants in this study on income management present that there are positive changes on managing income, budgeting, and spending in the immigrant households. Some Korean immigrant women did the budgeting in Korea, but it did not mean that they had control over the income. They tended to disperse money for family expenditures, child education, and allowance for in-laws while they sacrificed their own spending. Ms. Song's comment that she would set aside funds for in laws every month and could not buy even a bus ticket for herself shows an extreme example. However, the perception of equality supported by Canadian law related to a conjugal relationship, including equal rights to property

they own, guarantees Korean immigrant women's rights which were not recognized in Korea. Moreover, Korean immigrant women's paid work outside of the home increases their independence and self-confidence.

### **3. Willingness to Change Unequal Gender Relations**

The willingness to change patriarchal attitudes in the family is an important factor in the process of bargaining to rebalance unequal gender roles in the Korean family. In her research findings, Moon (2003) suggested that the willingness to change unequal gender relations in the family has a more solid effect on gender equality than women's employment. Women's employment in many cases of Korean immigrant women in middle class families in New York State was accompanied by the probability of mothering as well. In addition, Korean men would share mothering when they had less patriarchal attitudes. Moon (2003) points out:

Because of the conservative gender ideology that constructs mothering primarily as women's work, middle-class Korean immigrant women's participation in employment is often determined by the availability of shared mothering. At the same time, flexible gender ideology influences husbands who share mothering with their wives to do so even in the absence of a pressing economic need for wives' income. (p.856)

Ms. Park, who was a full time housewife in Korea, runs a small business with her husband in Canada. Her children are in charge of a fair amount of housework and her husband does most of the cooking. As the couple had to work early in the morning to late at night, they negotiated with their children regarding the responsibility for



house chores. Ms. Park stated that her husband was more determined about the idea that their children should learn how hard their parents work for the family. He insisted that they take some responsibility for family matters in Canada, while the only thing her children had to do in Korea was study to pass the university entrance exams:

My husband and I have to leave the house early in the morning to work. My husband insisted that our kids have to take responsibility for house chores and as they understood it; we agreed that my son and daughter would clean the house, make lunch, do laundry, and so on. If we need any help in our shop, they come and do that too (Ms. Park).

While Ms. Park's husband was the main breadwinner in Korea and Ms. Park was expected to do housework and caregiving for her husband and her children, her husband has changed his attitudes on the unequal gender division of labour in the family. As their economic and social conditions have changed after immigration, he gave up the privileges as the husband in a family in Korea, and likewise their children:

When we decided to buy a house not an apartment as our children liked a house better, we had a negotiation with our children. If we buy a house, they would take care of the house such as cleaning the house, mowing the lawn and shoveling the snow. They said they would and we bought a house. Our children do what they promised. Well, for us it seems reasonable. But when Korean people come and visit and see our children doing housework, they are stunned and don't understand why our children are doing the housework not me. Well, I was so exhausted with physical work I did for our business. So I told them I was going to give up on housework. My husband agreed and arranged dividing housework with our children. (Ms. Park)

Ms. Kim's husband had to change his patriarchal attitude to negotiate what he wants. He wanted to have the storage of *kimchi* (a common sidedish of spicy fermented cabbage) outside in the winter as it is normally done that way in Korea. Ms. Kim did not want to go out and get *kimchi* every day during the winter as Korean women usually did in Korea. Therefore, she demanded that they would do it only if her husband would go out and get the side-dish everyday. It would look weird in Korea if a man went out to get *kimchi*, but he had to change his attitude to get what he wanted in Canada.

On the other hand, Ms. Lee sees no change in her husband's patriarchal attitudes. She understands that it is because he has devoted his life to his career. Even though he is ready to retire and has time to do some house work, he is not used to doing it. Ms Lee says it is her fault that she 'spoiled him' until now:

When I go out with my friends, I put dinner on the table for him. Even so, he waits for me while I have dinner outside. Then, he makes me eat again while he has his dinner in front of me. I have never had dinner by myself at home. Sometimes, it is 11pm or 12am that he comes home and then we have to eat together. We are to eat together at any time. I hate him being like that. My kids are different. They've grown up here and they would shovel the snow and clean up the garbage to get some allowance. However, my husband is a typical Korean man. He would never change his attitude. (Ms. Lee)

Ms. Kang talked about the critical meaning of "respect" in Korea while discussing some disputes she had with her husband. It was hard for her husband to

accept the changes happening in his family after immigration. As their social and economic condition changed, he had to give up certain privileges in the family, such as ignoring any housework, having his meals served, and the 'normal' power of the breadwinner being respected for supporting his family. As it was hard for him to accept his changed position, he sometimes complained that Ms. Kang did not respect him as head of the family:

My kid's dad would think he should be treated better than he is now as a head of the family. He said that I should respect him as a head of the family as we do in Korea because we are Korean. But I think it doesn't make any sense. If we live in Korea, I wouldn't even think about if it makes any sense or not as respecting a husband as head of the family goes without saying. That is required as a matter of course in Korea, and I would think I should... Both have to be changed in a different society. He cannot think that he is in a higher position than me forever. It will make him harder to adapt changes and burdened. It took him several years to accept the change. Well, we are still struggling but I can see that he changed a lot. (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Kang's husband had a difficult time trying to change his patriarchal attitudes since their family situation changed after immigration. It was easy for him to have privileges in the family in Korea, when he was the breadwinner and that fact gave him almost absolute bargaining power over housework, childcare, and family decisions. Therefore, how they deal with the shifting bargaining power toward more gender equality depends on their will and negotiations for family survival. Ms Kang's comment demonstrates a good example of Korean immigrant men in the family who

have to deal with their patriarchal attitudes which privileged them in Korea:

Korean men have a lot of privileges in Korea. It is certainly hard for them to give up those privileges and share household chores. They would feel shameful and disgraced about doing such things they did not have to in the past. They want to show off themselves but they can't here. While he had to give up his privilege, my voice gets bigger in the house, and our children go out more as they grow up, rather than spending time with him... if he cannot change himself according to what is happening now, he will be alone. There is no other way. (Ms. Kang)

As argued earlier, we cannot assume that women's employment would automatically increase women's bargaining power in the family. Ng (1991) explains that the change of gender relations by immigration generates struggles in the family.

The change in women's domestic labour in turn creates new areas of contestation and conflict between immigrant women and their husbands; as well, it upsets the previous balance of power among all family members. (p.17)

Ms. Kang's case shows that there is a struggle between the spouses in the renegotiation of the gender relations in the immigrant households. Men are not willing to give up the privileges they had in the past but it is inevitable for the family survival in a different social and economic situation by immigration. Therefore, the willingness to change patriarchal practices and attitudes in the family is one important factor which impacts gender relations in the family. Sometimes, as seen above, regardless of women's economic activity outside of the family, men simply do not want to give up their privileges in the home. A conjugal conflict is unavoidable in some cases, if change is to be effected.

## Chapter VI

### **Family and Community: Reproducing the Korean Patriarchal Tradition**

Among this study's participants, when a Korean family came to Canada, the roles of the Korean women as a caregiver, or a mother and a wife in the family changed, corresponding to different social and economic conditions within which they find themselves in Halifax. While they quit their job and stayed home in Korea, most participants found a job or started a small business with their husbands when they came to Halifax. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Korean women in immigrant households did gain a better bargaining position in many cases, so that husbands started to share more housework than they did before, and women had more to say in the process of decision making over family matters than they did in Korea.

On the other hand, there is some evidence in this research that Korean women in those households are the main actors to sustain Korean culture and tradition. They are still the caregivers who educate their children about Korean culture to keep their identities as Korean or Korean-Canadian, maintaining the transnational links in the Korean family and community. Ralston (1988) observed a similar pattern in her research on the South Asian immigrant women in Halifax, in that the immigrant women are forced to perform the traditional gender relations of their homeland while taking responsibilities of conveying their ethnic culture and patriarchal gender

relations in the family and the ethnic community. According to Ralston:

Culturally-defined gender relations in the home country dictated that they were totally responsible for transmission of the culture and for work inside the home in Canada, whether or not they worked outside the home. (p.71)

Even though there are many changes in gender relations in the Korean family since the women work outside, and husbands and children take more responsibilities for domestic work, and even though Korean women have obtained more negotiating power over family matters, Korean women's gender roles as mothers who take responsibility for their children's education and maintaining Korean culture in the ethnic community continue to be distinct and unequal compared to men's. Moreover, it is conflict-laden and challenging for Korean women to maintain the culturally-based gender role of teaching their children the Korean culture consistently, while at the same time teach them to internalize unequal gender relations based on Korean patriarchal ideology as good mothers according to Korean cultural norms.

The lived experiences of the participants reveal Korean immigrant women's important roles in maintaining the Korean ethnic culture inside and outside of the family. Their role as housewives is extended to the Korean community. Korean immigrant women take responsibility for cooking Korean food and preparing for traditional holidays while Korean men take up important positions in the community. The gender divided roles in the community not only tolerate unequal gender relations

based on Korean traditional patriarchal ideology, but also depend on Korean immigrant women's unpaid labour. Moreover, Korean immigrant women's role as mothers raising children for a better future is maintained largely in the Korean community. Korean immigrant women are given the responsibility to teach their children the Korean language and culture in the family and the ethnic community. By setting up the 'Korean Heritage School' in the community, these immigrant women take an important role, teaching the next generation in the community Korean culture.

### **1. The Korean Association of Nova Scotia: Gender Roles in Ethnic Social Networking and in Maintaining the Korean Heritage**

The Korean Association of Nova Scotia (KANS) is a Korean immigrant organization. It organizes events on Korean Holidays, such as *Sul-Nal*, marking the Korean lunar New Year. KANS also participates annually in the events of Asian Heritage Month in February and the Multicultural Festival in June. Members perform Korean traditional music and introduce Korean food and souvenirs on those occasions. Occasionally, KANS holds fund raising events such as a music concert for the Memorial Park for Korean War veterans in 2005. KANS also supports small ethnic organizations such as the Korean Heritage School and *Sa-Mul-Nol-Yee*, a Korean drum group. As the history and population of Korean immigrants in Nova Scotia has not been sufficient to build a strong community, KANS has had minimal effect on

social networking, such as providing settlement services for newcomers, and its main role has been organizing ethnic gatherings and public events in Nova Scotia:

The Korean Association has existed since 1967. It was not registered as a group at that time. We had gatherings at home for Korean holidays. We would invite Korean international students too. When I worked with general affairs in our group, we finally registered as a non-profit organization to be able to participate in the Multicultural Festival. You cannot participate in the Multicultural Festival if you are not registered as a non-profit organization. (Ms. Lee)

Two Korean churches have been the main venues for social networking among Korean immigrants. However, most of the participants in this research have had little involvement with the Korean churches. There has been conflict among Korean immigrants, and it has resulted in two different churches in Halifax. There is also ongoing competition to attract Korean newcomers to each church. Ms. Park experienced a difficult relation with Korean people who went to church as she refused to attend:

We happened to introduce ourselves to a Korean minister here and he asked us to visit the church. We politely rejected the idea. We didn't want to go to church for help to settle down in a new place as we are not Christians. Then, we noticed that even though Korean people who go to the church pass by us, they wouldn't say hello. We felt very uncomfortable. I don't understand their attitude. We are all Koreans in a strange place and even greeting each other in Korean would help each other knowing that there are other Koreans like us. We are outsiders in Canada and outsiders among the majority of Korean immigrants who go to church here. So we don't get really attached to them. (Ms. Park)



It has been difficult for KANS to have members of both churches participate in events that KANS has organized. Moreover, it created difficulty selecting staff of KANS who are neutral regarding the Korean Churches. Ms. Lee knows the history of KANS very well as she was one its founding members:

When one church member became a chair of KANS, members of the other church would not participate in KANS activities. I was one of them who tried hard not to separate the Korean church into two. I think now that we need one more church to balance the competition between the two Korean churches. (Ms. Lee)

Most participants agreed on the need for KANS and the Korean community to include everybody, regardless of attending church. Even though they do not like the conflicts between Korean immigrants, the women in this research feel some degree of responsibility to keep KANS for the community:

I think we need KANS even though it is not stable right now. Some people say we don't need it as Korean immigrants have to put some effort into it while they are busy with their work to support their family. However, I think we should keep it even though it is small. As Canada encourages multiculturalism, I think we should let them know that we exist. Even having a Korean traditional meal together in *Sul-Nal* is enjoyable. (Ms. Kang)

Most participants have been involved in the events of KANS even though they are not official staff members. Mostly, they would provide food and labour to prepare events. For an occasion such as a Korean holiday, cooking Korean foods and setting up the tables are the main work; therefore, Korean women's roles in preparing foods and organizing those events are heavily depended on. Ms. Han offers her labour

when the KANS needs help:

We cannot be involved directly as staff in KANS, as we are busy. However, we try to help them as much as we can. A Korean traditional dance group from Korea visited in Halifax. I prepared several meals for them. Well, we couldn't offer them a place to stay because we cannot afford it. But we do as much as we can. (Ms. Han)

Ms. Choi has taken an active role in KANS. She has also been helping with the Asian

Heritage Month event:

I happened to be the person who goes to the meetings for the Asian Heritage Month events in May. Sometimes, KANS presents a fashion show with traditional clothes or *Tae-Kwan-Do*. I display Korean books and information brochures in the public library in May. Six years ago, Nova Scotia appointed a Korean day on October 3, and Korean immigrants marched on Spring Garden Road. The Korean embassy in Montreal also sent us some Korean drums to support the Korean drum group. (Ms. Choi)

Even though Korean immigrant women play an important role in organizing KANS events by offering labour, their work has been little appreciated. They are the main workers who organize events in the Korean community, but men are appointed to be chairs and heads of the organizational branches due to the patriarchal ideology within the Korean community. Therefore, the wives of those men appointed in KANS have primarily done all the work whenever an event was held. Ms. Lee mentioned the tendency was worse at the beginning of the organization: "It used to be only a chair. A man was appointed to be a chair and the wife would manage all the work. But there are many staff members in KANS now." (Ms. Lee)

Among the appointed staff, normally it is still mostly men who are in charge of the KANS' branches. However, Ms. Shin recently took an elevated position in KANS. She was thrilled to serve the organization, since she had not been active in the Korean community due to work and bringing up two children. However, Ms. Shin realized that the KANS was not yet well organized and nobody was willing to be actively involved. As well, according to her experience, high levels of patriarchal ideology are still prevalent in the community, creating a belief that higher positions in these organizations should be filled by men.

Jones-Correa (2000) pointed out that men experience a loss of status economically and socially in the process of immigration. Therefore, they seek compensation for this loss through the community organizations they form in the receiving country by assuming leadership positions for themselves within the organizations. According to her:

The immigrant organizations they form and participate in compensate for the loss of status by providing a social sphere or arena where a migrant's previous status is recognized and bolstered. This is particularly true of those seeking organizational or leadership roles. (p.357)

Ms. Shin's elevated position in KANS is disrupting the patriarchal hierarchy in the Korean community. However, no people other than Ms. Shin were willing to take the responsibility, and this opportunity to take a leadership role could help change the patriarchal mentality and culture in the Korean community.

## 2. Bequeathing Korean Culture to the Second Generation in the Family and the Community

Participants in my research were asked if they identify themselves as a Korean, Korean-Canadian, or Canadian. The answers were varied. Ms. Song insisted that she is definitely a Korean:

Of course, I am a Korean. My son would be called a Korean Canadian as he grew up in Canada. I have learned English and Canadian culture here because I want to feel that I belong in Canadian society. However, I don't want to be a Canadian. I go to Canadian church wearing *Han-Bok* (Korean traditional clothes) when it is a Korean holiday. When they are so amazed by the beautiful *Han-Bok* and ask me why I wear it on that day, I proudly explain what day it is that day in Korea (Ms. Song).

Ms. Song is one of those participants who uphold in their families the values they had in Korea. For her, practicing Korean culture and teaching it to her son is very important; since she wants her son to adopt some elements of Korean culture which she admires:

We have never skipped once celebrating Korean holidays. We would cook traditional Korean foods every holiday and wear *Han-Bok* (Korean traditional dress). I have taught my son the Korean language and Korean values since he was young. His sense of values is well established in my family, so he wouldn't forget them... you know, Korean values, such as considering others first and respecting elderly, the Korean affection of eating rice together in a rice pot... (Ms. Song)

Ms. Song is proud that she taught her son Korean values. Even though Ms. Song said that her son is a Korean-Canadian as he lives in Canada, she wishes her son to live

with Korean culture.

As Spitzer (2003) suggested, the Korean women's cultural carework in the Korean immigrant community has been vital for the transnational community to maintain ethnic boundaries, bridging the community with its homeland:

Women's carework is central to the practice of culturally appropriate roles to demarcate ethnic boundaries against the potential onslaught of competing values that threaten transnational communities with dissolution. (p.270)

One of the important reasons that Korean immigrant women teach their children Korean is that it is an essential tool to connect them with their extended family in Korea. Ms. Kim had an embarrassing moment when she visited her extended family with her daughter. As her daughter could not speak Korean the extended family blamed Ms. Kim for not taking responsibility regarding her daughter's education:

When I visited my parents in Korea, I was reproached for not teaching my daughter Korean, as my daughter spoke only English at that time. I taught her Korean since then. When we visited my family in Korea again, my daughter only spoke Korean. (Ms. Kim)

There was concern in the Korean immigrant community in Halifax that Korean children were forgetting the Korean language. With the primary goal of teaching Korean, the Korean language school was founded seven years ago. It is a non-profit organization run by several Korean immigrants. The Korean embassy provides textbooks and funding for the school. There are four levels of classes for

about thirty children, all of them Korean. There is also an adult class, mostly for those with a Korean partner. They set up the language school in one of the buildings at Saint Mary's University, and classes are offered for a small fee every Friday evening. The principal of the school is a Korean man and all teachers are Korean women. Most of them have children who attend classes.

Ralston (1988) observed that immigrant women tend to take an important role in maintaining cultural traditions through their roles of wives and mothers, as the latter are reconstructed in the receiving country:

The women reconstructed very forcibly through their activities the culturally specific gender roles of wives and mothers who cook and nurture the men and the children, and take responsibility for educating the youth in the cultural tradition. (p.76)

Ms. Kang teaches children in the Korean language school. She started it because she noticed that her children started to lose the Korean language as they entered the Canadian school system. She argued strongly how important language is for the Korean children in Halifax in order to construct their identity as being Korean-Canadian in the Canadian racist social structure:

Language has everything in it. If one loses it, the person loses her/his culture. Korean kids here learn and catch up with Canadian culture so quickly when they start schooling because they speak English at school. If they lose Korean, they lose Korean culture. I have thought deeply that it is not only about speaking Korean after all. Korean kids learn so slowly. They complete Korean alphabets spending a year because they are busy with study at school. Therefore, I can do it because I made up my mind that I have

responsibility for them speaking Korean. My daughter could not speak Korean at all but she likes to speak Korean now. (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Kang takes the main responsibility for her children to learn their own language and Korean culture. Even though she works six hours a day, Ms. Kang takes an important role in the Korean community volunteering to teach Korean immigrant children the Korean language. Ms. Kang's belief in teaching her children Korean is based on her role as a mother taking responsibility for her children's education. For Ms. Kang as a Korean mother, teaching her children Korean is regarded as an important duty for her to keep a Korean cultural identity, and maintaining her family's ties with Korea, their homeland.

Korean immigrant women take an important role in the Korean community to maintain Korean culture and to teach it to the next generation. While Korean men tend to be appointed to figurehead positions in the KANS and other organizations such as the two churches, Korean immigrant women are the main ones who provide their labour and time to manage the organizations. Moreover, Korean immigrant women in this research demonstrate that immigrant women are in charge of imparting the ethnic culture and language in the family and the community to the second generation of Korean-Canadians. While admitting that there are unequal gender roles in Korean culture, these immigrant women have a strong belief that maintaining Korean culture in the family and the ethnic community is important to their identity as Korean-

Canadians, and in order to bridge various gaps among themselves, their children, and their homeland.



## **Chapter VII**

### **Challenges and Limitations: Toward More Egalitarian Gender Relations in the Korean Immigrant Family**

There emerges a lot of negotiation between family members to build the economic and social stability of the family in a new society. The family is not merely a place where gender inequality continues to exist, but a place where the family members cooperate together to survive and build a new home for the family. In Canada they suddenly become a minority, and there is no supporting social network of extended family and friends, which would be the norm in Korea.

The family in many immigrant households is regarded as a survival unit in a hostile social setting (Kibria 1993, Morokvasic 2000). As they face the racist, sexist, and capitalist social conditions in Canada, the Korean immigrant family takes an important role as a shelter and survival unit (Lim 1997). It is crucial to perceive the meaning of the family to Korean immigrants in certain social situations, as it helps to understand the challenges regarding unequal gender relations in the family.

Most of the Korean husbands of participants graduated from university and had professional jobs in Korea. The Korean households in this research could afford their living expenses with only the husband's income in Korea. However, most participants had to get a job or set up the family business with their husband when

they came to Canada as the economic stability of their family was threatened. Their businesses are mostly a laundromat or food court restaurant, which lower the economic and social status of their family compared to that in Korea. Except those women who came here in the late 1960s, most participants started a job which they would never do in Korea, as those jobs in Korea would be filled by lower working class workers and their standard of living was more likely middle class.

As the economic and social status of the family was lowered by immigration, the priority of the family became to gain a similar economic and social status they used to have in Korea, rather than challenging gender inequality in the family. Moreover, as Tastsoglou (1997) pointed out, with little social capital, immigrant families often feel that they only have each other, and thus, they are afraid of challenges to the family unit. They would rather compromise in a racist and capitalist environment. In her study on Greek women in Ontario, Tastsoglou (1997) argued:

The Greek immigrant family, although fraught with contradictions, has not unequivocally been a site of oppression for the woman, but rather, a site of material and emotional resources against the hardships of the new, and often hostile, environment. (p.133)

In this chapter, family survival in a hostile society and daily life will be discussed. Moreover, Korean immigrant women converse about conjugal conflicts. Korean women have gained better bargaining positions in the division of labour and decision-making processes, despite a high level of patriarchal ideology in the family.

Lastly, this chapter will discuss how the hostile social environment due to racism, capitalism and patriarchal ideology limits Korean immigrant women's opportunities to challenge gender inequality in the family.

### **1. Challenges: Family Survival in a Hostile Society**

As discussed earlier, immigrant families tend to experience downward economic mobility after immigration. Therefore, women's employment for a secondary income for the family is inevitable in many immigrant households. Six out of nine participants in this research started working outside the home when they came to Canada. They were all housewives in Korea. Most participants in this research restarted their work outside the home not because they were looking for self-esteem or self-achievement, but because their family needed the secondary income. In addition, despite their higher education in Korea, the Korean women who wanted to get their own job instead of running their family business tended to experience employment discrimination due to racism and sexism.

The interviews with Korean immigrant women who came to Canada in the late 1960s and late 1990s exemplify similar racial practices and attitudes they have experienced. Korean immigrant women's ability to work has been judged by their English skill and not their capacity to work. It has been hard for the Korean immigrant women to have opportunities to prove their working ability, as employers are

negatively biased. When the Korean immigrant women are presented with an opportunity, they have to work extra hard to prove their ability and get recognition as a valued employee.

Ms. Kim came to Canada as a nurse. Even though she had the status of a registered nurse, they would not give her the tasks she deserved with many years of experience practicing in the emergency room in Korea. Ms. Kim had to prove herself by working hard whatever they asked her to do; mostly what a nursing assistant would do:

I did tasks that a nursing assistant would do because I could not speak English well even though I was a registered nurse. However, I worked really hard and they liked me because I would do those dirty tasks they did not like. One day though, a nurse could not extract blood from a patient even though she tried more than seven times. So, I offered to help. Then, she looked at me unpleasantly and told me that she had to ask the head nurse. The head nurse said if I could finish the job, then that would be fine. I made it at once. Of course, that was easy as I worked at the emergency room and an intensive care unit in Korea. I was asked to do the remaining patients. I finished the task within 15 minutes, which would have taken more than one hour for that nurse. Then, that became my task. I finally became a nurse as I got credit for this. (Ms. Kim)

There is little relation between her ability as a nurse and English skill. Moreover, it was the employer who hired her because she was qualified. Ms. Kim admitted that it was hard for her to improve her English, but it was not that relevant to her work ability:

I had a hard time to learn English. However, if they wrote it down

for me, I could understand every word as medical terms are the same in Korea too. Moreover, I had worked in an intensive care unit in Korea. I worked much better than other nurses here. After all, I taught nurses here. (Ms. Kim)

However, her lack of English was the excuse for racist practices, questioning her ability as she came from a developing country at that time. Ms. Kim also had to deal with racist attitudes daily. Some patients would reject to be treated by her because she was Asian:

They would say directly to me that they didn't like a foreign nurse and wanted to have another nurse. Then, I thought to myself 'if you don't like me, I don't like you either,' and smiled at them saying, 'I will send another nurse.' (Ms. Kim)

Tastsoglou and Miedema (2005) argue that immigrant women's working skills have been undervalued because of their accents and general language skills. However, in many cases, this phenomenon is more likely driven by racism, because accents are associated not with communication ability, but with sounds judged as superior or inferior.

As far as accents go, though it is identified as a major obstacle in employment by immigrant women, the real obstacle we see is not the absence of the "right" sound. Since sound does not present a functional problem, it is treating a different sound as improper and inferior, i.e. racism, which is the real obstacle. (p. 214)

Ms. Shin came to Canada in the 1970s. She recalled several occasions of racial and gender discrimination in the workplace. When she wore a new blouse, a co-worker commented, "Oh, where did you get this blouse? Did your sugar daddy buy it for you?" Ms. Shin said:

I felt that she said it like that because I wore a new blouse even though I came from Korea, was single and had no husband who could buy me one. I felt really offended and submitted a complaint to the Human Right Commission. I shouldn't have. They sent a letter to the supervisor, and I was blamed for it since I did not talk with management first. I did not know how it worked. They were not happy that I did not follow the procedure. I told my superiors what happened and they talked with the co-worker involved. (Ms. Shin)

Even though Ms. Shin was the victim of the racist and sexist practices, she was blamed since she did not follow the procedure which she did not know. There was a definite lack of information and education in her work place about how to deal with racism and sexism.

Ms Kang's husband had a job in a Canadian company when they came to Canada in 1996. However, Ms. Kang's family needed the secondary income to manage the family. Ms. Kang explains their downward economic mobility compared to their situation in Korea.

We live poorer than in Korea. Women including my sister in Korea do not have to work outside as they can manage their living well only with her husband's income. They are well off in Korea and we aren't. We cannot send presents for parents, nieces, and nephews in Korea at Christmas. We just send candies and chocolates (laugh). That means we don't have extra money to enjoy. We spend all our income for basic expenses (Ms. Kang).

Ms Kang stated that she did not have to work in Korea but she had to work in Canada to make ends meet. It was difficult for her to get a job, and finally she decided to attend a college. After she graduated from college with good grades in Halifax, Ms

Kang still could not get a job. In the racist social structure in Canada, Ms. Kang was judged by her English skill, and not by her ability to work, or the opportunity to show that ability had not even been even given at all:

I graduated from a community college last year. I could not get a job, only with English language classes. Classes in the college were easier than I thought. I was not good at math, but I had all A's in my major. After I graduated, I still could not get a job as I have an accent and office jobs need to talk on the phone a lot. So I did volunteering in those jobs I could have, but I felt I was useless while sitting there. So I stopped volunteering. I've been working as a cashier in a convenience store for about six months so far (Ms. Kang).

As is the case with most immigrant women of colour, Korean immigrant women's education is not recognized in Canada. Therefore, they have to work extra hard to show employers in Canada that they have the ability to work. Even though Ms. Kang got a degree in Halifax, she was not given any opportunity to show her ability because of her Korean accent. Ms. Kang was an art teacher in Korea. She would not mind to go out and work in Canada for the extra income they need for living, but it is hard for her to get even a low-paid job, even with a college degree here:

I got a phone call that I may be hired by a company working for banks at night. I heard it is a job entering checks for banks. I would work from 8pm to 12am. I think it would be better that I work both in the convenience store in day time and the new job at night. Then our economic situation would be better. (Ms. Kang)

As Korean immigrant women work out of need for the secondary income, they appreciate that they make money, although those jobs are not often the ones they

used to have and enjoyed in Korea:

I got an education degree and my major was Design art. I loved it from when I was in Junior high school. I worked in an advertising business for a year. I did not like it so I quit and worked as a private art tutor for three years before I got married. I love children and I loved my job. (Ms. Kang)

After Ms. Yun and her husband set up their small business, Ms. Yun started to look for an alternative job for her in Canada, as she did not want to run their business for a long time. When Ms. Yun decided to take courses at the vocational school, it took her a year to prepare. Ms. Yun had to face racial attitudes as she entered the Canadian mainstream social system. Ms. Yun and the other woman of colour were quickly isolated in the school. Racial practices in daily life discourage immigrants to develop their self-esteem in a new society. Ms. Yun's experience in her school demonstrates that mainstream Canadians judge immigrants with their poor English while defining themselves as superior:

I felt something uncomfortable being in the school with other Canadians. I guess it was because I was an Asian and my English was poor. I could feel that they were not tolerant. I cried a lot when I just started the school. However, there was a Palestinian woman who also couldn't speak English well. We were studying buddies. Then, I got to know other students after all who helped me and we chatted sometimes. However, I felt uncomfortable when we had the last presentation. I designed a presentation relating to an ancient Korean dynasty. Our principal thought the idea was excellent. So I won the first medal in the presentation. Other students were praising my work before I got the first medal saying, 'It is great. You will get the first prize.' Then when I really got the first medal, their faces were all bitter. I could feel it on the stage. They were clapping but



they were not happy for me at all. (Ms. Yun)

Ms. Yun had to not only deal with the racist practices outside, but also challenge patriarchal attitudes in the home. Her husband and son doubted that she would be able to advance with her poor English, and they also discouraged her, saying nobody would want to hire her:

I told my son that you thought that it was impossible for me to do it... but I had to do it because it was like I was betting my life on it. I also told him that if I could graduate, to promise me that he would become a doctor. Then, my son told me that I had no ability to get a job. So I told him that if I do it then he will do his part too. I felt so great when I finished my courses.

After a while, she could not get a job. As in the case of Ms. Kang, Ms. Yun started to volunteer in her chosen field. Ms. Yun's experience displays how vulnerable immigrant women are when looking for employment. Fortunately, one of her Canadian friends whom she used to know at school helped her find a job:

When I went to school, I didn't speak English well. Unlike the Palestinian student, I was kind to other students. The poor young students who just graduated from high school could not afford to buy a cup of coffee, and I used to buy coffee for them sometimes. A Canadian girl that I knew from school called me after I sent my resume to the company where she was working. She saw my resume and told the manager that she knew me. She recommended to the manager that I worked very hard at school even though my English was not that good. That is the reputation you can get when you go to school. She told me about a new business which needed people and to call them right away (Ms. Yun).

The experience of racial and gender discrimination outside of the family shows some similar patterns. Korean immigrant women's ability to work has been

assessed by their English skill. To prove their capabilities, they had to work much harder than others. They sometimes have to do volunteering in the field; though they deserve to be hired, they look for any opportunity. Ms. Shin states that the best way to avoid racial discrimination is to be recognized as a good worker, and then you get respect. Ms. Shin's statement implies that immigrant workers have to earn respect which should rightfully be given automatically to everybody:

I have always felt that I belong to a minority group as I have an accent. I always felt that uncomfortable experience which might be racism. That bothers me. However, if you work hard, you get respect. As I worked hard and when they gave me the work evaluation as I was going to retire soon, the results were all excellent, excellent, and excellent. It depends on you. Even though I looked so small and I had an accent, I finally got respect. If you don't work hard, you get racial discrimination. (Ms. Shin)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, racial and gender discrimination against immigrant women seems not much changed, when comparing the experiences of Korean immigrant women who came to Canada in the late 1960s and 1990s. First, it is hard for them to find employment because 'they have an accent'. When they get hired, they have to work extra hard to get respect. Sexist attitudes have also marginalized immigrant women in the workplace. Korean immigrant women's lived experiences of paid work demonstrate that systemic racial and gender discrimination against immigrant women not only provide the justification of exploitation of the immigrant women's labour but also colonize their mental status. Ng (1993) argues:

The lack of recognition by Canadian institutions and employers of women's previous education and training is an effective barrier to their participation as equal members in society...The fact that women who received their educational credentials from Britain and the United States were given preferential treatment suggests racist assumptions in the accreditation process as well as in Canada's dominant relation to less developed parts of the world... these procedures help to keep immigrant women in marginal positions in the paid labour force, and they contribute to their sense of dependence, isolation, and powerlessness. (pp. 286-287)

As the Korean immigrant women have to deal with racist and sexist practices in the workplace, their family is considered as a comfort and a shelter for them.

Elabor-Idemudia (2000) also argues that racial discrimination and job segregation against immigrant women in the workplace reinforce the dependency of immigrant women in the family and ethnic communities. Elabor-Idemudia (2000) points out:

The burden of the double day is intensified when the workplace becomes a place where immigrants experience segregation and isolation. Many of the women thus turn to their homes or ethnic communities for refuge from an alien environment. (p.102)

## **2. Patriarchal Bargaining in the Family**

Since one of the main reasons that Korean families immigrate to Canada is for the future of their children and since the patriarchal ideology that a mother has to take care of her children has been perpetuated by Korean women and men, it is preferred by some Korean women to quit their jobs and stay home as a full time housewife and mother if they can afford to do so. As the Korean immigrant family does not have any social bond with their extended family and friends away, and the

ideology and practice of the role of mother is reinforced in the middle class family, the priority of the family is set not only on achieving economic stability, but also on building a middle class status in Canada.

When Ms. Lee came to Canada in the 1960s, she experienced gender-based job discrimination. When Ms. Lee's husband found employment in Halifax, she was offered an advanced position in Winnipeg. However, she thought that she had done a similar job in Korea and did not need to do it again in Canada, so she refused the offer. Then, later on, Ms. Lee realized how it was hard for women to get such a position in Canada at that time:

They heard of my work and they chose me for my abilities. I didn't know the offer was a rare one for a woman at that time. I submitted an application for a similar position in Halifax. Their response was 'What! A woman wants this type of job?' There were not many females in the field in Canada at that time. So I took a lower level position. (Ms. Lee)

It was easier for professionals to immigrate to Canada and get a job in the 1960s due to the needs of the labour force. However, Ms. Lee could not practice her profession in Canada because of the gender-based job segregation in her field. Even though she practiced in her field in Korea, Ms. Lee accepted a lower level of employment here, reducing her social status in Canada.

Even though she had a professional job in Canada, she decided to quit and become a full-time housewife in Halifax when her two sons were young. There are

several reasons that she quit her job. First of all, her working position in Canada was not satisfying for her compared to her career in Korea. Job segregation against an 'immigrant' and woman discouraged her to remain in the workforce. Moreover, she felt that her children needed a full-time mother's care in the family. Ms Lee realized that her family had only each other in a new society. As Ms. Lee's family can afford their living with her husband's income and since they built a middle-class status in Canada, she chose to be a full time housewife and mother for her children's future in Canada:

We only have the four of us. My children do not get any affection from our extended family as they are so far away. We are the real nuclear family without relatives here. I don't think every child needs a full time mother to have a promising future but... maybe I didn't want to have a guilty feeling of not being a full- time mother if they don't have a bright future. It was a difficult decision. Everybody who I worked with said not to quit my job saying children would grow themselves. But they only had me and their father. If one of us did not sacrifice, we didn't know what our children's future would be. (Ms. Lee)

As we can see from the experience of Ms Lee, without the need for an additional income besides that of the husband, and with the experience of employment segregation due to racism and sexism, immigrant women in middle-class families will weigh their options and sometimes yield to the patriarchal patterns and become full-time housewives. For Ms. Lee's family, rebuilding the middle class status of the family in Canada through the second generation became the priority in the

family. Moon (2003) pointed out that women's unpaid work such as mothering has not been focused on to explain the gender power relations in the family compared to women's paid work and its effect on the gender equality in the family. She argued that women do the unpaid work as a mother and a wife in the household whether they work outside or not. Moreover, women's unpaid work in the family could be intensified in the middle-class family's struggle to keep their status through the education of the next generation. Moon (2003) demonstrates:

It is noteworthy that most existing studies of middle-class immigrant families continue to focus on women's paid employment and overlook their carework in exploring the effects of immigration on gender relations in families. This omission is problematic both because most immigrant women continue to mother their children after immigration, regardless of their employment status, and because mothering is integral to the middle-class concern with the reproduction of socioeconomic status (or upward mobility) through investing in their children's formal and informal education. (pp. 842-843)

There are a lot of internal and external factors that influence gender relations in the Korean immigrant family. Korean immigrant women's employment has certainly changed unequal gender relations in positive ways, as we see from some of the Korean immigrant women in Halifax. However, the priority of family survival in the racist social environment, the high level of patriarchal ideology and practices in the Korean family, and the marginalization of immigrant women in the workplace due to racism and sexism, hinder the Korean women's challenges to gender inequality in

the family. Lim (1997) argues:

The members of immigrant families may perceive their families as a source of support in resisting oppression from outside institutions rather than a locus of gender conflict; any conflicts among family members may therefore be muted. (p.35)

Various degrees of racist and sexist practices, such as job segregation against immigrants and daily racist practices they face on the street and social institutions limit the challenges to gender inequality in the Korean family while Korean immigrant women are apt to bear the patriarchal practices as their prior agenda is family survival. Moreover, patriarchal practices in the family supporting the capitalist economic structure in Canada encourage immigrant women to take responsibility in the family to build and maintain their middle-class status.

### **3. Korean Immigrant Women's Challenges of Gender Inequality**

There are positive and negative effects of the changes in the Korean family regarding gender inequality. Women's employment certainly helped the positive change of gender relations in the family. However, women's employment itself is not always an opportunity for Korean immigrant women. Many Korean immigrant women started to work because of the economic instability of the family after immigration, not as a quest for self-achievement. Moreover, as they need the secondary income to get by, some Korean immigrant women started any jobs available to them, mostly manual and low-paid jobs. Compared to their educational

level and careers they had in Korea, their socioeconomic status was lower due to racism and sexism in Canada.

Family survival in a hostile society and upbringing of the next generation are the priorities of the family, while eliminating gender inequality is a secondary concern if at all for them. Therefore, Korean women's employment is supposed to be temporary, so that when the family builds economic stability as middle-class, it is probable that Korean immigrant women would go back to the status of a wife and mother devoting their life to other family members. Moreover, job segregation in the workplace against immigrant women due to racism and sexism also discourages continuation of their careers. Moreover, Korean immigrant women's care work is extended in a way that they take responsibility for maintaining Korean culture in the family and the ethnic community in Canada.

Morokvasic (2000), however, points out that immigrant women are not mere victims. In their limited situation due to the family survival and racism in the hostile society, immigrant women challenge their oppressive conditions inside and outside of the family:

It is misjudging to assume that immigrant/minority women are only victims with no power. Within the limited social positions, those women generate power sources through their own groups to deal with economic hardship, racism, and patriarchal gender relationships. (p.97)

Korean immigrant women are not powerless in the racist, capitalist and sexist social



structure. Korean immigrant women in this research have challenged their given situation inside and outside of the family.

Ms. Kang stated that she has thought about the role of mother when she felt guilty that she could not take care of her children while working. Moreover, she wants to continue drawing and she wishes she could do what she wants in the future. Her consciousness-raising process demonstrates that Ms. Kang's lived experience of her own situation led her to challenge the high level of patriarchal ideology her family had before:

I've changed enough to give my opinion in the equal position of my husband and to make big family decisions together. I think sometimes it wouldn't be like this if we lived in Korea. I am a kind of person who wants to do new things constantly. Other moms tell me that I am greedy. They say I am busy enough with my two young children. They say my husband makes money anyway even though it is not plentiful. They don't understand why I want to do more things. But my ambition is like my instinct. If I restrain what I want to do, I am not happy and my family wouldn't be happy. That shouldn't happen. It is not a good thing that I am being selfish in the family but if every family member can sacrifice a little and help each other, why shouldn't I do what I want to? Well, balance is important. If I am sick, nothing is done in the family. But I would be so depressed if I have to give up what I want to do to sacrifice myself for my family. I want to spend every minute meaningfully. It would be a good way to use it for the family but why can't I use it for myself? (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Kang also challenges the patriarchal role of mother in her family. A good mother is supposed to take care of her children and support their children to get well-educated in Korea. However, Ms. Kang realized that she can be a good mother without

sacrificing and devoting herself entirely to their children:

Obviously, children would have less attention as I am not always home to take care of them. It is a good mother who sacrifices herself completely for her children. However, I think it is a good mother too when she can show them how much she works hard for what she likes to do outside of the home. (Ms. Kang)

Ms. Yun achieved high self-esteem after her hard work paid off, and she has a professional career now. Even though Ms. Yun worked as a full time housewife taking care of her own family and in-laws, she had to help on the farm that her father in-law owned in Korea. However, her labour inside and outside of the home was not paid and appreciated. Her labour was taken for granted as the right duties of a wife, mother, and daughter in-law. When Ms. Yun got her own job, she was thrilled to have her own income. Ms. Yun challenged her husband's patriarchal attitude as a head of the family. As he considers himself the breadwinner of the family, Ms. Yun's husband simply saw the family income from the family business as his. Therefore, when Ms. Yun finally got her job, this was the beginning of her independence from his patriarchal attitude and remarks. Ms. Yun says:

I started to work as full time and after eight months I earned the money I spent for schooling. I gave the money to my husband and I was proud of myself saying "I returned the \$9000.00 that I owed you!" as he used to say that he was the one who worked hard to pay my tuition. (Ms. Yun)

Ms. Yun enjoys the economic independence she has now, i.e. the fact that she is able to support herself. In addition, she is satisfied that she has her own space and time

outside of the family:

A lot of Korean immigrant women get stressed in Canada because they have to spend more time with their husbands. In Korea, after their husbands go to work, they were free. In my case, I was with my husband all the time working in the poultry farm in Korea. But now I found my own life.... When I come to work in the morning in the beauty salon, my aching arms stop aching and I start my own routine. (Ms. Yun)

Furthermore, Ms. Yun encourages Korean housewives in Halifax to get activities

outside of the home when they come to do their hair. Ms. Yun not only thinks about

her situation now but plans ahead what would happen to her in the future when she

gets old as an immigrant in Canada and share her experience with them:

I encourage Korean moms to get any jobs and go into the main society. Even when you work in the *Tim Hortons*, you can meet friends there when you work a long time in one place. I told them to learn English. When we get old, children leave us. It is not like in Korea that children take care of their parents when they get older. Then, when I end up in a nursing home, who am I going to talk with if I cannot speak English? If my husband passes away first, who am I going to hang around with? How can I make friends when I cannot make any joke in English with people in a nursing home? I repeatedly tell Korean moms that they can do anything if they try. I say, 'Try this, try that. You can do it!' (Ms. Yun)

As an immigrant without extended family, relatives, and friends in Korea, their

isolation is not only a temporary problem. Ms. Yun's comments emphasize that

immigrant people in Canada could be more isolated in later life when there is no

support from Canadian society for them to engage into mainstream society. As Ms.

Yun recognizes the isolation and invisibility of immigrant people in the mainstream

Canadian society, she challenges her inactivity among immigrants and offers Korean immigrant women a space they can share:

Now, I have my own plan. I've been working for five years. I've cried a lot when I started working as I experienced sorrow. However, I achieved the goal I set before. I have no more wish, but to open my own shop in the future. Then, I will invite Korean women when I close the shop for the day and would offer coffee and listen to Korean songs with them. Anybody whether they have religion or not, anybody who doesn't have any other place to go but their own home would come and just have a cup of coffee. I wish my elder life is like that, enjoying my work and my life with my family and friends. (Ms. Yun)

Ms. Kim organizes a gathering with several elderly Korean women in her place once a week:

Our group, six elderly women, eat lunch together and sew. Sometimes, we go out together for birthdays and go shopping to buy fabrics, just our elderly social group (Ms. Kim).

I visited the club meeting once. One member said to me, "Just wasting the end of our life time together while waiting for our turns." Certainly, the women's club not only helps Korean elderly women by giving a space to spend time but also comforts isolated Korean elderly women. While sewing, they chat in Korean listening to Korean music and suddenly you feel you are in a neighbour's house in Korea having a relaxing time together.

In addition, they help elderly Koreans in Halifax when they need a hand. They would visit Korean elderly in the hospital and bring Korean food for them. In that meeting, they talked about visiting one elderly Korean woman who was in a

hospital. They share what is going on with Korean immigrant people of the same generation and support them emotionally and physically. Ms. Kim's elderly group in the Korean community is meaningful in that it is a women's group supporting vulnerable Korean elderly people.

The lived experiences of the participants in this research present various aspects of changing gender relations in the Korean family and community caused by immigration to Canada. There are various ways of bargaining process to negotiate gender division of labour and decision-making in the family, as their social and economic status has changed.

Korean immigrant women's employment has helped them with their challenges of unequal gender relations in the family, self-esteem, and with the financial and psychological independence of Korean immigrant women. However, the racial and gender discrimination outside of the family such as job segregation and the daily racist and sexist practices of the larger community in Canada have discouraged and slowed down challenges to gender inequality in the family and the ethnic community. Korean immigrant women tend to regard their families as shelters in a hostile social system. Moreover, the high level of patriarchal ideology in the family and the ethnic community are justified and reinforced sometimes as a source of power against the racist and class-based social structure in Canada. Therefore, Korean

women take an important and somewhat contradictory role in maintaining the 'ethnic culture' which is patriarchal and hierarchal, in that it has promoted women's oppression in Korea.

On the other hand, Korean immigrant women are not ineffective in terms of challenging the patriarchy and racism inside and outside of the family. Many of them have achieved more egalitarian gender relations in the family by demanding that other family members take some degree of responsibility for housework. Many of the Korean women also accomplished high levels of self-confidence while settling down and in the process of adjusting to their lives in Canada. Moreover, they take an active role in the Korean community in helping and supporting other isolated Korean immigrant women, elderly, and the second generation of Koreans.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Conclusion**

This research attempted to reveal the hidden aspects of Korean immigrant women's lives by listening to their lived experiences in Halifax. Specifically, this research focused on the changes of gender relations in Korean immigrant families, questioning whether immigration, which is one venue for social transformation, brings about more egalitarian gender relations. Using the lens of an anti-racist feminist perspective and analyzing their stories from the standpoint of Korean immigrant women, this research has argued that the system of oppression underlined in Korean immigrant women's everyday lives has to be understood within their specific social situations constructed by race, gender, and class. Gender relations for Korean immigrant women are not the only challenge they face in daily life. Situated in a racist, sexist and class-based social structure as immigrant women, gender relations in the Korean immigrant family are dynamic and complicated by issues of family survival in the hostile social environment in Canada, as well as complex patriarchal legacies in and outside the family.

Most Korean immigrant women in my research came to Halifax as dependent family members. However, as we learned from the lived experiences of Korean immigrant women in previous chapters, they are not dependent and inactive family

members, but active income earners and care providers. Compared with their social and economic status in Korea, many experienced a degradation of their socioeconomic class after immigration to Canada. Therefore, Korean immigrant women's economic activity outside of the family became necessary for the economic stability and survival of the family.

Seven out of nine participants have worked outside of the family in Canada. Most of them were full-time housewives in Korea. As they started working outside, many of them described situations in which their bargaining power within the family regarding housework and making family decisions increased. Many Korean immigrant women have demanded that other family members share house chores, which is a dramatic change compared with the situation of middle-class married women in Korea, who are responsible for the household and family as a full-time housewife in Korea. In addition, some of the participants mentioned that they had gained enough self-confidence to express their opinions and claim privileges from their husbands, which would not have been the case had they continued to live in Korea. However, gender relations in the family cannot be explained solely by the women's participation in the workplace. There are other social aspects influencing these relations in Korean immigrant families.

Korean immigrant women have faced job segregation and racial



discrimination as members of a minority group in the racist, sexist and class-based Canadian social structure. The transformed social and economic conditions inside and outside the family in turn has shifted gender relations in the family. Moreover, their involvement in the ethnic community has helped them build social networks for the family and maintain the traditional Korean way of living, based upon a strong patriarchal ideology. Those social aspects also affect Korean immigrant women's challenges of unequal gender relations in the family.

Their family priority has become rebuilding a level of socioeconomic security for the family in a hostile social environment. Therefore, the issues of unequal gender relations in the family and women's double work inside and outside the family are likely to be regarded as the 'inevitable sacrifice' for the family survival.

As noted in previous chapters, most participants in this research work in a place where their education and jobs in Korea are not recognized or relevant. Seven out of nine participants have a post-secondary degree. The other participants have a high school diploma. Except for two Korean women who have similar occupations to what they had in Korea, the majority of Korean women in my research have low-paid, manual, and physical jobs or business. Some of them were teachers and white collar officers before they got married.

However, as Canadian employers do not generally recognize their previous

education, abilities and experience in Korea, these immigrant women take any jobs available for them in Canada for the economic stability of their families. Even after they got a job, they also had to prove their ability to work by working harder than other Canadian workers while they were judged by their poor English skill in the work place. Moreover, the sexist environment in Canada also marginalized Korean immigrant women in the workplace. The racial and sexist discrimination in the workplace results in their economic condition of vulnerability and reinforces Korean immigrant women's dependence on the family.

Patriarchal ideology and practices in the family restrain Korean immigrant women's challenges regarding gender inequality in the family. As was discussed in previous chapters, many Korean immigrant women have gained bargaining power in the family as they work outside the home. However, there is evidence of resistance by Korean immigrant men, who do not want to give up their privileges in the family and change patriarchal attitudes that they have learned. This often generates significant conflict between spouses and could threaten the existence of the family unit. Moreover, it is shown that some immigrant women feel that they have a responsibility to raise children, and are willing to give up their jobs if their families can afford to do so.

Korean immigrant women's experiences, however, provide evidence that

immigrant women are not victims of the sexist, racist, and capitalist social system.

Facing challenges inside and outside of the family in a new society, Korean immigrant women have not only challenged difficulties, such as ongoing patriarchal practices in the family and racial and sexist discrimination outside of the family, but also have created social networks and spaces for Korean immigrants, Korean immigrant women, and the next generation. While enjoying independence and self-confidence as they generate a portion of the family income, some of Korean immigrant women stated that they demanded their rights, such as sharing housework with their husbands as well as equally participating in family decision-making.

Ms. Kim created a space for the elderly Korean immigrant women who are isolated from the mainstream society. Ms. Kang holds an important role in Korean community to pass on the Korean language and culture to the next Korean generation in order for them to understand their identity as Korean-Canadians. Ms. Yun hopes and plans to build a network among isolated Korean immigrant women by offering a space for gathering in the future. Ms. Shin took an active role in the Korean Association of Nova Scotia.

This research did not explore the aspect of migration in the larger socio-economic global context. In the process of globalization, many developing countries have been colonized by western countries economically, politically, and culturally.

Immigrants from those developing countries have experienced the domination of western values in their home country. One of the main reasons that Korean families immigrate to Canada is for their children's education. It is because the system of western education has been highly valued, and English as a global language has been an important skill to find viable employment in Korea. Therefore, more attention in immigrant studies should be given to the effect of colonialism when attempting to explain why people in the so-called third world want to migrate to western countries. Moreover, this study has limitations regarding the affect of colonialism in the experience of Korean immigrant women. According to Bannerji (1999), differences and diversities of non-white Canadians through Canadian multicultural policy become the ruling apparatus of limiting and controlling the terrain of immigrants, while degrading differences and diversities of immigrants as so-called traditional and non-modern. Thus, the concept of 'difference' is meant to be subjected to the discourse of an imperialist, colonialist, racist national project.

It is from this source that the content of difference and diversity of official multiculturalism evolves. This reduces non-Europeans the world over into pre-modern, traditional, or even down-right savage peoples, while equating Europeans with modernity, progress, and civilization. (p.268)

Nonwhite immigrants often internalize the ideologies of colonialism and racism, and they eventually accept their race as their disability, when adjusting to mainstream white- centered social system. Ms. Shin, in chapter VII, stated

that

However, if you work hard, you get respect. As I worked hard and when they gave me the work evaluation as I was going to retire soon, the results were all excellent, excellent, and excellent. It depends on you. Even though I looked so small and I had an accent, I finally got respect. If you don't work hard, you get racial discrimination. (Ms. Shin)

The comments of Ms. Shin give a good example how some immigrants of colour accept the racist practices and attitudes as something that they have to overcome by themselves, and not as racist discrimination that has to be corrected and diminished. Therefore, this research indicates that the effects of colonialism on the lives of nonwhite immigrants in western countries should be an important component of further research initiatives in the field of immigration studies.

The lived experiences of Korean immigrant women in this research reveal some other important social problems they have faced in Canada besides some of the issues on which this research focused. For example, one respondent shared her experience of a conjugal relationship conflict when the gender power relationship in the family shifted by renegotiation after immigration. Even though the women's employment has brought about more egalitarian gender relations, in some of the Korean immigrant households, the process of renegotiation cannot be assumed as peaceful. Giving up privileges the Korean men had in Korea was not easy. It is crucial to understand the struggles in immigrant families while they settle down and integrate

into a new social setting in order to support the family unit and rebuild their secure and stable livelihood, as was their aim when they decided to migrate to Canada.

In addition, the isolation of the elderly immigrants is pointed out by Ms. Kim and Ms. Yun. As many first generation immigrants are not able to speak English while struggling with their family's survival, building a social network for the elderly in the Korean community became an important agenda for Korean immigrants. Ms. Yun is critical about her later life of vulnerability and insecurity.

It is not like in Korea where children take care of their parents when they get older. When I end up in a nursing home, who am I going to talk with if I cannot speak English? If my husband passes away first, who am I going to hang around with? How can I make friends when I cannot make any jokes in English with people in a nursing home? (Ms. Yun). (Analysis chapter p.63)

Ms. Kim offers her space for elderly Korean women. They have been in Canada more than ten years. However, the first generation of most Korean immigrant women cannot speak English fluently as they devoted their time in Canada to rebuilding the socioeconomic stability of their families and supporting the education of their children. Therefore, those Korean immigrant women are even more vulnerable when they get older. Since their children leave their parents and build their own lives, the isolation of first generation Korean immigrants gets worse in later life. Therefore, research looking into the social needs of immigrant seniors would be helpful to produce a social policy nexus supporting elderly immigrants in Canada.

This research found from the lived experiences of Korean immigrant women that there are many tasks to be completed in order to understand and support Korean immigrant women and their families. First of all, there should be more research to learn about the lived experiences of Korean immigrants in Canada to understand the difficulties they face while they integrate themselves into Canadian society. This research points out that gender relations in the Korean households cannot be explained solely as a gender matter. Their different family situations in a new setting due to race and class are interconnected with gender relations in the family.

The links between research on immigrant families and policy making in governmental institutions should also be explored and systematically pursued. Korean immigrants heavily depend on their own ethnic community which further isolates Korean immigrants from mainstream society.

We need to better understand the role of ethnic communities as shelters for immigrants in a hostile social environment but also as hierarchal and patriarchal organizations. Racial and gender discrimination in the workplace and on the street has to be uncovered and patriarchal attitudes inside and outside the family should be monitored through the lived experiences of immigrant women.

This study reflects the hope that the outcome of this research would add to the body of practical feminist knowledge as reflected in the reality of Korean immigrant

women, serving to challenge the patriarchal and racist ideologies and practices

immigrant women face every day.



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