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## **Summary:**

In this article the author describes how Korea has changed demographically in the last twenty years. In particular the author describes how international marriages have dramatically increased since 2000; from 3.5% to a high of 13.5% of all marriages in 2005 with a yearly average of now around 10%. Most of these marriages are occurring between Korean men and foreign women. The author notes that most of these marriages are taking place in rural areas because Korean women have been leaving the countryside in droves since 1990 and this has left a dearth of marriageable women. Consequently, Korean men; especially farmers, have been seeking “mail order” brides from such countries as China, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines and this quickly changing the demographic make up of the Southern part of the Korean peninsula. Although, the author notes that the average age difference between the “mail order” brides and their Korean husbands is high (17 to 17.5 years for Vietnamese and Cambodian brides), he nevertheless believes that if the couples treat each other with kindness and respect, they may not find romantic love, but they may find happiness and satisfaction.

## **Article/Photocopy:**

### **International marriages**

By Andrei Lankov

When in the early 1990s I published a book on daily life in Korea, I stated with a measure of confidence: “As a rule, Koreans do not approve of mixed marriages.” This might sound like a generalization, but it seemed that back then, some 20 years ago, that public opinion polls supported such a statement: studies confirmed that South Koreans were remarkably less willing to marry their children to foreigners than, say, Hong Kong Chinese or Japanese parents.

Had anybody told me 20 years ago that very soon Korea would become one of the world’s leaders in the number of “international” marriages, I would probably have laughed. But “never say never” — this is exactly what began to happen after the year 2000.

To be more exact, a type of international marriage was quite common in Korea from the late 1940s: marriages between Korean girls and American soldiers. No exact statistics seems to be available, but the number of such marriages over the last half a century might be as many as 100,000. In most cases, though, Korean spouses came from underprivileged social groups and were more or less despised (or, perhaps, pitied) by mainstream society.

Things began to change in the late 1990s. In 2000, 3.5 percent newly registered marriages in Korea were with foreigners and in 2005 the share of such marriages reached 13.5 percent. In the subsequent years the ratio has fluctuated between 10 and 13 percent, and in 2009 some 10.9 percent of all new marriages were

concluded with foreigners. And, remarkably, it is Korean males who usually take a foreign spouse nowadays — in 2009, 75.5 percent of all newly registered mixed marriages had a Korean groom and a foreign bride.

From the first glance at the available marriage statistics the nature of these unions become clear: this is essentially one of the largest mail-order-bride operations the world has ever seen. Korean farmers, largely from the less developed parts of the country, marry young women from Asian countries.

In 2009, about a third of all brides in newly registered mixed marriages (34.1 percent, to be exact) came from China. Vietnam was the second large bride exporter, with 21.8 percent of all brides being females from this wonderful yet underdeveloped country. China and Vietnam were followed by Cambodia and the Philippines, but also by Japan (even though the nature of the marriages between Japanese women and Korean men must be different).

This explosive growth in the number of such marriages was brought about by demographic changes in the Korean countryside, principally the flight of marriageable young women to the cities. From the 1990s women began to leave their native villages in droves, while men were expected to take care of the family farms and had no choice but to stay. So, foreign brides were “discovered,” and nowadays the share of mixed marriages in the countryside is astonishing. For example, in South Jeolla Province, 43.5 percent of all farmers who married in 2009 took a foreign bride.

Not surprisingly, foreign wives tend to be much younger than their Korean husbands — the norm for mail-order brides worldwide. A 2009 large-scale survey of mixed families indicated that on average the wife was 8.3 years younger. However, this research dealt with all existing mixed marriages, including those with a Korean wife, so for foreign wives from some countries the difference could be much greater: for Cambodia, the average age difference reached 17.5 years, and in the case of Korean-Vietnamese marriages the average age difference is 17 years.

Most of the marriage partners come from East Asian countries which are culturally similar to Korea. Actually, many Koreans say that the foreign brides, especially those from Vietnam, remind them of the Korean women of the good (read “patriarchal”) old days when Confucian norms were still adhered to unconditionally and women knew their “proper place.” As a poster advertising brides from Vietnam says: “Vietnamese girls, they who never run away.”

International marriage brokers arrange for the wife-seeking farmers to come to Vietnam or China, where they are introduced to a number of potential marriage candidates. Then the choice is made and the paperwork begins, and in a few months, a new bride lands in Korea.

Taking into consideration such a backdrop, one shouldn't be surprised to hear that these marriages are often criticized in the Korean media. There are good reasons to worry about such marriages, but perhaps a more balanced view on these unions would be more sanguine.

Indeed, most of those marriages are driven by pragmatic considerations, but we should not forget that the same is applicable to a majority of marriages throughout the world. The idea of love as the sole legitimate reason for getting married is very recent (maybe, a century or so old), and so far it has prevailed only in the more affluent parts of the globe.

Of course, it would be naive to think that the life of our ancestors was devoid of domestic bliss — there is much evidence that tells us that the opposite was true. If people were good to one another, and caring, they might become a perfect couple, whatever the initial reasons for their marriages.

But one thing is clear: Korea is not a mono-ethnic country any more — or rather it is losing this peculiarity at an amazing speed.

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***You will need to do this for a total of three articles. After you have found and summarized your three articles, you will need to answer the question:***

*Why do Korean educators need to be aware of issues in multiculturalism and multicultural educations? Use what you learned from **ALL** three articles to answer the question.*

## **There is no correct answer to this question.**

Your answers will depend on your beliefs and the articles you have summarized. When you answer the question **you must** use and refer to the information in the articles you have read and summarized to support your opinion and reasoning. You only need to the answer the question once; that is after you have read and summarized the three articles. It is important that the articles you choose help you answer the question. Choosing an article about multiculturalism in the US may not be helpful unless you can use it to answer the question above.