

Religion and Mothers in the Discursive Construction of Multicultural Korea By Gowoon Jung

Responding to the state and civil society's pro-multicultural actions, Korean discourses on immigrants have changed over time from unfavorable attitudes to positive, sympathetic, and supportive discourses. However, resentful sentiments about multicultural families and immigrants are noticeable from anti-multicultural online communities. In making multicultural nations, mothers, who participate in civic actions, have an integral role in promoting pluralistic discourses and democratic values characterized by openness, flexibility, and empathy. Comparing two groups of evangelical Protestant mothers, namely, transnational and domestic mothers, this study examines how mothers perceive multicultural families and children, what strategies they use in making discursive boundaries to include immigrants, and how they contribute to the making of multicultural Korea. The study draws on in-depth interviews with thirty evangelical mothers who were college-educated millennials with

Findings show that transnational mothers have a more inclusive perception of multicultural families and children, through their use of the interconnected languages of religion and cosmopolitanism. Transnational mothers find a boundary of sameness between Koreans and foreign others, sanctifying children across borders. Their narratives show that they dignify migrant wives and children as worthy constituents, associating their motherly experiences and emotions with religious teaching and language. They lessen ethnic differences and barriers of skin color between their own and other children by infusing spiritual attributes and characteristics into their biological and immigrant children. Furthermore, transnational mothers' living experiences in foreign environments make them focus on inclusive and tolerant evangelical values, leading to accepting attitudes toward multicultural families and children. Living in foreign countries, transnational women's mothering experiences made them find the same characteristics in their own vulnerable situations and those of other immigrant families arriving in Korea.

"I can talk about this issue because I am a mom...Children did not migrate here because they wanted to, so why [should they suffer] because of other people's sins?"

"I stand for the support [of undocumented children]...[T]he ideal church is where I think I can share my resources with others...I think we need to apply this to immigrants equivalently."

"[B]ecause I live here in the US...we are outsiders here...the system for minorities is really well established. Parents who gave birth in the state can receive a voucher for food, such as formula. In Korea, it will be hard to enact all such things, but I believe that we need to provide benefits at least for basic education and medical benefits. I gave birth to two children and have experience here, so I think there is no need to limit too much for children in Korea."

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"I am scared of [*Joseonjok* (Korean-Chinese)]. You know what I am saying...they can be violent and scream in certain situations."

"In the news about the crimes of *Joseonjok*...I see many harsh replies and comments."

"If people in our country are well-protected and the country is a state with perfect forms [of welfare], then we can step forward toward multiculturalism...in my opinion, our country is a state where native citizens are not well protected....such a group of people is marginalized."

Conversely, domestic mothers with little international experience accentuate the boundary of difference between Koreans and foreign others, emphasizing the fact that foreigners have different personality and character qualities. They showed concerns and fears as mothers, largely influenced by media portrayals of immigrants' violence and criminality. Domestic mothers see that children become a rationale for drawing a boundary of difference between Korean citizens and immigrants. They also developed a critical perspective on Korean multiculturalism, seeing co-ethnic Koreans as a more vulnerable group ignored by the Korean government. Expressing sympathy toward marginalized native Koreans, these women promoted 'nationalistic talk,' taking a critical stance toward the Korean government and they advocate a welfare system for working-class Koreans. Their sympathy does not cover all global citizens but is limited to a restricted geographical territory.

Overall, the findings of this study show the extent to which evangelical mothers move beyond a rigid notion of ethnicized, blood-based citizenship. The narratives by transnational mothers contest an exclusive notion of national citizenship, thereby displaying their willingness to embrace immigrant groups. Meanwhile, the responses of domestic mothers mirror the continuing operation of ethnic nationalism. This proves the persistent, lingering notion of ethnicized national citizenship in the minds of Koreans. Analytically, this study draws on intersectionality to shed light on women's multiple positions and identities in families, churches, and global communities. By examining reciprocally reinforcing, overlapping meanings of religiosity and cosmopolitanism for mothers, this study shows that women's lived practices and identities in diverse social institutions help them develop unique ways of imagining multicultural Korea.

References:

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