

# Was “Cross-Border Marriage” in South Korea an “Invented Fantasy”?

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## Introduction

"Cross-Border Marriage" has been a popular choice for many Korean men when choosing their significant others. According to Statistics Korea (2019), the percentage of marriage between Korean males and foreign females in South Korea increased substantially from 5.4% in 1999 to 30.7% in 2005 and remained high at over 25% in the 2010s. Even though international marriage was popular in Korea from 2000 to 2010, there was an increasing divorce rate between Korean men and foreign brides starting from 2004 and reached a high divorce rate of 8.3% in 2011.

However, the environment of “Cross-Border Marriage” has changed since 2014 after the Korean government restricted the requirements of international marriage (Kwaak 2014), such as foreign brides who are going to marry Korean men must pass the government-approved Korean language proficiency test and provide proof of funds, which could show whether the brides are able to rely on their own economically. It is observable that the divorce rate has kept decreasing in recent years.

Hence, this study aims to investigate the reasons which led to the high percentage of international marriage, as well as the increased high divorce rate, from the 2000s to the 2010s.

## Results

- How did different parties contribute to the "Invented Fantasy"?:
  - **Korean Government**
    - introduced and encouraged "Cross Border Marriage"
    - used “citizenship” as an inducement to bring in foreign brides.
  - **Marriage Brokers**
    - put up many advertisements, showing ‘Marry a Vietnamese Girl’, ‘They never run away’<sup>f</sup>
    - used the concept of "Hypergamy" to attract overseas brides
  - **Media**
    - reinforced the men’s expectation of the role of a foreign bride (“obedient wives” and “well-behaved”)

- What were the consequences of "Cross Border Marriage" that were neglected?:
  - **Commodification of Intimacy**
    - The words in advertisements showed "Pay Later", and "100% guaranteed refund" (Hyunok Lee 2014, 1255)
  - **Conditional Acceptance**
    - Koreans possess strong nationalism that they prefer to maintain their “racial purity”
    - If the marriage migrants could contribute to the country and increase the competitiveness of the country, their identities could be justified, e.g. reproductive potential
  - **Psychological Challenge**
    - Language barrier
    - Expectation Discrepancy

## Conclusion

“Cross-Border Marriage” had been falsely shaped by the Korean government, media, and marriage brokers. The “Invented Fantasy” of international marriage led to many mismatched marriages and sufferings in the 2010s, such as objectification of women, insufficient social acceptance, and unfavourable mental conditions of brides. The study proved that Cross-Border Marriage was beautified by different parties and was not as perfect as it depicted from the 2000s to 2010s. Tortured by the international marriage, many attempted to divorce. However, since the reform of the “Cross-Border Marriage” in 2014, it is hoped that this policy can lower the possibility of the mentioned problems from happening again, for instance, prevent miscommunication with their husbands, and avoid brides marrying with an economic intention. Both Korean grooms and brides deserve to enjoy equity and rights in the marriage.

## Selected References

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