

**BARGAINING CITIZENSHIP:
WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, THE STATE, AND MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN
SOUTH KOREA**

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Dissertation Abstract

Since 1948, South Korea has maintained restrictive immigration and citizenship policies that promote ethnic homogeneity and discourage the settlement of immigrants who do not have marital or family ties to ethnic Koreans. From 2005, the Korean government has instituted unprecedented reforms that have included local voting rights to permanent residents, dual citizenship for certain categories of citizens, and policies that promote multiculturalism; such reforms have made Korea the country with the most progressive stance on immigration in East Asia. Why has the Korean government proactively embraced immigrant incorporation under the banner of multiculturalism, after decades of promoting ethnic homogeneity and racial purity?

In contrast to previous studies that focus on the adoption of liberal international norms, the remnants of the developmental state, and grassroots pressures from civil society, this dissertation explains immigrant incorporation in Korea as the unintended consequences of the negotiations between state efforts to regulate women's access to rights and the attempts by women's organizations and migrant women to secure rights and expand memberships. Although they comprise less than twenty percent of the total foreign population, marriage migrants, or foreign women married to Korean men, have been situated at the center of efforts to promote multiculturalism. Consequently, gender has figured prominently in shaping immigrant incorporation. Through a framework that defines citizenship as a negotiated relationship, this study demonstrates that women and the state are engaged in ongoing negotiations over three dimensions: access to rights, rights, and memberships where the outcome is often uneven and contradictory. Korean grassroots women's organizations capitalized on the growing significance of marriage migrants, to attempt to re-negotiate the terms of women's membership and rights. In bargaining with the state however, women's organizations have become implicated in state efforts to incorporate migrant women as wives and mothers based upon the very patriarchal ideals of womanhood and family that women's activists have long struggled against. Thus, citizenship ultimately poses a paradox for women, one that offers emancipatory potential for equality and inclusion while reinforcing gender ideals that exclude and marginalize them. Based on ethnographic and archival research, including personal interviews with fifty-one women's activists, migrant women, and policymakers conducted throughout the Seoul-Gyeonggi metropolitan area in Korea from September 2011 to November 2012, this dissertation highlights the unintended consequences of women's attempts to bargain with the state.