

Single Cycle Degree programme
in Comparative International Relations (LMR60)

Final Thesis

Bride Trafficking in East Asia:
The South Korean Context and Transnational Dynamics

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Sabrina Marchetti

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Letizia Palumbo

Counter-supervisor

Ch. Prof. Sara De Vido

Graduand

Veronica Rinaldi

Matriculation Number 880365

Academic Year

2025 / 2026

*Alla mia famiglia
e a Veronica bambina.*

Table of Contents

Table of contents	pag.	5
Riassunto in Italiano	pag.	6
Chapter 1		
Introduction	pag.	11
Chapter 2: What is Bride Trafficking		
2.1 Definition of Bride Trafficking and Normative Framework	pag.	20
2.2 Historical Developments of Bride Trafficking in the Southeast Asian Context	pag.	29
2.3 A Gendered Migration Phenomenon	pag.	36
Chapter 3: South Korean Social, Economic and Cultural Context		
3.1 Challenges of Rural Areas in South Korea	pag.	43
3.2 Women's Condition in South Korean Marriages	pag.	52
3.3 Migrants Realities in the South Korean Context	pag.	60
Chapter 4: South Korea and International Relations on Bride Trafficking		
4.1 South Korea and US Bilateral Cooperation	pag.	65
4.2 Transnational Aid and NGO Networks Support	pag.	73
4.3 Domestic Policies and Contradictions	pag.	83
Chapter 5		
Conclusion	pag.	92
List of references	pag.	96
Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA)	pag.	107

Riassunto in Italiano

Questa tesi ha come scopo esaminare il fenomeno del bride trafficking nell'est asiatico, utilizzando come caso di studio di riferimento la Corea del Sud, in quanto paese di destinazione. L'obiettivo principale è dimostrare che il traffico di mogli non è solo un'attività criminale che viola il diritto internazionale e i diritti umani, ma anche una particolare forma di sfruttamento strutturale, che trova radici nelle disuguaglianze economiche, nelle norme patriarcali della società, nei regimi migratori e nei sistemi di governo internazionale. Questa ricerca esplora le circostanze che rendono possibile la trasformazione del matrimonio in uno strumento di controllo e coercizione attraverso un approccio interdisciplinare che combina diritto internazionale, sociologia politica, studi di genere e studi di migrazione.

Il primo capitolo affronta le difficoltà fondamentali del bride trafficking, evidenziando come esso si collochi in una zona grigia tra migrazione matrimoniale volontaria e tratta di esseri umani. Nonostante il fenomeno non sia propriamente ed esplicitamente riconosciuto dal diritto internazionale, il Protocollo di Palermo fornisce una base normativa fondamentale, in grado di far intendere le forme di sfruttamento che possono derivare dal matrimonio. Assieme al Protocollo, accordi come la Convenzione per l'eliminazione di tutte le forme di discriminazione contro le donne (CEDAW) e le convenzioni dell'Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro (ILO) svolgono un contributo significativo nel collegare il traffico di donne alle discriminazioni di genere e alle pratiche riconducibili alla schiavitù. La ricerca inserisce inoltre il fenomeno in una prospettiva storica. Le forme contemporanee di bride trafficking si sviluppano all'interno di una lunga tradizione caratterizzata da concubinaggio, matrimoni combinati, colonialismo e

migrazioni forzate. Con la globalizzazione economica e l'aumento delle disuguaglianze tra i paesi dell'Asia orientale e sudorientale si è consolidato un mercato matrimoniale transnazionale nel quale le agenzie matrimoniali e gli intermediari hanno assunto un ruolo centrale. In molti paesi del sud-est asiatico il matrimonio con uno straniero è percepito come una possibilità di mobilità sociale e di sostegno economico per la famiglia, mentre nei paesi più sviluppati dell'est Asia uomini residenti nelle aree rurali ricorrono sempre più frequentemente a matrimoni con spose straniere. Il capitolo evidenzia anche la significativa dimensione di genere delle migrazioni. Le donne sono coinvolte in percorsi migratori legati al lavoro domestico, alla cura e alla riproduzione familiare. Le politiche migratorie e i visti matrimoniali contribuiscono a produrre forme di dipendenza che aumentano il rischio di sfruttamento. Il concetto di cittadinanza coniugale, infatti, mostra come spesso la validità dello status legale delle mogli migranti sia direttamente subordinato alla stabilità del matrimonio, limitando così l'autonomia delle donne. Analizzando l'esempio della Corea del Sud la tesi vuole dimostrare che la vulnerabilità non deriva solamente da caratteristiche individuali, ma in maniera più evidente, da strutture economiche, sociali ed istituzionali che condizionano le possibilità di scelta.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra sul contesto sudcoreano. La rapida industrializzazione del paese pur portando molti benefici, ha anche causato la nascita di profonde disuguaglianze all'interno del territorio e un progressivo declino delle aree rurali. L'invecchiamento della popolazione, la drastica diminuzione della natalità e l'emigrazione dei giovani verso le città hanno determinato un forte squilibrio demografico. La percentuale di donne coreane che abbandona le campagne in cerca di un'istruzione più approfondita e indipendenza economica è cresciuta esponenzialmente, rendendo sempre più difficile per gli uomini rurali trovare una moglie. Questi cambiamenti sono tra i fattori che hanno contribuito al ricorso ai matrimoni internazionali. Nelle campagne sudcoreane, infatti, il matrimonio mantiene ancora una funzione economica e sociale fondamentale. Per molti uomini che vivono nelle zone rurali, il matrimonio rappresenta una condizione necessaria per ottenere il riconoscimento sociale. Per questo con il tempo la normalizzazione delle unioni internazionali ha reso le donne

migranti una risposta ai problemi demografici delle campagne. Tuttavia, molte donne migranti una volta arrivate in Corea del Sud, si trovano a vivere condizioni di isolamento, difficoltà linguistiche e dipendenza economica. Si trovano inoltre a svolgere lavoro agricolo, attività domestiche e cura degli anziani della famiglia, lavori che spesso non vengono riconosciuti adeguatamente. Le limitazioni alla mobilità e la dipendenza dal marito inoltre riducono l'accesso indipendente ai servizi sanitari, per esempio, e ai programmi di integrazione. La tesi evidenzia anche come le politiche multiculturali promosse dallo Stato abbiano migliorato alcuni aspetti dell'inclusione senza però affrontare le cause strutturali alla base delle disuguaglianze. Il peso dell'adattamento ricade prevalentemente sulle donne migranti, mentre le strutture patriarcali e le disparità territoriali rimangono sostanzialmente immutate. Il matrimonio internazionale viene così utilizzato come strumento di compensazione delle crisi demografiche senza mettere in discussione i modelli sociali che le hanno prodotte.

L'ultimo capitolo analizza il ruolo della amministrazione internazionale e del rapporto tra Corea del Sud e Stati Uniti riguardo il bride trafficking. Un'attenzione particolare è dedicata al Trafficking in Persons Report, elaborato nell'ambito del Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Attraverso il sistema di classificazione dei paesi, questo rapporto esercita una pressione normativa capace di influenzare le politiche nazionali. I risultati della Corea del Sud in questa classifica hanno favorito l'implemento di nuove riforme legislative, una maggiore attenzione all'identificazione delle vittime e il miglioramento e rafforzamento dei sistemi di raccolta dei dati. Questo Rapporto, quindi, non viene solamente interpretato come uno strumento di valutazione, ma anche come un meccanismo capace di guidare le priorità politiche degli Stati riguardo il fenomeno. Un ruolo centrale è svolto anche dalle organizzazioni non governative, dai movimenti femministi e dalle reti per i diritti dei migranti. Questi attori contribuiscono attivamente alla denuncia degli abusi nei matrimoni internazionali, a fornire assistenza legale e psicologica alle vittime, basandosi sul rispetto dei diritti umani secondo il diritto internazionale. La cooperazione tra società civile e istituzioni risulta tuttavia ancora caratterizzata da tensioni, soprattutto quando le organizzazioni mettono in evidenza le responsabilità strutturali e i limiti delle politiche ufficiali. Nel complesso, la ricerca sostiene che il bride trafficking debba essere

interpretato come il risultato dell'interazione tra disuguaglianze globali, sistemi migratori, norme patriarcali e meccanismi di governance internazionale. Il fenomeno di bride trafficking, infatti, non può essere affrontato solamente attraverso strumenti repressivi, ma necessita di azioni in grado di intervenire sulle condizioni economiche, sociali e culturali che rendono possibile questo tipo di sfruttamento. In conclusione, la tesi afferma che soltanto con un approccio basato sui diritti umani, sulla parità di genere e sulla cooperazione internazionale è possibile combattere efficacemente questa forma di tratta di inganni e sfruttamento, che continua a nascondersi dietro l'istituzione del matrimonio.

Dal punto di vista metodologico, la ricerca adotta un approccio qualitativo basato sull'analisi di fonti giuridiche, rapporti di organizzazioni internazionali e letteratura accademica. L'utilizzo di una prospettiva femminista permette di mettere in discussione la concezione del matrimonio come sfera unicamente privata e neutrale, mostrando come questo possa diventare uno spazio nel quale si riproducono rapporti di potere e gerarchie di genere. La vulnerabilità femminile viene interpretata come una condizione prodotta da fattori strutturali e non come una caratteristica individuale. In questo senso, il bride trafficking appare come una manifestazione delle disuguaglianze che caratterizzano il sistema internazionale contemporaneo. La ricerca sottolinea inoltre come domanda e offerta nel mercato matrimoniale internazionale nei paesi del sud-est ed est asiatico siano profondamente influenzate dalle differenze economiche tra i paesi coinvolti. Gli intermediari sfruttano queste aspettative reciproche trasformando il matrimonio in una semplice transazione e contribuendo a occultare le dinamiche di sfruttamento dietro l'apparenza di una scelta individuale e consensuale. Nella ricerca, quindi, si evidenzia il bisogno di andare oltre una visione unicamente criminale del fenomeno e di adottare strategie multidimensionali in grado di sfidare le radici economiche, sociali e culturali che rendono possibile la continua esistenza del traffico di mogli. In conclusione, questa tesi vuole mettere in luce la complessità di un fenomeno che sfida le tradizionali distinzioni tra migrazione volontaria e coercizione, tra sfera privata e diritti umani, tra sovranità nazionale e amministrazione globale. Prendendo in analisi allo stesso tempo norme internazionali, strutture socioeconomiche e meccanismi di monitoraggio, questa tesi offre una lettura complessiva del bride trafficking e contribuisce ai dibattiti

contemporanei su genere, migrazioni e diritti umani. Infine, evidenzia come per combattere con successo il fenomeno si richieda cooperazione internazionale, attento sostegno alle vittime, regolamentazione delle agenzie matrimoniali e interventi capaci di ridurre le disuguaglianze economiche e di genere che alimentano le condizioni di vulnerabilità. Solo affrontando questi fattori strutturali è possibile garantire una tutela effettiva dei diritti delle donne e prevenire nuove forme di sfruttamento nascoste dietro pratiche socialmente accettate. Promuovendo inoltre maggiore consapevolezza pubblica e cooperazione regionale costante. L'obiettivo finale, quindi, è evidenziare la necessità di politiche orientate alla tutela delle donne migranti, al contrasto delle disuguaglianze e alla promozione di modelli sociali più inclusivi ed egualitari.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Human trafficking has risen as one of the most prominent and complex human rights threat of the twenty first century, cutting across borders, legal systems, and social structures. While this issue is often associated to the practices of forced labor, sexual exploitation, and a transnational criminal web, a less known yet equally important dimension of human trafficking has grown in the last decades, and it concerns the use of marriage as a tool of coercion, exploitation, and control: bride trafficking. This phenomenon stands within a conceptual framework that combines gender, migration, and global inequality. Although not explicitly recognized as a proper category in international law, this problem has gained more and more attention from scholars and political actors, especially in regions where demographic drops, patriarchal norms, and economic disparities merge to create conditions of extreme vulnerability. East Asia has a long historical legacy concerning gendered migration, arranged marriage practices, and structural inequalities, therefore it has become one of the main regions in which bride trafficking thrives. At the same time, there is a significant difference between sending and receiving countries in this phenomenon. South Korea, for instance, in the last seventy years has experienced great demographic and social transformations that have intensified the country's reliance on transnational marriages, feeding the high risk of bride trafficking.

This thesis examines bride trafficking in East Asia with a particular focus on South Korea as a destination country. It argues that bride trafficking must be viewed as a structural and gendered form of exploitation ingrained in social, economic, and political systems rather than just as a criminal act, placing the phenomenon within larger discussions on human

trafficking, gendered migration, and global governance. To shed light on the intricate processes that influence the supply and demand aspects of the transnational marriage market, the study takes an interdisciplinary approach putting together elements of political sociology, feminist theory, international law, and migration studies. This thesis aims to give a thorough understanding of how bride trafficking arises, continues, and is regulated in modern East and Southeast Asia by examining the normative frameworks governing trafficking, the socioeconomic circumstances of rural South Korea, and the international monitoring mechanisms that impact national policy responses.

Bride trafficking is an issue that blurs the lines between legal marriage and exploitative arrangements, between private family affairs and public human rights concerns, and between voluntary and forced migration. The legal dependency ingrained in many marriage migration systems, the ambiguity surrounding consent, and the cultural legitimacy of combined marriages make it harder to recognize and fight exploitation. Women may enter willingly into overseas marriages, often because of financial necessity or family expectations, but once they get to their new country, they may be exposed to abuse, isolation, and coercion. At times like these, the definition of trafficking provided by the Palermo Protocol, which is based on the triad act, means, and purpose, offers an all-round framework that can include exploitative forms of marriage arrangements, while also leaving a great deal of space for interpretation. Because of this, states have very different ideas about how to define and control bride trafficking; some use criminal justice strategies, while others concentrate on family law or migration control.

This thesis will also highlight how bride trafficking in East Asia has its roots in colonial legacies, socioeconomic disparities, and historical patterns of gendered movement. The gender and family structures of the area have long been influenced by customs like concubinage, arranged marriage, and the trade of women between villages. Beyond coming from historical roots, contemporary forms of trafficking are further influenced by modern day factors like global capitalism, labor migration, and marriage marketing built by matchmaking agencies. Because of their economic disparity, rural poverty, and limited possibilities for women, in sending countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines, marriage migration is recognized as an acceptable way of achieving mobility

or grant family survival, Meanwhile, the desire for foreign brides has been spurred by demographic imbalances, especially the lack of marriageable women in some areas. This has created a transnational marriage market that traffickers and unethical brokers can take advantage of.

In this regional context, South Korea holds a distinctive place. Over the past three decades, increased industrialization, urbanization, and demographic decline have turned the former emigration-heavy nation into a major migrant-receiving one. Due to increasing population aging, youth outmigration, and gender imbalances, especially in rural areas, the country has seen what scholars call a "marriage squeeze" for rural men. Meanwhile, government regulations and matching services have greatly contributed to the institutionalization of foreign marriage as a solution to social and demographic issues. While many international marriages can be considered safe and consensual, some may involve coercion, exploitation, or deceit and this happens in particular when women find themselves entering households with strict patriarchal norms, economic instability, and experience social isolation. In addition to limited access to social services and linguistic barriers, marriage visas establish a legal dependency that makes women even more vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, analyzing the larger socioeconomic and cultural framework in which marriage migration takes place is necessary to comprehend bride trafficking in South Korea. Marriage is crucial to rural communities' ability to keep up familial ties, care for aged parents, and support agricultural output. Confucian norms, which support hierarchical family structures and unequal labor distribution, continue to influence gender expectations. Migrant women often face multiple levels of vulnerability when they enter these settings, such as cultural expectations of compliance and caregiving, restricted mobility, isolation caused by language barriers, and financial dependence. These systemic factors make it challenging to distinguish between human trafficking and lawful marital migration, demonstrating how exploitation can become embedded in socially accepted organizations.

However, South Korea's responses to human trafficking are influenced by both national and international governance systems. The United States' Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, developed under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), is one of the

most significant tools for influencing global antitrafficking policy. Through its tier-ranking system, the TIP Report evaluates nations' efforts to combat human trafficking and exerts significant normative pressure on states to adopt specific policy frameworks to address the issue. South Korea's fluctuating rankings in recent years show how external monitoring can influence domestic reforms, particularly for issues like victim identification, legal frameworks, and data collection. The TIP Report functions not only as an evaluative instrument but also as a policy shaping mechanism that encourages states to align their antitrafficking strategies with U.S. priorities. Transnational NGO networks and civil society organizations are also very important in determining South Korea's antitrafficking policies. Feminist organizations, international NGOs, and migrant rights organizations have been crucial in raising awareness of abuses in cross-border marriages, advocating for legal changes, and providing victims with essential support. Their study highlights the limitations of state-centered approaches and the importance of survivor-centered, rights-based frameworks that address the structural problems that enable human trafficking. Transnational cooperation, which includes bilateral agreements, international funding systems, and regional initiatives, further reveals the complex structure of contemporary antitrafficking governance. Therefore, this thesis argues that bride trafficking must be seen as a form of gendered structural abuse that results from the interaction of global inequalities, patriarchal norms, and migration regimes. It challenges narrow criminal justice approaches that focus just on prosecuting traffickers and emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches that address the social and cultural conditions that make women vulnerable to exploitation. By analyzing the phenomenon at three interconnected levels, these being international norms, national socioeconomic systems, and global governance mechanisms, this study provides a thorough explanation of the formation, regulation, and contestation of bride trafficking.

Despite the fact that bride trafficking is receiving more attention, there are still a lot of gaps in the academic literature. Few studies combine an examination of national socioeconomic dynamics and international governance mechanisms with legal definitions of trafficking or the lived realities of migrant brides. In order to look deeper into this gap, this thesis looks at how domestic social conditions, international norms, and global monitoring systems all influence bride trafficking. To do so, I divided the work in three

chapters following this main research questions: how does bride trafficking become structurally possible and normalized within the South Korea-Southeast Asia marriage market?

By addressing this question, this thesis aims to contribute to a more in depth understanding of bride trafficking as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to individual acts of coercion but must be situated within broader structures of inequality and governance.

For this thesis I used a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that combines legal analysis, policy analysis, and historical sources based on desk research. It draws on international legal instruments, national legislation, academic literature, NGO reports, and policy documents to examine how bride trafficking is defined, how it developed through time, how it is regulated, and what it reveals of underlining gender inequality in South Korea. The study adopts a feminist analytical lens to highlight the gendered dimensions of trafficking and to challenge assumptions that frame marriage as a private or culturally neutral institution. It also incorporates insights from migration studies to analyze the structural conditions that shape women's mobility and vulnerability.

Chapter one establishes the theoretical and legal groundwork for the entire thesis. It begins by examining the definitional challenges surrounding bride trafficking, a phenomenon that occupies a conceptual grey zone between consensual marriage migration and human trafficking. The Palermo Protocol, in particular, uses the triad of act, means, and purpose to conceptualize trafficking. This chapter examines how this framework can be applied to exploitation related to marriage even though the Protocol's text makes no explicit mention of marriage. The chapter highlights the flexibility and limitations of current legal frameworks in addressing types of exploitation that are ingrained in socially acceptable institutions, such as marriage, marriage by examining the open-ended nature of the Protocol's definition. The chapter then turns to the broader normative landscape, examining how human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions contribute to the regulation of forced marriage, servile marriage, and gender-

based exploitation. The CEDAW entered into force the 3rd of September 1981 after more than thirty years of worked engaged by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. It focuses on bringing up into the topic of human rights concerns the female half of humanity, in particular its agenda focuses on three main branches of women discrimination: civil rights and legal status of women, their reproductive rights, and the impact that cultural factors have on gender relations. The ILO on the other hand was established in 1919, and its aim is to promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labor rights. Therefore, this chapter explores how all these tools conceptualize gender discrimination, vulnerability, and consent and how, considered together, they offer a normative framework for dealing with bride trafficking even in the absence of clear legal classification. The analysis highlights the significance of viewing vulnerability as a structural condition influenced by economic dependency, gender inequality, and restrictive migratory regimes rather than as an individual trait. The second section of the chapter discusses the historical background of bride trafficking, focusing on East Asia, where women's migration patterns have long been impacted by gendered migration patterns, arranged marriage traditions, and economic inequality. The chapter examines the historical roots of bride trafficking, including early forms of cross-border marriage that were often controlled by racial hierarchy and economic reliance, concubinage, colonial practices, and wartime marriages. It looks at how modern forms of bride trafficking are influenced by contemporary factors including global capitalism, demographic imbalances, and the marketing of marriage through matchmaking businesses, while also building on these historical trends. Overall, chapter one offers a thorough conceptual and normative framework for comprehending bride trafficking as a type of gendered structural violence by combining legal analysis, feminist theory, and historical study and it provides the analytical tools necessary to examine how exploitation can be embedded within marriage and how structural inequalities shape women's vulnerability to trafficking.

Chapter two shifts the focus from global and regional frameworks to the national context of South Korea, one of the most significant destination countries for marriage migrants from Southeast Asia. The chapter makes the case that understanding bride trafficking requires an examination of the cultural and socioeconomic factors that influence gender

relations, marriage, and rural life in South Korea. It starts by looking at the significant changes in geography and population that have taken place in the country as a result of its quick industrialization. Youth migration outside of less developed areas, especially among young women seeking school and work prospects in metropolitan centers, resulted in gender imbalances, rapid aging, and a sharp drop in the population of rural areas. Due to these demographic changes, males are finding it more and more difficult to find local brides in rural areas, creating marriage pressures. Furthermore, the chapter examines how rural households now use marriage as a means of securing caring, labor, and family continuity. It examines at the persistence of Confucian values including patrilineal descent, gendered labor divisions, and filial piety and how they impact the lives of Korean women and migrant spouses. The chapter highlights how the institutionalization of marriage migration, which is facilitated by government regulations and promoted by matchmaking services, has emerged in response to the decline in the rural population while also supporting patriarchal norms and structural injustices. One section of the chapter is also dedicated at examining the daily realities of men, women, and consequently migrant women in rural South Korea which takes up a significant amount of the chapter. It examines the ways in which women's vulnerability is made worse by linguistic difficulties, social isolation, limited transportation options, and legal dependency brought about by marriage visas. The chapter talks about how migrant spouses frequently take on the majority of unpaid domestic work, elder care, and agricultural labor while continuing to be marginalized in household decision-making processes. The psychological and emotional sides of rural marriage are also discussed, including the challenges of maintaining family harmony, the stigma associated with seeking help, and the mental health problems aggravated by loneliness. The chapter also examines the broader gendered aspects of marriage in South Korea, including the nation's declining marriage rates, the changing perspectives of young women, and the emergence of feminist movements like the 4B movement, which publicly challenges marriage and motherhood as patriarchal institutions. By analyzing both the structural conditions of rural life and the shifting cultural landscape of marriage, Chapter two demonstrates how South Korea's socioeconomic and gendered context creates an environment in which exploitative marriage arrangements can emerge and persist.

Chapter three expands the analytical lens to examine how South Korea's responses to trafficking are shaped by international governance mechanisms, bilateral relations, and transnational civil society networks, in particular related to the nation's relationship with the United States. The first section of the chapter examines the United States' involvement in international antitrafficking governance, with particular attention to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the yearly Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. It looks into how the TIP Report's tier-ranking method influences national policy reforms through diplomatic pressure and reputational rewards, act as both an assessment tool and a soft power tool. The chapter tracks South Korea's evolution over the course of the 2023–2025 TIP Reports, showing how shifts in ranking have prompted institutional reorganization, legislative changes, and an increased emphasis on victim identification and data collection. The chapter then looks at how domestic governance practices are influenced by international monitoring systems. It claims that in addition to analyzing state performance, the TIP Report actively changes the data systems, indicators, and institutional priorities that regulate human trafficking. The efforts taken by South Korea to increase its rating, such as building more shelters, strengthening screening methods, and fortifying legislative frameworks, highlight how external assessment can effect domestic policy priorities. The chapter's second section looks at how feminist groups and international NGO networks have influenced South Korea's anti-trafficking environment. It emphasizes how civil society actors have played a crucial role in bringing attention to abuses in cross-border marriages, promoting the rights of migrant women, and offering necessary resources including shelter, counseling, and legal assistance. In order to promote changes, the chapter examines how NGOs cooperate with state institutions and mobilize international human rights frameworks. It also deals with the tensions that occur between state and civil society actors, especially when NGOs point out institutional weaknesses or contest official narratives. The chapter finishes by placing South Korea within wider regional and international governance frameworks and examines the ways in which regional agreements, bilateral cooperation, and international financing sources influence state responses to human trafficking. It advances the idea that anti-trafficking governance is essentially complex, involving connections between national interests, local realities, and international norms. By analyzing these dynamics, chapter three shows

how bride trafficking is governed not only through domestic law but also through transnational systems of monitoring, aid, and cooperation.

Bride trafficking is a complex and evolving phenomenon that challenges traditional distinctions between voluntary migration and coercion, between private family matters and public human rights concerns, and between national sovereignty and international governance. The scope of this thesis is to present a thorough knowledge of the development, persistence, and governance of bride trafficking by analyzing the phenomena at different levels, including international norms, national socioeconomic systems, and international monitoring mechanisms. In addition to acknowledging the responsibility and vulnerability of migrant women, the study emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive, rights-based strategies that address the systemic factors that encourage exploitation. In doing so, this thesis also aims to contribute to broader debates on gender, migration, and global governance, offering insights that are relevant not only to South Korea and Southeast Asia but also to global efforts to combat human trafficking in all its forms.

Chapter 2

What is Bride Trafficking

2.1 Definition of Bride Trafficking and Normative Framework

The phrase “bride trafficking” is an intersection of gender, migration and criminal law. It does not have an official classification in international law, however it has gained more and more attention over the years, and the cases of research, policy, and legal discussion where marriage was used and described as a mean for human trafficking, raised. The term itself is quite complex, as it describes a practice, marriage, that it is both a personal and cultural function for individuals, but also a practice that can become a tool for economic exchange, coercion, and abuse. To be able to define bride trafficking with more accuracy, we need to understand first the normative definition of trafficking in persons and then how marriage can sometimes become the drive or purpose of that trafficking.

We could say that bride trafficking stands in a conceptual gray zone between voluntary and legitimate marriage migration and human trafficking. It involves, in fact, the recruit, transportation, and exploitation of women across borders using the institution of marriage, where women find themselves trapped in a system of abuse after agreeing to a marriage outside of their home country. However, at the same time it is a very sensitive topic as it regards a sphere of private life of people, from which many states resist to intervene. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) notes, the connection between trafficking and marriage is not easy to detect or categorise, therefore States often struggle to understand when a marriage is a real social arrangement and when it is a mean of exploitation (UNODC, 2020). As a matter of fact, there are women who leave their home countries voluntarily for marriage, helped by matchmaking agencies or family networks. On the other hand, there are a lot of women who are deceived or sold into marriages that result in exploitation that can be sexual, to forced labour or

confinement. For this reason, we can talk about a so-called grey area regarding the definition of bride trafficking, as it is still an unclear issue of structural coercion sustained by poverty, gender discrimination, and legal dependency that limit women capacity and possibility to leave an abusive reality. It is difficult, therefore, to have a simple definition, as bride trafficking defies simple acts of deception, and requires critical engagement with the social structures that enable exploitation disguised as marriage (UN WOMEN, 2012).

To begin, it is useful to know the general definition of human trafficking that the UNODC provides:

“Human Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims”.

Additionally, according to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, commonly known as the Palermo Protocol, of trafficking in persons consists of three main elements: the act (such as recruitment, transport, or harboring), the means (such as coercion, exploitation, or practices similar to slavery), and the purpose (again such as exploitation or forced labor) (UN 2000, art. 3(a)). Although, the Trafficking in Persons Protocol does not directly and explicitly include marriage as a form of abuse, UNODC research surrounding the Palermo Protocol and the circumstances in which different forms of marriage can fall under its scope, disclosed that instances of forced marriage may very well categories as forms of trafficking in persons. The Protocol does say, however, that trafficking related to marriage purposes can involve all the three elements listed in the definition, but not as the Protocol drafted and anticipated. It is, as we called it earlier, a gray area. Marriage can play the part of the act, the mean, or even the purpose, as it can be the tool through which a woman is transferred

abroad, the deceptive mean used to control her, or the circumstance within which the exploitation occurs.

As stated in the definition I previously provided, the trafficking in persons is described as a three-element crime, with an act, a mean, and a purpose. The General Assembly adopted the definition in order to further clarify the definition of this issue, providing various forms of exploitation. Although marriage is not clearly mentioned as one of them a lot of countries have chosen to specifically address also forced and child marriage in their national anti-trafficking legislations (UNODC, 2020). This is possible as the protocol adopted officially in 2000, was designed as an open-ended list of ways of exploitation, so that it could be inclusive of new forms of trafficking and exploitation when they might originate. During negotiations for the Protocol in fact, the topic of marriage was overly discussed. At first, it was considered that the term “forced labor” should have included cases of “forced marriage” or “marriage of convenience”, and there were big talks on whether different forms of specific exploitation should have been mentioned in the Protocol as violent crimes against women, forced marriage being one of them (UNODC, 2020). The impossibility to mention them all is what lead to a more open-ended approach to the issues mentioned in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (UNODC, 2020).

Another aspect worth mentioning is that marriage, often considered a private matter, is usually dealt with at the national law level, from how marriages must be registered and officiated, to crimes related to them, such as what we are talking about: forced and coerced marriages. In these cases, the aspect of human rights protection is significantly important, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for both women and men of age to get married and have the same rights. For example, in East Asia in particular, bride trafficking has its roots deeply connected to forced marriages, as in most Asian countries the most common tradition related to marriages was, and still is to this day in some instances, matchmaking and arranged marriages (Lhomme et al., 2021). This instance makes the ambiguity between bride trafficking and voluntary marriage migration even more difficult to detect in the East Asian territories. The matchmaking process, in fact, with the years passing and society developing has also expanded across borders and helped a lot of men to keep a conservative mentality toward marriage and not dislike the

idea of even “buying” their brides from abroad if necessary. This process is facilitated by intermediaries, such as matchmaking agencies, that often don’t disclose and inform about the level of consent the women involved can exercise (Bélanger, 2010). This tradition is one of the elements that make unclear and difficult the legal boundary, according to the UNODC. Many women, in fact, might have consented to marriage and migration at first, but they find themselves isolated and exploited once they arrive in the new country. However, the Palermo Protocol’s provisions state that the victim’s consent is irrelevant if any coercive mean is used, so even if a woman initially decided voluntary to migrate, the resulting mistreatment makes the consent invalid according to law.

From a criminological perspective, therefore, bride trafficking although not having, to this day, an official and universal definition, falls under any category that uses marriage in order to disguise crimes of exploitation. Primarily, although different in some ways, it can be associated to the crime of “sex trafficking”, where women in particular are tricked and coerced into sexual works. In the case of bride trafficking, in fact, the women or young girls are the main subject of exploitation of male buyers who often seek a wife who can work as a sex object, a birth-giving machine, or a domestic care worker (UNODC, 2020).

Trafficking or servitude related to marriage is not a new trend however, as already in 1956, the UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery provided a forerunner concept of bride trafficking identified as “servile forms of marriage”. Article 1(c) in fact states:

- “(i) A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group; or
- (ii) The husband of a woman, his family, or his clan, has the right to transfer her to another person for value received or otherwise; or
- (iii) A woman on the death of her husband is liable to be inherited by another person;”.

The modern matchmaking methods of bride trafficking much resemble the servile conditions stated above.

At the same time, not all marriages that involve international migration are fraudulent and constitute trafficking. We must mention that many match-making agencies work under rightful law across the booming so-called “bride market” of East Asia, offering structured services and facilitating visa processes with fully informed consent. The challenge for policymakers here is to be able to distinguish legitimate marriage arrangements and trafficking schemes (Scobey-Thal, 2015). The difference here lies in the means, if deceit, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability was used to obtain the marriage or maintain it.

The notion of vulnerability is also a crucial aspect of bride trafficking. First of all, it is important to understand in which way we are referring to vulnerability when we talk about bride trafficking, as in the sphere of migration politics it is becoming a quite discussed topic. The term “vulnerability” can assume different meanings depending on the matter debated, even completely opposite. This is one of the reasons why when vulnerability is related to migration it is a highly contested issue, as in time it has become not only a mean to define people in need of any kind of aid, but also a tool of selection to establish who is vulnerable enough or in need of more protection from the institutions (Geymonat et al., 2024). Naturally, this has created a toxic narrative within migration as people find themselves victims of this selective competition (Geymonat et al., 2024).

However, when we talk about bride trafficking, we refer to a gendered phenomenon which adds another characteristic to the notion of vulnerability. If we think about vulnerability from a gendered perspective, in fact, then it means highlighting how gender power can produce certain forms of exploitation and abuse, based on the particular conditions where women find themselves living, coerced and oppressed by gender hierarchies (Giammarinaro and Palumbo, 2024).

Women’s vulnerabilities in regard to migration, in fact, do not only come from individual circumstances, but from a more systematic network of inequality, such as gender discrimination, restrictive migration laws, and economic dependency (UN WOMEN, 2012). Marriage migration and bride trafficking in particular reenforce these vulnerabilities. As I mentioned before, women may enter a consensual transnational

marriage on a marriage visa or spouse-dependent visa, that will tie their legal status effectively under the complete control of their husbands. This legal dependency immediately creates a situation of coercion and exploitation that can be classified as trafficking, even in the absence of physical abuse. According to feminist scholars, recognizing the complexity of vulnerabilities and limited choices women have in these situations is significantly important, and not to concentrate only in the presence or absence of abuse. This requires a shift from a binary model of consent versus coercion as opposites, to one that looks at how much of a real choice a woman had during the whole process. Within this model bride trafficking is not just a simple crime, but an overlapping of gendered power, economic dependency, and migration control (UNODC, 2020).

Until now, therefore, it is clear the definition of bride trafficking is a matter that discloses many interpretative challenges. As I previously mentioned, marriage is not specifically listed in the Protocol as a form of exploitation, but with this strategic open-ended phrasing it allows its scope to include different practices similar to slavery, forced labor, or trafficking, including those disguised as transnational marriages. By doing so the Palermo Protocol establishes a more flexible legal framework. While not expressly naming “bride trafficking” it gives enough normative framework to debate such cases when the required factors are present. Trafficking related to the context of marriage arises when the act of recruitment or transfer is carried out with violence, coercion, or mislead and the marriage eventually results in exploitation. The fact that these marriages might present official and formal documentation does not rule out the possibility of trafficking; the job here is to carefully analyze the implicit means and purposes. The adaptability allows domestic legal systems to adapt the Protocol’s normative framework to local marriage and migration costumes while following international norms (UNODC, 2020).

The Palermo Protocol can be considered the main normative work when talking about bride trafficking, but it is not the only one. Other broader human rights treaties that address gender discrimination, slavery-like practices, and labor exploitation are relevant for the phenomenon of bride trafficking.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) is one of them. The CEDAW establishes the fundamental obligation for

all States to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all aspects of life, which include marriage (CEDAW, 2013). In particular, Article 6 states that all parties of the convention must take all appropriate measures to suppress all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women, and Article 16 specifically refers to the practice of marriage stating:

“1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.”

Article 16, therefore, is committed to guarantee equal rights in the marriage and family relation sphere. This is a very important step as many of the norms cited in the article fall short when it comes to bride trafficking. While also dealing with the economic aspect of marriage, this article understands that inequality within the family is one of the primary sources of discrimination for women. Another important aspect is that the CEDAW Committee explicitly connects trafficking to a gendered migration process, noting that the demand for foreign brides can result in practices of trafficking and servitude. Therefore, it urges States to regulate private recruiters and the so-called matchmaking agencies and, in addition, to provide proper protections and ensure access to justice for migrant women. These kinds of provisions label bride trafficking under the sphere of gendered violations of human rights, deeply rooted in discriminatory social structures and not just criminal acts (CEDAW, 2008). Furthermore, the CEDAW, recognizes the connection between, forced marriage, bride trafficking, and domestic servitude, as where women's migration for marriage is facilitated by deception, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability, the resulting exploitation falls under the scope of the previously mentioned Article 6. This makes it so that States have obligations to not only punish the offenders, but to also face the structural inequalities that make women much more vulnerable to this kind of exploitation.

Two of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions also address bride trafficking. The Forced Labor Convention (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No.105) define forced labor "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered himself voluntarily". Therefore, when women find themselves forced to carry out domestic work or sexual services under threat or servitude, we have a violation of both anti-trafficking and forced labor norms (ILO, 1930; ILO, 1957).

Finally, it is interesting to observe how states responded to these different normative frameworks according to their socio-legal contexts. In East Asia, as we already mention, transnational marriage is more common than in western countries, therefore they tried to regulate the issue, rather than implementing a more prohibitive approach. South Korea,

for example, introduced in 2007 the Marriage Brokerage Act, which require transparency from matchmaking agencies to all parties involved and to be registered by the government. In Korea the number of marriage-visa that can be issued is limited (UNODC, 2020). Taiwan and Singapore also acted similarly to South Korea, establishing licensing plans and obligations on agencies to prevent frauds. However, these kinds of enforcements are not constant and not well supervised, allowing brokers to actively operate across borders. On the other hand, in Vietnam, a country from which many of the women trafficked are natives, has officially criminalized commercial marriage brokerage with the Marriage and Family Law of 2000. However, here as well enforcement of these laws is not managed properly, granting brokerage networks to continue their business (Scobey-Thal, 2015). These contrasting results reveal a key dilemma of bride trafficking: excessive criminalization can move the market underground, while insufficient regulations leave women vulnerable.

In conclusion, as emerged from the sources cited in this research, the definitional and normative framework regarding bride trafficking unveil both the promise and the paradox of international law nowadays. On one hand we have the Palermo Protocol and other works that provide tools to be able to recognize and address exploitation within marriage. On the other hand, we have the flexibility of these frameworks that make the application of the norms uncertain. The most important factor is that bride trafficking should be understood as a form of gendered structural violence, where marriage becomes the instrument of control over women, helped by global inequalities legitimized by patriarchal societies. Effective normative responses, therefore, must grow beyond criminal justice into the realm of migration policies, labor regulation, and social equality. In our modern world where millions of women migrate for marriage and where the criminal act of trafficking is still present, clarity in definition and coherence in the legal framework are essential for justice itself.

2.2 Historical Developments of Bride Trafficking in the East Asian Context

Bride trafficking is a coercive and exploitative movement of women across borders for marriage, that has gained significant attention in current migration debates. However, as we already mentioned, it is not a new phenomenon. Bride trafficking belongs to a long historical progression of forced mobility, from slavery and forced labor to arranged marriages and concubinage. In particular, in East Asia, where colonial history, armed conflict, patriarchal family structures, and global economic and social inequalities are deeply intersected, the issue of bride trafficking has developed in notably distinctive ways.

Scholars frame migration as a constant and normal aspect that characterize human history, showing how mobility and cultural synergy have shaped societies throughout time. In recent years the aspect of gender was integrate into migration studies, highlighting women's roles in migration, their experiences, and specific vulnerabilities. An important aspect when we talk about bride trafficking, as it is considered gendered phenomenon of migration. Furthermore, in recent studies related to this issue, it was revealed that bride trafficking is rooted in gender inequalities, commercial matchmaking agencies, and states regulatory frameworks (Hoerder, 2004).

In this section I will explore the historical context of bride trafficking in East Asia, examining the role of colonial legacies, demographic pressures, patriarchal values, and the raise of the global marriage market. Bride trafficking shall be understood not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a result and combination of history of migration, gender relations, and also citizenship.

As previously stated, migration has been a fundamental aspect of human history for a long time. People have always moved in search of better chances of life, opportunities, or protection (Gabaccia et al., 2004). In East Asia migrations also helped local communities to connect and expand trade networks, labor, and even the empire. However, these movements were profoundly gendered, as men typically migrated for work, while women generally moved for marriage purposes, family responsibilities, or slavery. This is why for many years migration research only focused on male labor migrants, concealing women's central role in migration. A gendered view on the topic reveals how patriarchal

norms, marital expectations, and reproductive responsibilities have structured women's mobility (Guerry and Thébaud, 2020; Sinke, 2006). In East Asia, as I mentioned, women's migration was often tied to marriage, whether voluntary, arranged, or forced, leaving them particularly exposed and vulnerable to exploitation. Recently, marriage migration has stood out as a distinct analytical category of migration. Transnational marriages, particularly those involving East Asian citizen from richer countries, are increasingly organized through matchmaking agencies and brokers, thanks to an extended network (Lee et al., 2016). As introduced in the first section of the chapter, some of these marriages can be seen as voluntary, others however quickly become what we can define as trafficking when the women are deceived, pressured, or treated as exchange objects. Historically similar cases can be found in the colonial era with the practices of "war brides", arranged marriages across colonial empires, and early systems of servitude and concubinage in which women were similarly objectified and exchanged. During the colonial period in fact, East Asian women often entered relationships with foreign men, such as European colonizers, Chinese merchants, and Indian migrants (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). These unions, however, were deeply conditioned by racial hierarchy and economic dependence. Later on, during the Vietnam War and the U.S. military presence in the continent, from the Philippines grew the "war bride" phenomenon, where local women married foreign soldiers. Although some of these marriages might have been genuine, many others were dictated by coercion, exploitation, or survival necessities caused by poverty and conflict (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017).

It can be understood that force migration has also been a significant element of human migration. In East Asia, slave trading was connected with systems of forced labor and concubinage, where women were often trafficked as sexual slaves or sold into unions that served colonial or elite interests. For instance, these kinds of practices in China contributed to "shortages" of women, boosting bride purchase and trafficking. The same or similar practices were frequent also in other East Asian countries, where women were considered as goods by both patriarchal and colonial structures (Eklund, 2013). Families also played a significant role in these dynamics. In fact, Asian families often view migration, and migration for marriage purposes, as a strategic decision for the survival of the household. In this case women's marriage to foreign men can function as patriarchal

arrangements, where families exchanged their daughters' labor and reproductive capacity for economic relief.

Post colonial governments in East and Southeast Asia often lacked the means to control the growing commercial matchmaking marriage industry. The Vietnamese government, for example, implemented stricter regulations only after different cases of highly publicized cases of domestic violence and murder of Vietnamese brides abroad. However, these regulations often come well after the trafficking networks have already expanded well beyond the capacity of governments to contain them. As a result, brokers simply move their business underground, only increasing the risks for women who then seek their services. The combination of poor regulation norms and the patriarchal beliefs about women's duties to marry and support their families highlight the environment in which bride trafficking has developed.

The rise of global capitalism has also shaped the conditions under which bride trafficking occurs. Beginning in the 1970s and even more rapidly throughout the 1990s, East Asian countries experienced rapid industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. These big transformations had two major impacts significant for bride trafficking.

First, the economic developments pushed many men living in the rural areas to move for work, often to major big cities or even abroad. This created a very particular phenomenon that scholars refer to as "bachelor villages", mainly in the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia, where the rural population primarily became to consist of young males. On the other hand, women went abroad to enter more feminized labor sectors, such as domestic work, caregiving, and factory employment. These gendered migration patterns greatly reshaped the family dynamics and household strategies in these countries (Yeoh et al., 2017). The growing participation of women in global labor markets grew expectations that their mobility should contribute to family income, either thanks to wage labor or through marriage to a foreign man who can provide remittances.

Second, economic globalization had a great role by creating inequalities between East and Southeast Asia. Wealthier states like South Korea, but also Japan and Taiwan, experienced labor shortages, higher living costs, and decline in the demographic sector.

Poorer countries on the other hand faced economic instability and limited opportunities for rural workers. These differences fueled incentives for cross border marriages. While for men in wealthier countries foreign brides represented a way to ensure a marriage that they felt was more and more inaccessible in their own societies, for many Southeast Asian families marrying a daughter abroad into a richer household meant an appealing, and even necessary, survival strategy. The profit gained from these transnational marriages paved the way for brokerage firms to market women as ideal, traditional, and family-oriented partners. This commercialization strengthened the gendered stereotypes while normalizing the practice of acquiring a wife from overseas. Therefore, we can say that the historical context of bride trafficking cannot be separated by the economic and social transformations experienced by East and Southeast Asian countries, that reinforced gendered inequalities.

Apart from formal matchmaking agencies, bride trafficking in East Asia has also been facilitated by informal chains of kinship, community contacts, and local intermediaries (Yeoh et al., 2017). These actors often have an ambiguous role, as they may actually help women in seeking better opportunities, but they may also use deceptive or coercive means to make a profit. These local intermediaries often disguise themselves as community helpers, especially in areas where transnational marriages have become a common thing. In fact, a woman that successfully marries abroad may be an incentive for her female relatives or friends to pursue the same kind of opportunity, creating a chain migration dynamic. Doing so, with time, entire communities risk depending entirely on wages sent from foreign sons-in-law, reinforcing these social norms and encouraging women to marry out of their country. Normalizing these practices, however, can hide the potential risks involved, especially when brokers exaggerate the benefits coming from them, concealing potential dangers. These kinds of local chains also make it easier for brokers to act unnoticed, especially when families participate actively in the recruitment processes, because of economic need (Bélanger, 2010).

These informal networks are not a new phenomenon but have deep historical roots. As we saw earlier on, during the colonial era women often moved for labor and concubinage and migration often depended on informal intermediaries such as traders, religious leaders,

and village chiefs. These actors operated outside or together with the official colonial system, creating a parallel structure of mobility. In modern trafficking networks these historical patterns are reproduced, combining community trust with economic hopelessness to sustain a gendered economy of marriage migration.

Bride trafficking in East Asia is also shaped by shifting cultural ideals. Hypergamy for example, has long influenced marriage culture, with the expectation for women to marry to a man of higher status to ensure economic and social stability. However, globalization has changed the values that make a spouse ideal. In wealthier Asian countries, men who experience marginalization within their local marriage markets, because of poverty, rural residence, age, or lack of education, often resource to foreign brides to restore their sense of masculinity or to fulfill the cultural expectations of family structure. On the other hand, women from poorer countries may perceive foreign husbands as symbols of modernity, stability, and economic opportunity. Southeast Asian wives, therefore, are often sold as modern, educated, adaptable, and at the same time traditional, obedient, and family oriented. These contrasting expectations create a fragile ideological space for women, where they gain value because they are imagined as valuable both economically and domestically (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). Marriage brokers naturally exploit this narrative by selling women as solution demographic, economic and cultural issues for the receiving countries. Again, history repeats itself as this was also a common practice in the colonial era.

Lastly the experiences lived by women who married abroad reflect historical patterns of control and vulnerability. The majority of brides who migrate to rural South Korea, China, or Taiwan encounter very strict patriarchal household structures, isolation, and lack of linguistic support. Domestic violence, economic control, and social isolation recall the historical custom of concubinage and slavery that aimed at systematically restrict women's autonomy. Isolation in particular is a key aspect that may help distinguish legitimate marriage migration from bride trafficking; living in remote rural areas, in fact, foreign brides find themselves with limited access to transportation and community and social services. This isolation is not accidental, but it reflects the structural inequalities made to leave women dependent on their husbands and exposed to exploitation. In many

cases brokers intentionally lie about the living conditions women will face upon marrying abroad, contributing to a pattern of deceiving recruitment proper of trafficking (Lee et al., 2016).

Nowadays as in the past, women who find themselves trafficked often lack the possibility and capacity to then return home, seek legal protection, or access support networks. This highlights the continuity of historical and contemporary systems of gendered control related to migration. Bride trafficking related to women's migration to support their households is the most common and it is shaped by poverty, gender inequality, and limited chances for a better life regime. Women are not simply passive victims of their fate in this context, but they navigate these restraints in pursuit of better opportunities, at a great personal cost (Yeoh et al., 2017).

Demographic imbalances, such as unfair sex ratios, rapid migration from rural to urban areas, and decline in fertility, consequently created uneven marriage opportunities across Asia. In China the preference for sons and sex-selective abortions have left with time millions of men without the perspective of finding a spouse, and similar experiences have happened in South Korea and Vietnam. In fact, many rural Korean men struggle to find local partners, leading them to rely on brokers that match them with foreign brides, often coming from Vietnam (Lee et al., 2016). The expectation for women to promptly get married has long been the main influence of marriage markets. In territories where men were impoverished or socially outcasted, women often sought for foreign husbands as viewed as more secure financially. On the other hand, men in wealthier countries sought more traditional and submissive wives from poorer countries. This last two characteristics are the reason why Southeast Asian women are often perceived as ideal brides in global marriage markets (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). This commercialization of women's marital roles has helped the spread of trafficking, as brokers take full advantage the social and economic inequalities. The rise of commercial matchmaking agencies during the 1990s favored the institutionalization of forms of bride trafficking. In South Korea, lack of regulation of the phenomenon enabled brokers to expand their work, arranging marriages between rural men and foreign women. Once again, while some be

voluntary arrangements, the thin and blurred line between legitimate matchmaking and trafficking underlines how structural factors combine to heighten women's vulnerability.

The case of Vietnamese women marrying South Korean men well represent the dynamics of contemporary bride trafficking. Between the years 2000 and 2006, the number of these marriages grew exponentially from less than 100 to more than 10,000 every year. Many of these unions were managed by brokers, that provided minimal courtship and limited informed consent. Then, after migrating, women often found themselves placed in remote rural areas of Korea, where they faced isolation, language barriers, and sometimes domestic abuse. While some pursue these marriages to improve their family's economic situation, many are deceived or pressured into them, making the boundary between marriage migration and bride trafficking more and more difficult to expose (Lee et al., 2016).

Another aspect worth mentioning is that with the consolidation of modern nation-states in East Asia during the 20th century, governments slowly started to introduce legal frameworks aiming to regulate marriage, citizenship, and transnational migration. These regulations, however, were often shaped by patriarchal ideas about women's roles within the household and the nation. States historically viewed women's marriages to foreign men as an issue of marital citizenship, where women's patriarchal roles became of interest for national projects. In South Korea, for instance, women who decide to marry abroad face the loss of citizenship rights, with complicated legal procedures for family reunifications, or bureaucratic barriers to mobility (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). These restrictions consequently make women dependent of brokers or other intermediaries to handle migration processes, creating opportunities for trafficking networks to take advantage of them. At the same time wealthier countries, such as South Korea, formulate policies to recruit foreign bride for their advantage, as part of a broader demographic and rural development strategy for the state. The Korean government, in fact, was initially very welcoming towards foreign brides, as it saw international marriages as a solution to the demographic decline and men loneliness in rural areas. Marriage matchmaking agencies and brokers became almost institutionalized organizations, working with local government structures even when operating in unclear

legal areas (Lee et al., 2016). This confused boundary between state-sanctioned matchmaking and exploitative trafficking reveals how sometimes state policies themselves can contribute to women's vulnerability.

To conclude, in reference to the research conducted, we could say that bride trafficking in East Asia can be placed within a wider historical path of migration, gender norms, and global economic transformations. Although finding its roots in the colonial period, system of slavery, and long surviving patriarchal structures, the phenomenon has shifted due to contemporary demographic pressures, commercial matchmaking, and state regulations on cross-border mobility.

Migration is a core aspect of human life, but its coerced and exploitative side expose the most brutal dimension of mobility. Bride trafficking represents the violent side of marriage migration, where women's decisions to move are manipulated, forced, and exploited. Therefore, to contrast this issue more than criminal sanctions or administrative control is needed, but a broader change in gender ideologies, economic inequality, and legal framework regarding family and citizenship.

The challenge for East Asia particularly, is to recognize women's influence and to ensure significant protection from exploitation. This requires a further effort to address the structural conditions that limit women's saying and ensuring that marriage migration stays a voluntary act. Only by tracing bride trafficking within its historical, social, and global contexts policymakers and scholars will be able to develop appropriate responses that will support women's rights, autonomy, and dignity.

2.3 A Gendered Migration Phenomenon

To better understand bride trafficking, it is important to look at this phenomenon of migration through a gendered point of view. Traditional migration studies often regarded women simply as passive actors of male migrants, without considering the ways in which gender can shape mobility, opportunity, and vulnerability. Some scholars even argue that gender should be a central aspect of migration studies as it deeply influences experiences, limitations, and the ability to act (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). In the context of transnational

marriage, gender is not a casual factor, on the other hand, it dictates expectations, roles, and vulnerabilities, with women restricted into hierarchical systems that govern the terms of their mobility.

Particularly in the Asian context, the feminization of migration provides a conceptual frame for understanding the phenomenon of bride trafficking. As we mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter, women mainly participate in international migration for labor or marriage purposes, sectors that stand out for their low social consideration and dependency on male partners. This type of migration cannot be divided from structural inequalities of society, as women's economic contribution, reproductive labor, and domestic responsibility are a core aspect of both their migration and their acceptance in the new household. Even voluntary migration and marriage can create dependency and social vulnerability, underling the gendered process (Piper, 2008).

Gendered recruitment practices and family expectations build the distribution of mobility opportunities in Asia, highlighting the crucial role played by structural factors. In fact, while men mainly mobilize for work, women often travel for domestic and marital purposes, producing very distinctive forms of gendered migration (Asis and Piper, 2008). Furthermore, migration control frameworks and state policies portray gendered vulnerabilities of society, especially when legal recognition, residency, and citizenship are dependent on marital status (Christou and Kofman, 2022). In this way, bride trafficking clearly shows how migration is moderated by socio-economic and institutional hierarchies that converge with gendered power.

While structural limitations play a significant role, women also exercise their decisional power on the matter. In fact, migrant face multiple levels of power, from the household to foreign social fields, while taking strategic decisions about mobility, employment, and domestic relations. Bride trafficking perfectly shows this duality, as women may voluntarily marry out of their countries as a strategy to improve material conditions or social status, yet their consent is connected to structural inequalities, patriarchal norms, and legal dependency. Both opportunity and constraint, therefore, must be understood as key features of gendered migration (Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

Research in the East Asian context show how bride trafficking is to be considered a gendered phenomenon of migration. Study cases following South Korean men and Vietnamese women, for example, show the combination of demographic pressures, commercial brokerage, and patriarchal expectations toward women who eventually migrate. As mentioned in the previous section, the rural male population in South Korea faces lack of local brides due to urban migration and social changes, creating the search for foreign brides. Matchmaking agencies and brokers mediate this demand building communication, expectations, and even the perfect image of the promised brides. The gendered perspective of this migration is clear: women's domestic, reproductive, and emotional labor is instrumentalized, with brokers and receiving families selecting brides based on their obedience and family orientation. Legal frameworks do not help women's situation of dependency, many cross-border brides for example lack the proper documentation or opportunity to formal citizenship, and cultural narratives further legitimize these power inequalities (Kim, 2012).

China provides a parallel example. Similar to the South Korean situation, rural men in China, constrained by gender imbalances and a long preference for sons, turn to women from other provinces or neighboring countries. Once again, women entering these marriages face the possible improvement of their household income, but patriarchal traditions still control their domestic and reproductive labor. Brokers usually help these arrangements, reinforcing gendered hierarchies (Lu and Tao, 2015).

These dynamics can also be looked from the perspective of "marital citizenship", where foreign brides' legal and social status is linked to marital stability, causing structural dependency and limited autonomy. This happens also in voluntary migration, highlighting how structural dispositions intersect with gendered power to influence migration outcomes (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). Women may gain profit and empowerment through migration, social networks, and household influence, but structural inequalities limit their consent. Bride trafficking has the same pattern of creating vulnerabilities through social inequalities (Bachan, 2018). These conditions, in fact, create opportunities for bride trafficking to infiltrate the marriage market. Coercion often occurs through deception, emotional manipulation, and exploitation of already

existing inequalities (Singh, 2004), and in China, as in other Asian states, this is evident when women are sold as brides after being promised legitimate job opportunities, or good marital and life conditions.

Another country that offers another important empirical example are the Philippines. Basa et al. (2012) examine in their article how Filipino women's decisions to migrate, similarly to other countries mentioned before, are shaped by family economic strategies, gendered expectations, and recruitment intermediaries. In the Philippines women are often considered the primary contributors to household survival, they are expected to send home earnings and carry familial burdens throughout transnational labor. The structural patterns present in the article are very similar to those used in bride trafficking.

Indeed, recruiters and intermediaries play a fundamental role in shaping Filipino women's idea of marriage abroad. Marriage is often sold as a respectable, valid, and safer alternative to simple labor migration, with the promise of emotional fulfillment and economic stability. This gendered structure goes hand in hand with the national discourse that portray Filipinas as naturally caring, family oriented, and submissive women, all qualities that makes them very attractive for the transnational marriage market. In this way, women's agency is dictated by narratives that legitimize migration through marriage while concealing the structural inequalities that such migration entails.

The Philippines also have strong migration laws; however, this does not rule out vulnerability. As in other contexts, the legal path required by marriage migration often binds women's status to their husbands, creating conditions in which exploitation can persist. The patterns in this context, reliance on intermediaries, familial pressure to migrate, and unequal access to information, highlight how gendered recruitment systems can produce risks of coercion even in an apparently well-regulated environment (Basa et al., 2012). These findings uncover the broader point gendered migration vulnerabilities go beyond specific national contexts and repeat constantly across different forms of mobility.

Finally, it is important to give the proper attention to the structural and legal environment that plays a fundamental role in shaping the vulnerabilities experienced by women who

decide to migrate for marriage. It is within these areas that conditions useful to bride trafficking are normalized. We already stated that the concept of marital citizenship highlights how states install dependency into the structure of migration policies: a foreign brides' rights are tied to the longevity of her marriage (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau, 2017). This connection does not just make women more vulnerable to exploitation but also creates a mechanism of institutionalized coercion. A woman who wants to leave a harmful marriage is forced to weight the loss of legal status, potential deportation, and separation from children, making the cost of exit almost unbearable. These patterns may develop even when women enter transnational marriages with full apparent consent.

Furthermore, spousal visa regimes are emblematic of this dynamic in East Asia. In many cases, foreign brides are granted temporary, conditional visas that can only become permanent residency cards after years of proving marital stability. This sort of tryout period of time, effectively shifts state oversight to the private sphere, allowing and empowering husbands to act as the gatekeepers of their wives' legal security. Doing so state policy only supports patriarchal authority. In such a system the lines between migration, marriage, and control are unclear creating a complicated structure where women's autonomy is limited by administration channels (Christou and Kofman, 2022).

These patterns of legal dependency are not to be separated from broader states approaches to migration management. In Asia, the feminization of migration is influenced not only by changes in labor markets but also by state policies that channel women into specific reproductive roles. Family reunification rules, marriage visa categories, and domestic work programs all define the acceptable terms for which a woman can move. Notably, this not only causes less opportunities for women to move but further fuel the gendered social expectations. Although women may move across borders freely, they often do it in ways that reinforce their association with intimate and domestic labor and caregiving (Piper, 2008). Marriage migration, and bride trafficking, therefore, perfectly fall under a category of policies that value migrant women's labor when it contributes to household stability, demographic reproduction, or social care, all aspects historically feminized and undervalued.

Development debates also have a role in presenting women's migration as a tool for economic contribution and poverty alleviation. Such discourses refer to the remittances women send back to their home countries, while completely overlooking the inequalities and gendered burdens of this practice. By emphasizing the capacity of women to be providers for their families once abroad, the rhetoric of development may unintentionally normalize dangerous migration alternatives, including bride trafficking (Lansink, 2009). In fact, in the cases of Vietnam and the Philippines, as we saw, marriage migration is framed as a legitimate improvement strategy. Yet this conceals the reality that often awaits migrant brides upon their arrival, where their rights are conditional and their autonomy is constrained by legal and cultural expectations.

The overall interaction of policy, governance, and development discourse traces the social perception of foreign brides. From what we have mentioned transnational marriage is seen at the same time as a demographic tool, an economic strategy, and a personal solution and these kinds of reports can make even exploitative unions as both normal and appealing. Crucially, state policies are not only responsible of shaping women's vulnerabilities but also men's prospects. When governments entirely approve and help marriage migration processes for demographic or social motivations, men at the receiving end are facilitated to consider foreign brides as guaranteed partners whose role is mainly to attend and rehabilitate rural households or provide reproductive labor. This further entrenches patriarchal norms, confining women within pre-established historical roles, that are difficult to overcome in a future moment both economically, socially and even legally.

All together these structural, legal, and policy dimensions reveal that vulnerability in bride trafficking and marriage migration is not accidental but produced by a series of interconnected systems. Migration control builds legal dependency, demographic and social customs impose gendered expectations, development discourse hides risks of women's migration, and patriarchal social norms ensure that women's mobility routes lead into environments of dependency and exploitation. Bride trafficking appears within all these constrictive factors as a natural consequence of gendered migration regimes that

privilege control, domesticity, and structural subordination over genuine autonomy of women.

In conclusion, we could say that bride trafficking perfectly represents migration as a gendered phenomenon. Women's migration across borders is dictated by structural inequalities, patriarchal norms, legal dependency, and brokerage systems. The study cases from China, South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam have shown how although women may exercise a certain level of decisional power in choosing marriage migration, their autonomy is often compromised by social, economic, and legal constraints. Concepts such as marital citizenship and structural vulnerability how gender impact the conditions of mobility, transforming marriage migration in a form of systemic exploitation when inequalities are not addressed properly.

A gendered perspective on the issue, allows scholars and researchers to pinpoint bride trafficking within more extensive migration systems, labor hierarchies, and transnational social reproduction. It goes beyond the simple concept of criminality and victimhood, bringing to light the structural conditions that cause vulnerability and difficult line dividing proper consent and constraint. Finally, understanding bride trafficking as a gendered phenomenon stresses the importance for policy interventions aimed to address core structural inequalities, legal dependency, and the social valuation of women's labor and mobility.

Chapter 3

South Korean Social, Economic and Cultural Context

3.1 Challenges of Rural Areas in South Korea

South Korea is one of many countries involved in bride trafficking. The country's rapid transition from a mainly agrarian economy to a highly industrialized and urbanized one significantly altered its social, economic, and geographical structure. While on one hand this quick transformation has sustained economic growth and global competitiveness, it has also caused serious regional inequalities, in particular in the rural areas (OECD, 2021). Rural territories today are facing population decline, accelerated aging, labor shortages, and limited access to public services. Within this context, marriage has surfaced as a central social institution through which broader challenges are tried to be settled. In South Korea's rural areas marriage is far from being just a private tradition, but it is deeply connected with demographic survival, gender relations, agricultural sustenance, and state development strategies. Marriage migration, in particular, has become a key tool for rural communities to fight against demographic imbalance, while also bringing up the limits and contradictions of this phenomenon (OECD, 2021).

The decline of rural areas in South Korea can be understood as the result of long-term development strategies that mainly prioritized urban industrial advance over territorial balance. Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, economic investment, educational institutions, and high-quality employment opportunities have all been concentrated in the metropolitan areas, especially in the capital, Seoul. This uneven spatial concentration has generated a big wave of migration out of the rural regions, a process that has revealed itself as both selective and gendered. In fact, young people, and especially young women, are much more likely to leave rural realities in search of higher education, satisfying professional employment, and social environments that are perceived overall as more

suitable with independency and gender equality (Park, 2011). The long-term effect that these migrations have had, is the decline and deterioration of rural communities, leaving behind aging populations and shrinking social networks.

Demographic aging, in fact, is one of the biggest problems in rural areas. As fertility rates have declined at the national level - in 2025 South Korea's was registered to be 1.08 (Macrotrends, 2025) - rural areas have experienced a faster pace of population aging than urban centres, combined and favored by youth outmigration (OECD, 2021). Agricultural production, local welfare, and family care matters, are under significant pressure because of this demographic structure. Elderly people, in fact, often depend on family-based support, but the decrease of extended family networks greatly compromises the ability of rural households to provide care. In this setting marriage gains a new meaning and importance as a way to secure labor, care, and intergenerational continuity within rural households.

Marriage in rural South Korea can be seen as closely connected to the managing of agricultural production and family care (Kim, 2014). Smallholding farming is still the main method of agriculture; therefore, many rural households rely on family labor for both economic survival and social reproduction. Marrying in a rural family therefore often implies living with your in-laws, participation in farm work, and caregiving for elderly parents. These expectations are strongly reinforced by patriarchal family norms that are rooted in the historical Confucian traditions, which continue to heavily influence rural social relations, despite the societal development in urban areas (Molony et al., 2016). The importance of a male descent, filial piety, and gendered divisions of labor remains strong in these villages, where family continuity is closely linked to land ownership and ancestral lineage.

These gendered expectations have profound implications for marriage patterns. Many Korean women perceive rural marriage as limited economic opportunity, heavy domestic labor and caregiving burdens, and loss of autonomy (Oh et al., 2024). Therefore, the appeal for rural marriage has decreased as women's educational level and job opportunities have increased at the national level. This shift resulted in a so-called marriage squeeze in rural areas, where men face more and more difficulty in finding

partners inside their local communities (Park, 2011). Public discourse often depicts this issue as a demographic crisis threatening the survival and integrity of rural areas, yet this kind of narrative frequently omit the structural conditions that make that kind of life particularly unattractive for women. This dynamic implies that there is more to the rural marriage dilemma than just a demographic imbalance (Hudson and den Boer, 2017). The lack of Korean women willing to marry is surely a significant aspect that also reveals hidden conflicting ideas about what it means to build a family nowadays. While many women are increasingly prioritizing equal marriages and personal independence, many rural men still look for brides who are ready to enter traditional family structures. As a result, the marriage squeeze becomes at the same time ideological, cultural, and demographic.

The experiences of rural South Korean men who enter international marriages also need to be taken into consideration, to have proper understanding. According to Kim's research (2014), many unmarried rural men view extended bachelorhood as a sign that they have not fulfilled significant social responsibilities rather than just a personal circumstance. While being single might lead to feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness, marriage and having children are seen as necessary steps toward becoming a respected adult. Many men view being a bachelor as a publicly visible status that impacts how they are perceived in their families and local communities rather than as a private concern (Kim, 2014). However, cultural prejudice and reluctance followed the decision to pursue an international marriage. Many Koreans, in fact, first disapproved of the notion of being married to a foreign woman and thought that such unions were undesirable or even disgraceful. International marriage has historically been linked to colonialism, foreign military presence, or even as a deviation from a traditional native family. Therefore, for many rural men, choosing to marry an overseas bride meant overcoming both negative public opinions and personal reservations. However, as time passed there were fewer possibilities to wed Korean women, and the stigma of being a bachelor eventually surpassed the stigma of getting married abroad (Kim, 2014). With her analysis, Kim's research shows that judgments and decisions on overseas marriages are rarely made in a closed environment. Unmarried men are sometimes encouraged to take part in matchmaking programs or introduced to brokers and organizations that arrange cross-

border marriages by family members, neighbors, and religious or community-based networks. With time passing and successful international unions, this practice becomes normalized and there is less and less opposition from the community to getting married to a foreigner.

The connection between foreign marriage and masculinity is arguably one of the most significant aspects in Kim's research project. Due to low levels of education, declining agricultural earnings, and the general devaluation of rural life, many economically poor rural men in South Korea hold a socially inferior position. By rebuilding a sense of masculine identity based on the conventional position of provider, marriage to a woman from a less wealthy nation can somewhat make up for this perceived marginalization they have. Some men, in fact, present themselves as benefactors or rescuers who, by merely bringing their wives to South Korea, gave them access to better economic prospects. Despite their inherent disadvantage in Korean culture, this narrative allows them to restore authority and status. However, this compensatory process dangerously reinforces power imbalances in the home. Korean rural husbands often prioritize their economic function over learning their wives' languages, comprehending their cultural backgrounds, or offering emotional support. Furthermore, adjustment and integration were frequently viewed as the migrant wife's primary responsibility. These expectations sustain hierarchical gender relations, because foreign spouses are expected to adapt and submit to established family structures, while husbands retain power due to their role as providers. Research on bride trafficking benefits greatly from an understanding of these processes since it shows how patriarchal expectations about masculinity and family formation, in addition to demographic challenges, influence the demand for foreign wives. Therefore, rather than attributing the phenomenon to personal decisions or illegal brokerage alone, addressing exploitative marriage migration necessitates addressing the systemic factors that marginalize both rural men and migrant women.

It is within this context that marriage migration has been recognized and institutionalized as a solution to rural bachelorhood. Since the 1990s, international marriages between South Korean men and foreign women, mainly from other Asian countries, have increased significantly, helped by matchmaking agencies and even supported by

immigration policies (Kim, 2017). International marriage is not a phenomenon limited to rural areas, but its concentration in these territories reflects the demographic and social challenges faced by these communities. In this case, therefore, marriage migration acts as a remunerative mechanism, addressing gender inequalities without fundamentally transforming their roots.

From this point of view, we can say that marriage migration is closely interlinked with global inequalities. Women's migration patterns, in fact, are also shaped by the economic imbalance between South Korea and sending countries in Southeast Asia, where marriage represents an opportunity for economic stability, social mobility, or a lifestyle improvement, even for family members (Kamiya and Lee, 2008). However, these fantasies are quickly brought back to reality when migrant women enter in contact with local power relations in rural South Korea, dominated by patriarchal values and limited resources. Furthermore, the cultural structure of marriage migration is strongly influenced by nationalist and gendered discourses. On this matter professor Sealing Cheng's concept of phallogentric nationalism is quite interesting to also understand how marriage migration has been normalized in South Korea. Cheng (2011) states that all concerns about globalization, declining fertility, and national competitiveness have been taught through masculinist narratives that put the reproduction of heteronormative families and heritage continuity as a priority. These only fuel the rural context where migrant women are viewed as solutions to demographic decline, valued primarily for their reproductive and caregiving roles.

Marrying in rural areas puts migrant women in front of different challenges. Infrastructures in these areas are often underdeveloped, particularly if we talk about transportation, healthcare, childcare and social services (OECD, 2021). Public transportation, for example, is sporadic and unorganized making it poorly aligned with the rhythms of agricultural and caregiving daily life. Access to a private mean of transportation therefore becomes crucial, however driving remains a man job, and control over mobility is frequently managed by the husband or the in-laws (Han, 2025). These restrictions overly affect migrant wives, whose social integration greatly depends on their ability to access language education, employment, and community networks (Han, 2025).

Limitations to mobility shape the geographical and social boundaries of everyday life. They confine women to the domestic circle and the labor that comes from it, reinforcing isolation and dependence. Han's research (2025) on gender, migration, and daily mobility, draws the attention on how women's movements in rural areas of South Korea are built around care responsibilities rather than personal development or economic redemption. The concept of "mobility of care", for her, captures the ways in which women's time and movement are subordinated to the needs of the family, in particular of the children and elderly members, and in rural environments this burden is amplified.

Another aspect aggravating these challenges is economic vulnerability. As I mentioned before, rural households usually depend on small scale agriculture that provides low and unstable incomes. Migrant women are of significant help to agricultural labor, domestic work and caregiving, but their labor is often unpaid and socially unrecognized (Yoon, 2021). In these areas opportunities for well-paid employment are limited, and structural barriers such as language proficiency and transportation access further narrow the possibilities. In this case economic dependence on spouses reinforces unequal power dynamics within marriage, limiting women's capability to negotiate household decisions or exit harmful situations (Kim, 2017).

Another challenge of rural marriage is health. Marriage migrant women, in fact, face elevated risks of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and stress (Ahn 2012). Living in a secluded area highlights these risks and issues due to limited access to healthcare and sometimes lack of competent services. Dependence on the husband or other family members for transportation and interpretation can discourage the effort of migrant wives for seeking help. Moreover, the importance of family harmony for social norms may suppress the chance of them speaking up about their psychological distress.

Social isolation and discrimination further shape the life of marriage migrant women in rural communities. Many migrant women, in fact, encounter prejudice in everyday life, when they interact with people, in educational settings, and attending local institutions (Yoon, 2021). While the state sponsors multicultural policies to facilitate integration, they often implement frameworks that place the burden of fitting in a completely new environment on migrant women themselves. Multicultural family programmes and

organizations can help and provide useful services, but their reach is still limited in rural areas, and they often miss to adequately address the structural conditions of isolation, gendered labor, and economic precarity that characterize provincial life (Han, 2025). As previously stated, marriage migration intersects with decentralization and rural development strategies, as a consequence of the action plan that South Korea implemented at the policy level. However, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the country's decentralization reforms have only shifted responsibilities to local governments without properly addressing the imbalance in economic and administrative capacity of the territories. Rural administrations often lack the capacity and resources to develop appropriate measures to population aging, migration, and gender inequality and the rural-urban connections that are advertised by the government as solutions to regional disparities, only tend to benefit areas close to metropolitan centres, leaving remote rural areas further marginalized (OECD, 2021). How heavily South Korea relies on marriage migration as a tool to contrast demographic decline underlines the limitations of the current policy approaches. While international marriages may have slowed population decline in some villages, they do not address the core issues of rural isolation such as uneven development, inadequate infrastructure, and unrelenting conservative gender norms (Cheng, 2021). Treating migrant wives simply as instruments of rural life sustainability can keep alive patterns of dependency and social exclusion for women, rather than promoting inclusive community development.

Although the reality of marriage migrant women may be harsh, it is also important to note the efforts they implement to navigate rural life. A lot of women, in fact, make an effort to improve the community creating organizations and informal support groups, and doing so, with time, some women are able to revision household roles, expand their social networks, and conquer greater autonomy (Han, 2025). Unfortunately, these outcomes remain uneven and unlikely.

To further understand the gravity of the challenges faced in rural areas, it is necessary to consider how rural marriages is tightly interlinked to everyday practices of social reproduction that go beyond the simple household. In fact, social reproduction in rural areas includes not only biological reproduction, but also the maintenance of agricultural

subsistence, the passing on of cultural values, and the caregiving across generations (Kye and Park, 2024). Marriage plays a central role in preserving these processes, especially because these places lack proper state welfare and therefore family-based care is dominant.

The expectation for marriage to secure labor and care in rural areas does not come just from traditional values, but it is amplified by the demographic aging and the flight of younger generations from these territories. In these communities the elderly often rely on family members for daily attendance, medical assistance, and emotional support. Marriage migrant women often become key providers of this kind of care labor, going beyond responsibilities of childcare to include eldercare and community participation. Although essential for rural household this type of labor is not often recognized as it should be in economic and policy terms, and the invisibility of care work reinforces gender norms and hierarchies where women are used for their unpaid labor (Molony et al., 2016).

Living with parents-in-law remains a common practice in rural areas, particularly because house and land are closely linked. This setting can cause more gender-based asymmetries within the household as the decisional power is often concern of the older male members of the family. These dynamics require migrant women to adapt to clear expectations of obedience, filial piety, and gender roles that might differ from their country of origin (Kim, 2017). Extended family structures therefore have a lot of influence in the marriage dynamics.

Another critical challenge faced in rural marriage is education and parenting. Migrant women are expected to play a central role in raising children and supporting their education, a task that is not easy in the highly competitive South Korean education system. However, rural areas most times lack the resources for better education, such as extracurricular programmes or specialized support services. Children coming from multicultural families often face additional issues related to language, discrimination, and scares institutional support. Therefore, migrant women find themselves mediating between home and school, a task that requires linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and mobility, further intensifying the pressure placed on them (Kim, 2017). Furthermore,

the limited availability of childcare facilities consequently limits women's opportunity to pursue further education or a well-paid job. In this case, migrant women economic autonomy is put aside or given up in favor of caregiving responsibilities, fueling economic vulnerability (Han, 2025).

Finally, the emotional dimension of rural marriage needs particular attention. Social isolation, language barriers, and limited opportunities for peer interaction can lead to feelings of loneliness and exclusion among migrant women. Family harmony is held up by the emotional labor these women provide, by concealing their personal distress and performing normative roles of dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. This expectation for women to quietly adapt these norms can reveal a broader cultural structure that prioritize family stability over the wellbeing of the individual, and with time cumulative effects of emotional suppression can have serious repercussions on mental health (Ahn, 2012).

A positive aspect is that religion and community organizations may sometimes provide important support for marriage migrant women. Churches, temples, and community groups can function as spaces for connecting with other people, exchange of information, and even emotional support (Kang, 2019). This can help migrant women integrate more easily in the new community, but it also highlights the lack of formal policy interventions in regard to these issues.

On another note, the experiences of rural men also require critical attention when discussing marriage challenges in rural areas. For a man to be bachelor in a rural context is often viewed as a social problem caused by individual failure. This completely overlooks other structural conditions that shape men's marital prospects, such as economic insecurity, declining agricultural incomes, and the social devaluation of rural life. Many men living in rural villages face marginalization within national narratives that advertise successful urban professional carriers. For them marriage migration represents a mean to achieve socially recognized adulthood, but also it may reinforce their feelings of inadequacy (Cheng, 2021).

On this note, it is also interesting to analyze the age of men and women involved in international marriages. According to research conducted by Yang-Heui Ahn (2012) and

Keuntae Kim (2017) in two separate articles, the age gap between international couples is usually greater than in couples formed by two native Koreans. In fact, among Koreans who married foreign women, 85% of them are older than their brides, with more than a half of them being more than ten years older. In comparison, 53% of Korean men who married Korean women are older than their wives, with just the 2% being more than ten years older. Although it is notable that the groom is older than the bride in most marriages around the world, the significant age difference between Korean husbands and foreign wives may contribute to hardships the couple may face. While many international marriages are stable and supportive, marriage migrant women may encounter higher risks of domestic conflicts and have limited access to external support, particularly when they live in rural areas (Lee et al., 2016). In order to address these risks a broader effort to object gender norms and increase women's autonomy must be made.

In this brief section I analyzed the main challenges faced by migrant women in rural areas in South Korea. For the scope of this research, we can say that marriage in rural South Korea serves as a link through which demographic change, gender relations, and geographical imbalance can be improved. The excessive reliance on this phenomenon, however, reflects the strong will of rural communities to escape their isolation, but also the inadequacy of existing developing policies. Marriage migrant women play a central role in sustaining households and even communities, but they do so in an environment full of structural constraint and unequal power dynamics. Recognizing migrant wives as full social actors of the community and addressing patriarchal norms that shape rural life is fundamental to transform the challenges we talked about into opportunities for social justice and overall improvement of the community.

3.2 Women's Condition in South Korean Marriages

Marriage in South Korea has become a very discussed topic nowadays, particularly regarding women perspective on it. While it was always considered a natural step in people's life tied to adulthood and social respectability, now it is highly questioned by

younger generations, especially from young women who see it as an unequal and costly tradition. While on one hand in the last seventy years South Korea has experienced great economic growth, educational expansion, and technological development, on the other hand gender relations within the marriage sphere remain rooted to the patriarchal norms coming from the Confucian family ideology (Hoffman, 1995). The imbalance between women's social advancement and the persistence of traditional marital expectations has contributed to the decline in marriage rates, birth rates, and to the general negative attitude South Korean women have toward marriage (Lee et al., 2025).

The historical traditions of marriage in South Korea are linked to Confucian ideology, which bases family life on a patrilineal descent, hierarchical relations, and a defined and clear division of gender roles (Hoffman, 2025). Marriage was viewed as more than just a personal achievement, but as a way to preserve family lineage and maintaining social order. Women were usually expected to leave their homes after marrying, integrate into the husband's household, and take the responsibility of bearing children and of domestic work. Although many of the legal structures associated with this system have been formally dismantled, its cultural grasp has not disappeared and continues to shape marital expectations and gender norms in contemporary South Korea (Nam, 2010). Research on patrilineality and son preference further illustrates how marriage historically served as a mechanism for ensuring the continuity of the male family line, often limiting women's autonomy and reinforcing gendered inequalities (Den Boer and Hudson, 2017).

Den Boer and Hudson, for example, showed in their research how, despite its rapid modernization and economic development, son preference remained engraved in South Korea's culture, therefore influencing reproductive behaviors and contributing to the symbolic devaluation of daughters. This ideological trend is very important to understand women's condition within marriage nowadays, as wives are still often expected the same things they were told in the past. A further analysis shows that gender roles in South Korea have long been defined as interconnected yet quite unequal, with men taking part in the public sphere and women taking charge of domestic and caregiving roles (Hoffman, 2025). This is also because historically femininity has always been linked with obedience, emotional restraint, and self-sacrifice, characteristics that, to this day, are still often

associated to women and wives in particular (Hoffman, 2025). Despite women's increased access to education and participation in the job market, these cultural expectations persist and often contribute to tensions between women's expanding social roles and the traditional obligations associated with marriage.

Women's access to education has had a fundamental role in changing marital expectations in South Korea, although the rising of education opportunities did not translate also into gender equality within marriage. Ji-Sun Chung has documented in her research how historically women's limited access to education has also limited their opportunities in life and strengthened economic dependence on marriage. While today a lot of these institutional obstacles have been reduced, their effect still remains and has power to influence gendered expectations related to marriage.

With the growth of higher education in the second half of the 20th century women were able to pursue professional careers, become financially independent, and develop aspirations that went beyond the traditional boundaries of family life (Chung, 1994). As a result, marriage eventually stopped being the main tool with which women could achieve social standing and financial stability. However, it is important to note that family structures and traditions have not change as fast, or with the same rhythm of women's modern engagement in education and the labor market. This difference has led to what could be referred to as a structural conflict between patriarchy and modernization. Notably, in fact, marriage is still influenced by expectations coming from traditional gender structures, despite women being encouraged to pursue higher education, fully engage in the economy, and contribute to the advancement of society.

More recent demographic studies show that higher levels of female educational are associated with changing attitudes toward marriage, particularly in relation to expectations of equality and shared responsibility (Chung and Lee, 2022). Moreover, highly educated women are more likely to delay childbirth or to remain childless, largely because of the difficulty of combining professional careers with the demands of motherhood within marriage (Lee, 2018). What these patterns show is that marriage arrangements have changed slower than women's educational and occupational status.

The endurance of hypergamy, that is to marry to improve one's social or economic condition, keeps shaping these dynamics. However, these kinds of expectations, where women have to marry a man of higher or at least equal socio-economic status, have become increasingly difficult to fulfill, as women's career realization grows more similar to men's today (Chung and Lee, 2022). This imbalance fuels the belief of a shortage in marriage opportunities for women and men and adds to the declining marriage rates of the country, reinforcing norms and belief that treat women's economic autonomy as a potential obstacle to marriage. This contradiction between traditional norms and modernization is significant because it alters the perceived advantages and disadvantages of marriage. In the past, marriage was seen as a means of achieving both financial stability and social mobility. However, marriage may instead mean more household responsibilities, job disruptions, and less personal freedom for a lot of today's highly educated women. The problem lies not just in the amount of domestic labor but also in its symbolic value. Marriage frequently maintains a gendered hierarchy of duties that seems more and more at odds with modern notions of equality and personal growth.

Consequently, we can say that employment status is also connected to marriage arrangements, though in gendered ways. For example, a stable job is still the key condition for marriage among men, whereas women's employment is still an ambiguous matter, as it is seen both as necessary and potentially unsettling for a marriage (Kim, 2017). This ideology reflects the persistent influence of the man as the breadwinner, despite women's ever-growing participation in paid labor.

Working conditions in South Korea only fuel these gendered patterns: long working hours, very limited work-life balance, and a strong division between secure and unstable jobs, tend to affect women much more after they have children (Lee et al., 2025). Women often find themselves quitting their jobs due to caregiving responsibilities, resulting in long-term disadvantages in earnings and job stability, reducing women's economic autonomy within marriage.

The unequal division of paid and unpaid labor remains a central issue in women's experiences of marriage. Empirical research persistently shows that married women

continue to perform most domestic and caregiving work regardless of their employment status, producing what is often described as a double burden (Lee et al., 2025). This imbalance is frequently identified by women as a reason for postponing marriage or choosing not to marry at all (Lee 2023).

Mothers are still primarily responsible for their children's social and academic development, despite the significant transformation in society. This expectation creates significant emotional, financial, and psychological pressures in a highly competitive educational setting. Because of this, marriage is often seen as an institutional structure that concentrates caring responsibilities on women rather than as a relationship between equals (Chung, 1994). Therefore, delaying or rejecting marriage is a reflection of both shifting personal tastes and general discontent with the unfair distribution of reproductive labor. Feminist scholars have long maintained that significant amounts of unpaid reproductive labor carried out within households are just as important to capitalist economies as paid labor (Chung, 1994). Childcare, elder care, household administration, and preserving family well-being are all included in this labor.

Reproductive labor is often concealed because it takes place in private and is disproportionately performed by women, although being essential to society's functioning. The importance of reproductive labor is especially clear in the South Korean context. Despite notable improvements in women's education and employment, expectations on caregiving and home responsibilities remain highly gendered. According to the OECD (2021), South Korean women continue to perform far more unpaid household work than men, even when they work full-time. This imbalance demonstrates how economic modernity has not kept up with the redistribution of reproductive responsibilities within homes. Due to the persisting nature of these disparities, many Korean women may perceive marriage as an arrangement requiring excessive responsibility; despite having more options outside the home due to their education and professional accomplishments, marriage frequently still requires significant caregiving and household work obligations. Therefore, rather than being a rejection of family life in general, delaying or avoiding marriage could be interpreted as a rejection of institutional structures that still place the major burden of reproduction on women.

This perspective is supported by Chung and Lee's (2021) findings regarding changing marriage preferences among highly educated South Korean women. As they become financially independent, women seek relationships that are equal and involve shared responsibilities. However, lingering gender stereotypes sometimes create a contradiction between these expectations and the realities of married life. Instead of being solely a product of individual frustrations, the ensuing unhappiness is a reflection of broader conflicts between tradition and cultural change. Furthermore, Sealing Cheng's (2020) research offers a crucial framework for understanding these processes. Cheng argues that phallogentric nationalism, which connects women's reproductive capacities to broader national concerns about social continuity and population maintenance, is a common way for fears about family reproduction and demographic decline to be voiced. In such institutions, women are often implicitly expected to participate to national reproduction through marriage, children, and caring. As a result, the demands made on women to maintain family structures go beyond the home and are linked to broader demographic and political goals (Cheng, 2020).

From this perspective, falling marriage rates can be seen as a threat to established social reproduction norms. In addition to the institution of marriage itself, women are increasingly challenging the unequal distribution of labor that underpins it. Their unwillingness to get married is a reflection of a larger unwillingness to accept arrangements that still view reproductive labor as primarily the responsibility of women. The reduction in marriage indicates a problem in the social organization of caring, not a crisis in personal values. Additionally, this viewpoint provides fresh insight into the phenomena of international marriage migration.

Demographic considerations alone cannot account for the desire for foreign brides if many Korean women are becoming less inclined to engage in the reproductive labor customarily associated with marriage. Rather, it represents a persistent demand for family reproduction, caregiving, domestic tasks, and emotional labor that is still not sufficiently met by the social structures in place (Cheng, 2020). Migrant wives, therefore, are often integrated into rural families not just as spouses but also as producers of reproductive labor necessary for the upkeep of family and social life. They are frequently expected to

take part in family-based economic activities, take care of the elderly, administer the home, and bear children (Cheng, 2020). As a result, international marriage serves as both a response to the demographic imbalance and a means of maintaining traditional reproductive labor systems in spite of the increasing effort of Korean women to get away from such structures.

Modern legal reforms have modified the formal framework of marriage, but their effects on everyday practices have been limited. Sanghui Nam shows how feminist movements succeeded in challenging patriarchal legal structures, including the abolition of the Hojuje system, a family registration system that put men as center of the household (Nam, 2010). Although these reforms marked an important shift at the legal level, scholars note that changes in law have not been sufficient to transform daily marital relationships (Nam, 2010). Customs concerning domestic labor, caregiving, and family authority remain, therefore, mostly unchanged despite formal legal equality. As a result, marriage continues to be perceived as a cut to a woman's autonomy in Korean society. This divergence between legal frameworks and everyday life helps to explain why younger women may often approach marriage with uncertainty rather than viewing it as a stable or desirable tradition.

For some women, avoiding marriage becomes a way to maintain independence and control over their lives (Lee, 2023). In most recent years, following this sentiment of restriction related to marriage and patriarchal values in general, South Korean women have even created the so-called 4B movement. Women participating in this movement abstain from having physical encounters, dating, marrying, and having children with men because tired patriarchal ideology and misogyny that still dictates how they must live their lives. These are the "4 Nos" Korean women tell men, and this is why the movement is called 4B, after the four refusals that all begin with a "b" in the Korean language (Gao, 2024).

Transnational marriages provide additional insight on the challenges of women related to marriage. They are often viewed as a form of "family-oriented individualization", where men seek spouses through global marriage markets while being able to maintain

traditional family expectations (Shim and Han, 2010). These arrangements, however, tend to recreate existing gender hierarchies rather than overcome them. Moreover, as I have stated in chapter 1, the organizations promoting international marriages are often illegal and scam foreign women into coerced marriages, making this a bride trafficking issue. Foreign women are expected to conform to highly traditional roles within marriage, including hard domestic and caregiving labor, frequently under conditions of complete social isolation (Choo, 2013). In fact, migrant women are subject to moral surveillance, restricted mobility, and conditional access to rights within marriage (Choo, 2013). These findings indicate that marriage continues to function as a site of gendered control, regardless of women's nationality, but that migrant women might most likely be victims of these arrangements as they do not always have all the tools to understand what they are coming up against.

The reliance on migrant wives in rural areas further illustrates the persistence of family models that many Korean women are more and more rejecting (Han, 2025). At the same time, public discourse around marriage has become increasingly polarized. Analyses of online discourse show that Korean women are often portrayed as selfish or irresponsible for rejecting marriage, while men's limited participation in domestic labor is rarely problematized (Lee, 2024). These narratives frequently frame women's as moral or national failures by selling declining in marriages and fertility rates as their own individual choices (Lee, 2024). By doing so, the attention is shifted from structural inequalities within marriage and traditional gender norms are reinforced. One thing that further contributes to the issue is the stigmatization of unmarried women, which heightens the perception of marriage as an institution associated with obligation rather than a personal life decision. Therefore, the growing refusal of marriage among South Korean women can be understood in relation to persistent structural inequalities rather than simply a cultural anomaly.

Some studies conducted on the Korean population, show that women, in particular younger women, express higher levels of uncertainty or have negative thoughts toward marriage than men (Lee et al., 2025). These feelings reflect women's assessed expectations about the costs of marriage life, such as increased domestic work, career

disruption, and reduced autonomy (Lee, 2023). It is important to understand, however, that rather than rejecting intimacy or family life, women reject the institutional conditions under which marriage still operates. This challenges policy approaches that treat declining marriage rates primarily as a demographic problem. The literature instead challenges and points to the need to examine how marriage is organized and experienced in practice, particularly in relation to gendered expectations and inequalities.

3.3 Migrants Realities in the South Korean Context

South Korea's transition into a migrant-receiving society has been widely discussed in sociology, migration studies, and political science. However, scholars generally agree that this transition has not taken place through open or rights-based immigration. Instead, migration has developed through selective and state-managed pathways that produce unequal outcomes (Shin and Moon, 2019). Migration in South Korea is therefore not a single or uniform experience, rather it is organized through different legal and social regimes that shape migrants' lives according to nationality, gender, class, and legal status. Within this framework migrants' living conditions and opportunities are influenced more by institutional arrangements and dominant national ideas than by individual characteristics (Yu, 2023).

Shin and Moon (2019) argue that the migration process in South Korea emerged in response to labor shortages, demographic decline, and ethnic homogeneity. Migration policies were developed to address economic needs while almost ignoring long-term inclusion. Migrants are welcomed mainly as workers, spouses, or demographic resources, but they are rarely recognized as full members of the Korean society. This tension between economic dependence on migrants and resistance to diversity shapes the broader context of migrants' everyday lives. Policy-oriented research further shows that migration governance relies heavily on visa-based differentiation.

The concept of precarity is widely used in the literature to describe the structural position of migrants within South Korea's immigration regime. Rather than viewing insecurity as a side effect, Won (2024) shows that the administration of immigration and policy design in South Korea produces precarity. Migrant's residence security, work rights, and access to welfare are tied to very strict and well-defined visa categories, creating ongoing uncertainty across different life aspects. At the same time, while this pattern applies to all migrant groups on paper, its effects can be different depending on gender, nationality, and family status.

For labor migrants, for instance, precarity is mainly linked to employment-based visas that can restrict job mobility link legal residence to employer sponsorship (Shin and Moon, 2019). This way workers are exposed to exploitative labor conditions while also having limited capacity to seek help, since the termination of their contract would also result in the loss of their legal status. This kind of vulnerability is not something exceptional or unexpected, but a normalized part of the institutional structure of labor migration (Won, 2024). On the other hand, marriage migrants live precarity through different, but still similarly structured, mechanisms. Marriage visas, in fact, link legal residence to the successful duration of the marriage, consequently deepening the dependence of brides to their husbands and in general reinforcing gendered power dynamics within families (Won, 2024). Hwang's (2015) research on citizenship pursuit among marriage migrants further shows that long-term residence does not automatically guarantee a stable legal status. On the other hand, access to permanent residence or citizenship is heavily influenced by marital stability, income requirements, and state assessments of integration, making legal inclusion a process conditional to different requirements rather than assured by time and stability.

Gender is a key tool used to distribute precarity even more unevenly. Feminized migration pathways, marriage migration in particular, expose women at a higher level to forms of vulnerability such as domestic violence, social isolation, and economic dependence, while government responses keep prioritizing family preservation (Choo, 2013).

Furthermore, there is a significant division, between Southeast Asian migrants and Western migrants: the first ones are usually referred to as low-skilled, dependent, and culturally lacking, while the second ones are viewed as skilled, modern, and desirable (Yu, 2023). These narratives are instilled through policy making, media representation, and everyday interactions, influencing how migrants are treated, according to their origins, at work, schools, and public spaces. This racialization is particularly evident for marriage migrants. Choo (2013), documents how Southeast Asian migrant women are usually regarded as in need of discipline, language education, and cultural training, despite also usually representing the image of traditional woman rural Korean men are seeking. On the other hand, this narrative clashes with representation of Western women, who are often absolved from integration monitoring by the state despite holding the same legal status. Yu (2023) argues that this is the result of racialized assumptions about cultural compatibility, rather than objective policy criteria. In the Korean national imaginary concern over bloodline, lineage, and national purity continue to affect public discourse and family expectations (Lee, 2008).

Due to the unequal distribution of rights among migrant categories, legal disparity fuels existing inequalities. According to Won (2024), there is a stratified system of rights because access to social insurance, welfare benefits, and labor protections differs greatly depending on the type of visa. For example, marriage migrants may gain access to certain family-based benefits, yet their economic autonomy remains limited, while labor migrants may gain access to employment without corresponding rights to family reunification or long-term residence.

The impact of racialization and precarity is further demonstrated by health-related research. Research on the health of immigrant women reveals increased stress levels, mental health issues, and obstacles to accessing healthcare that are connected to prejudice in medical facilities, legal dependency, and language problems (Ahn, 2012). Moral distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" migrants are also essential to migration governance. Choo (2013) shows that marriage migrant women are judged based on parameters of femininity, motherhood, and obedience, and even access to rights is often directly proportionate to the compliance of these ideals. This kind of moral

governance further fuel gender hierarchies and at the same time hide the underlying foundations of inequality.

Policy-oriented research also highlights how integration programs frequently perpetuate precarity by shifting all responsibility to migrants instead of addressing institutional barriers. For instance, research by the Korean Women's Development Institute shows that programs promoting social participation frequently fail to consider childcare responsibilities, transportation barriers, and household power relations that limit migrant women's ability to engage in public life (Kim et al., 2021). We can say that immigration law, labor market segmentation, family norms, and racialized national imaginaries combine to create migrants' vulnerabilities (Shin and Moon, 2019). In South Korea, migration regulation is mainly characterized by a very selective structure, prioritizing demographic control and economic efficiency over long-term inclusion (Shin and Moon, 2019). Immigrations policies, in fact, regulate migrants' presence through visa stratification, time-limited residence, and differentiated access to rights, producing what Won (2024) describes as a regime of institutionalized precarity. Rather than helping a safe and lawful integration, these policy frameworks often function to discipline migrants' behavior and limit claims to social membership.

Marriage migration, therefore, clearly illustrate these dynamics. Integration requirements, controls, and moral judgements are particularly strict for marriage migrants, despite supposedly being addressed as future members of Korean society (Choo, 2013). While it is true that state-sponsored programs promote language learning, cultural adaptation, and family stability, the options to resolve domestic power imbalances or exclusion from the labor market are limited. Scholars argue that these policies tend to stress family preservation and demographic purposes over migrant women's autonomy and safety (Choo, 2013). It is also important to note that these discursive and policy frameworks also have an impact on children in immigrant households. According to Mary Lee's analysis, social services and educational institutions frequently portray migrant mothers' children as objects of intervention rather than as citizens with rights, putting more pressure on mothers to manage social acceptance and assimilation. This dynamic extends integration burdens across generations.

Data-based policy reviews point to the limited effectiveness of current integration strategies as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) migration report notes that although improvements have been made in data collection and coordination, significant gaps remain in addressing migrants' long-term settlement needs, particularly for women and families (Lee, 2022). Scholars emphasize that without addressing structural sources of precarity, policy reforms are unlikely to result in substantive inclusion. According to the sources I used, there is broad agreement that migration policy in South Korea prioritizes control over inclusion. Differentiated forms of visas shape migrants' everyday lives, health, and future prospects, while policy instruments function not only as administrative tools but also as mechanisms that reproduce social hierarchy (Won, 2024) (Yu, 2023). Essentially, we could say that migrants' realities in South Korea are often shaped by structurally produced inequality rather than by individual failures of adaptation.

Chapter 4

South Korea and International Relations on Bride Trafficking

4.1 South Korea and US Bilateral Cooperation

Human trafficking is widely recognized as one of the most complex transnational crimes of our times, intersecting with migration systems, global labor markets, organized criminal networks, and gendered forms of exploitation. The definition that was adopted internationally was established by the United Nations and describes trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation for purposes that include forced labor, sexual exploitation, and practices comparable to slavery (UNODC, 2024). This definition reflects a broad international consensus that trafficking constitutes both a criminal offense and a serious violation of human rights requiring coordinated governmental intervention.

Within this global framework, the United States have taken on a particularly prominent role in shaping anti-trafficking governance. The adoption of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000 established a comprehensive policy architecture centered on prevention, protection, and prosecution, commonly referred to as the “three Ps” (Bressan, 2011). The international dimension of this legislation materialized in the creation of the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which evaluates foreign governments’ responses to trafficking and has become one of the most influential monitoring tools in the field.

In order to evaluate national anti-trafficking initiatives, the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons publishes the TIP Report, which

gathers data from embassies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and governmental sources (Gehring, 2022). Following that, nations are ranked in tiers according to how well they adhere to the TVPA's minimal requirements. The United States stands out as a key player in establishing global policy expectations thanks to this evaluative framework.

The report serves as a governance tool integrated into larger international influence systems in addition to functioning as a descriptive document. The TIP Report helps spread policy models among jurisdictions by setting standards for appropriate state conduct. The report's goal, according to the Trafficking Institute, is to persuade governments around the world to strengthen their anti-trafficking measures and therefore expanding U.S. policy priorities beyond national borders (Gehring, 2022).

At the core of the TIP framework lies the tier-ranking system, which functions as both a classificatory tool and a mechanism of accountability. Countries placed in Tier 1 are considered to fully meet the minimum standards for successfully tackling trafficking, whereas Tier 2 countries are making significant efforts but remain non-compliant in important areas (Gehring, 2022). Lower tiers indicate weaker commitments and may carry diplomatic consequences, including potential restrictions on certain forms of assistance (Gehring, 2022). Importantly, Tier 1 status does not imply the absence of trafficking, rather it reflects a government's demonstrated commitment to addressing the problem through sustained institutional action. The U.S. Department of State emphasizes that countries must continue to show progress each year to maintain this classification, reinforcing the idea that compliance is an ongoing responsibility rather than a permanent achievement (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Governments are evaluated based on their ability to successfully outlaw human trafficking, enforce severe enough punishments, prosecute offenders, proactively identify victims, and grant access to protection services including medical treatment, shelter, and legal aid (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Preventive measures, collaborations with members of society, and initiatives to lower the demand for commercial sex or exploitative labor are further factors to take into account (U.S. Department of State, 2024). By using these criteria, the TIP Report creates a uniform framework for anti-trafficking governance that states are evaluated against.

The significance of the TIP Report extends beyond its classificatory function. Since its inception, it has contributed to the adoption and reform of anti-trafficking legislation in numerous countries, partly by compiling data that is otherwise difficult to obtain and by framing policy responses within a shared evaluative language (Weiss, 2012). In this sense, the report operates simultaneously as a monitoring device and a persuasive policy instrument. Nevertheless, the report also sparks intellectual discussion. While some observers argue that its credibility has occasionally been damaged by inconsistent implementation of standards, others speculate that rankings may be influenced by political factors. Critics have questioned the impartiality of the rating method by citing examples when ally nations seemed to earn more positive evaluations (U.S. Department of State, 2024). These criticisms highlight the report's ability to influence global behavior rather than lessening its significance. A monitoring tool that lacked influence would be unlikely to attract sustained academic scrutiny. More broadly, these debates reflect another central tension crucial in global governance mechanisms: the balance between normative leadership and geopolitical interest. Even so, research indicates that the TIP system has prompted tangible policy adjustments in many jurisdictions, while continued methodological clarification is often recommended to enhance transparency (Weiss, 2012).

The United States' leadership in anti-trafficking efforts must be taken into consideration while analyzing the TIP Report's formation. The United States established itself as a major player in defining successful responses to human trafficking by institutionalizing yearly assessments of foreign governments (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The proliferation of policy frameworks that prioritize criminal accountability, victim-centered protection, and TVPA compliant preventive actions has been facilitated by this leadership. Still, the report's emphasis on reputational rewards shows how monitoring can be used as a soft power tactic. The TIP approach promotes compliance through diplomatic signals and worldwide publicity rather than mainly using coercive means. Therefore, governments may modify domestic policies in response to constructive input in order to preserve their legitimacy within the international community.

Cross-border cooperation is becoming more and more important in the fight against human trafficking. The emphasis for international legal cooperation is put on the value of exchanging investigative strategies among jurisdictions and complying national laws with international agreements (ASEAN, 2010). This process is implemented with monitoring tools, which allow for comparative evaluation and state-to-state policy learning (UNODC, 2024). As a result, countries with higher rankings can act as role models, promoting the adoption of specific policies and strategies. In this regard, the TIP Report facilitates the progressive standardization of anti-trafficking tactics by encouraging comparable indicators and reporting standards.

An especially useful example for analyzing the impact of the TIP framework is South Korea. The nation's experience highlights the ranking system's advantages and disadvantages, including disagreements over political interpretation and analytical coherence (U.S. Department of State, 2024). At the same time, changes in South Korea's tier ranking have shown how policy reform can be driven by reputational concerns. Analyzing the response to low rankings, in fact, suggests that the latter can build diplomatic embarrassment, prompting the expansion of victim protection programs, specialized task forces, and enforcement initiatives (Weiss, 2012).

Such developments demonstrate the capacity of a monitoring system to shape national responses even in the absence of direct coercion. Yet they also raise important analytical questions. If rankings encourage reform, they may simultaneously obscure domestic complexities or overlook socio-cultural factors influencing trafficking patterns (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Understanding the TIP Report therefore requires moving beyond a binary interpretation of success or failure and examining how external evaluation interacts with internal governance structures.

This chapter analyzes how the United States, through the TIP Report, has contributed to shaping South Korea's anti-trafficking monitoring practices. I will trace South Korea's trajectory across the 2023–2025 TIP Reports and identify the main domains through which U.S.-driven monitoring has influenced domestic practices, including legal frameworks, victim identification mechanisms, institutional capacity, and reporting

systems. By situating these developments within the broader logic of global monitoring, the chapter argues that the TIP Report functions not only as an evaluative instrument but also as a policy-shaping mechanism embedded within contemporary anti-trafficking governance.

South Korea's position within the TIP Report has had noticeable changes in recent years, proof of not only shifts in domestic anti-trafficking policies but also the evolving evaluative criteria applied by the United States. In the 2023 TIP Reports South Korea was classified as a Tier 2 country by the U.S. Department of State, a title showing that the government was taking significant measures to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of forms of trafficking but had yet to achieve them (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The report pointed out different areas that required further attention, primarily limitations connected to victim identification procedures, lacking prosecutions in specific sectors, and gaps in protection services (TIP, 2023). By highlighting these shortcomings, the report gave input for future reforms and measures to obtain progress.

A successful improvement emerged in the 2024 TIP Report, when South Korea was restored to a Tier 1 country, the highest ranking reserved for governments that are considered fully compliant with the minimum standards included in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (U.S. Department of State, 2024). South Korea worked to improve what was considered lacking in the previous year report, and the local media celebrated this achievement by presenting the Tier 1 title as recognition of strengthened state commitment and institutional responsiveness to the cause (The Korea Times, 2024). The government itself seemed to read the ranking as a confirmation that anti-trafficking strategies were producing visible results and that the policy regulations implemented were helping them move in the desired direction (The Korea Times, 2024). However, achieving Tier 1 status did not eliminate critical observations. The 2024 report continued to underline persistent weaknesses, especially regarding the identification of labor trafficking victims and the need to address exploitation within specific industries more effectively (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The coexistence of acknowledgment and critique reveals an important characteristic of the TIP monitoring system: compliance is never treated as a definitive accomplishment but rather as an ongoing process that requires

continuous institutional recalibration. In this context, the ranking should be seen as a component of a larger cycle of assessment and policy improvement rather than as a definitive decision.

In the 2025 TIP Report, South Korea enhanced the use of quantitative indicators, such as data numbers and predictions, to evaluate governmental performance while maintaining its Tier 1 ranking (U.S. Department of State, 2025). The report highlighted that more victims were formally recognized and referred to support services than in prior reporting periods and also reported an increase in the number of people examined for trafficking warning signs (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Expectations for governments to create organized monitoring systems that produce tangible outcomes are reinforced by this growing emphasis on statistical measurement, which implies that the evaluative framework itself has grown increasingly data oriented.

When examined all together, the three reports reveal more than a simple progression of rankings; they show the gradual consolidation of monitoring practices that align closely with U.S. evaluative priorities. The transition from Tier 2 to Tier 1 corresponded with improvements in areas consistently emphasized within TIP assessments, such as legislative responsiveness, institutional coordination, and mechanisms for victim protection. Rather than reading each report as an isolated evaluation, it is more productive to understand them as helpful feedback tools in which external assessment benefits domestic policy directions.

This dynamic is especially noticeable when victim screening practices are investigated. While the 2024 review mentioned increased identification attempts, the 2023 report cited the lack of systematic screening as a significant structural barrier (U.S. Department of State, 2023 and 2024). By 2025, South Korean authorities had started to institutionalize procedures that matched TIP requirements, according to the report's comprehensive numerical data on examinations (U.S. Department of State, 2025). These changes imply that external monitoring can change what governments deem relevant to measure, record, and publicly disclose in addition to influencing policy outcomes. Therefore, the South Korean case shows that the TIP Report is more than a simple external evaluation tool. By

addressing which indicators, such as prosecutions, victim referrals, and specialist training programs, are likely to be examined in upcoming assessments, its criteria actively contribute to the building of national monitoring frameworks. In response to these assessments, governments may improve data collection methods and administrative processes to show compliance with international agreements and preserve their legitimacy.

Tracing South Korea development across the 2023-2025 reports reveals a recurring pattern where areas controlled by U.S. monitoring increasingly became central points for domestic reforms. Interpreting the TIP system's larger function in modern world governance requires an understanding of this connection. According to South Korea's example, governments use the report as a set of policy cues that can affect government goals and monitoring tactics, rather than just as an external assessment. In this way, the TIP framework helps to define the institutional structure that is used to plan, assess, and eventually legitimate anti-trafficking efforts on a national and worldwide scale.

Crucially, the TIP Report has stressed repeatedly how important it is for countries to address the vulnerabilities of human trafficking that are present in migration systems (The Korea Times, 2024). By drawing attention to these vulnerabilities, the report helps create a policy environment where taking legislative action serves as a means of proving that a country is responsive to global oversight. For instance, related to the issue of bride trafficking South Korea has implemented The Marriage Brokers Business Management Act to regulate commercial matchmaking agencies and reduce exploitation within cross-border marriages. The law imposes licensing requirements, mandates transparency in broker practices, and provides legal safeguards intended to protect migrant spouses from abuse (Korea Legislation Research Institute KLRI, 2018). Scholars' analyses of commercial marriage trafficking have identified regulatory gaps that previously allowed exploitative practices to persist, particularly in contexts where migrant women lacked adequate legal protections (MacLean, 2014). Strengthening supervision over marriage brokers can therefore be interpreted as part of a broader effort to address vulnerabilities highlighted in international anti-trafficking discourse.

As mentioned, one of the key points South Korea has focused on to improve its ranking in the TIP Report is the victim's identification and protection. The importance of identification comes from a fundamental challenge: trafficking is often hidden within legitimate labor markets and migration flows. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons emphasizes that because exploitation often takes place in sectors that are difficult to regulate, many victims go unreported (UNODC, 2024). Therefore, extensive screening measures that can differentiate trafficking from other forms of labor abuse are essential for effective monitoring. For instance, the 2025 TIP Report reported that both the number of people screened for trafficking signs and the number of legally identified victims increased (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Furthermore, in line with guidelines commonly mentioned in TIP evaluations, South Korea has increased the number of shelters, psychological services, and legal aid available to victims (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Marriage migration provides a particularly important context for victim protection. According to research on commercial marriage trafficking, migrant spouses may experience social isolation, legal dependency, and language challenges, all of which make it difficult for them to identify themselves and obtain treatment (MacLean, 2014). Coordination between immigration authorities, social services, and law enforcement is necessary to address these vulnerabilities.

Lastly, maybe the most significant area of monitoring influence concerns the production of data. Modern administration increasingly relies on statistics to be able to make complex social phenomena measurable, and trafficking is no exception. The TIP framework requires governments to provide detailed information on investigations, prosecutions, victim identification, and prevention initiatives. This expectation and constant monitoring encourage states to develop administrative systems capable of generating reliable and useful data. The same data, in fact, can be used for multiple purposes at once. It gives governments proof to back up claims of compliance, enables domestic authorities to monitor progress, and allows external players to compare performance across borders. Human rights reporting emphasizes how crucial documentation is in combating human trafficking; thorough documentation facilitates the identification of abuse trends, directs

policy actions, and improves transparency. Without systematic reporting, trafficking risks remaining obscured within broader migration dynamics.

Overall, from the analysis carried out on the sources provided, South Korea's case shows how external evaluation processes can become of use for domestic governance structures, and a successful relation between States can benefit improvement. The TIP Report does not simply document anti-trafficking efforts, it also helps define how those efforts are structured, assessed, and communicated, highlighting the broader role of international monitoring in shaping state responses to transnational crime.

4.2 Transnational Aid and NGO Networks Support

It is now widely acknowledged that human trafficking is a transnational issue that calls for coordinated actions that go beyond national borders. Because of this, international legal instruments, funding goals, civil society involvement, and geopolitical factors all influence the current anti-trafficking system. National regulations are often interconnected with larger normative systems that impact both the definition of trafficking and the institutional responses considered suitable, rather than evolving only through domestic reform processes.

A crucial turning point in the consolidation of global anti-trafficking governance was the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. The Protocol was a precarious international compromise that resulted from frequent tense discussions on legal definitions and the extent of state responsibility, especially with regard to the conflict between human rights protection and migratory control (Chuang, 2006). By portraying trafficking as a worldwide issue, the document reaffirmed the need for international cooperation while also giving nations significant flexibility in adopting preventative measures (UNODC, 2008). Human trafficking should be seen as a component of a larger system of exploitation based on systemic injustices, discrimination,

and socioeconomic vulnerability rather than as a collection of discrete criminal acts (UNODC, 2008). Understanding these underlying factors is crucial for creating survivor-centered kinds of intervention and preventative methods that can address the circumstances that make people vulnerable to human trafficking.

At the same time, emerging manifestations such as forced marriage and bride trafficking demonstrate the evolving nature of trafficking practices and highlight the need for policy frameworks that remain adaptable to shifting forms of exploitation (Rani, 2025). As we have seen in the previous chapters, bride trafficking is generally defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, or purchase of women and girls for marriages that are exploitative, non-consensual, or intended to conceal abuse (Rani, 2025). Unlike consensual arranged marriages, these unions are mainly characterized by the complete or partial absence of meaningful consent and often place women in positions of severe dependency and abuse. Understanding the persistence presence of practices of bride trafficking requires close attention to the structural conditions that enable it. One of the most significant drivers is gender imbalance, which in several regions has created a shortage of “marriageable” women and consequently generated demand that traffickers are able to exploit (Rani, 2025). Economic hardship similarly plays a central role, as families may accept marriage arrangements brokered by intermediaries who promise financial security or relief from burdens such as dowry payments (Rani, 2025). Cultural practices can further normalize these arrangements, especially when so-called “dowry-free” marriages are presented as opportunities for economic advancement (Rani, 2025). Due to these dynamics addressing the issue of bride trafficking requires approaches that go beyond criminal prosecution alone but further engage with the structural inequalities that drive exploitative marriage markets.

Although international law provides the normative basis for anti-trafficking efforts, the practical implementation of these commitments increasingly depends on mechanisms of transnational cooperation. Within this architecture, civil society organizations have assumed an indispensable role. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), for instance, stresses the importance of NGOs in promoting initiatives, training programs, research activities, and high-level policy discussions (OSCE, 2018). Constant

collaboration with specialized organizations has proved both their value and the challenges they encounter, including limited funding, questions of long-term sustainability, and the difficulties related to maintaining effective networks (OSCE, 2018).

NGOs engage in a wide range of activities, from running shelters and counseling facilities to offering legal aid and launching preventative initiatives (OSCE, 2018). Because of their close closeness to marginalized communities, they are able to discover victims who might otherwise go unnoticed while also guaranteeing that impacted populations can participate in the creation of policies that have a direct impact on their lives (OSCE, 2018). Civil society actors have a unique epistemic position within the anti-trafficking regime because of their proximity to vulnerable communities. The creation of National Referral Mechanisms has further acknowledged and institutionalized NGO participation by establishing cooperative frameworks through which states coordinate victim identification, assistance, and rights protection alongside non-governmental partners (OSCE, 2018). These mechanisms, that typically involve law enforcement agencies, migration authorities, healthcare providers, social services, and non-governmental organizations, reflect a multidisciplinary approach toward the fight against trafficking (OSCE, 2018). Awareness initiatives, outreach efforts, and specialized training programs similarly encourage sustained collaboration between public institutions and NGOs.

However, a good relationship between the parties involved is not always guaranteed. NGOs often oppose governmental policies and oppose being limited to the position of technical service providers who are not involved in political decision-making; even though authorities might appreciate their role in helping victims, critical activism can cause conflict, especially when groups point out weaknesses in governmental responses (OSCE, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to carefully balance the contributions of nonprofit organizations with the various goals of governmental actors in order to establish lasting partnerships. In times of crisis, NGOs' operational adaptability is most noticeable. In addition to building alliances with local authorities and international organizations, nonprofit groups are frequently among the first to respond to the needs of displaced populations, offering information, urgent help, and avenues toward protection (Rani, 2025). Their ability to operate on the front lines makes it possible for potential victims to

exercise their rights and obtain support services, highlighting the significance of strategic cooperation between state and non-state actors (Rani, 2025). For these initiatives to continue, transnational assistance is essential. NGOs can extend research projects, build infrastructures for support, and put prevention plans into action with the help of financial resources. However, financial arrangements can also affect governance by determining which policy tools are emphasized and which forms of exploitation are given attention. Thus, outside aid serves as a channel for the global spread of normative expectations in addition to providing material support.

The geopolitical dimensions of this process are particularly visible in the role assumed by the United States. Shortly before the adoption of the Palermo Protocol, the U.S. enacted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive domestic anti-trafficking statutes (Chuang, 2006). The act beyond being one of the most complete works on domestic anti-trafficking legislations, extended American influence beyond national borders through the establishment of a sanction's regime targeting governments considered insufficiently compliant with minimum standards (U.S. Congress, TVPA, 2000). Accordingly, the law authorizes the denial of non-humanitarian foreign assistance to governments failing to demonstrate meaningful progress, while also permitting U.S. opposition to loans from institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (U.S. Congress, TVPA, 2000). Annual assessments drawing on diplomatic, governmental, and NGO sources determine whether states satisfy these standards (U.S. Congress, TVPA, 2000) .

As Chuang (2006) states in her research, by assuming this extraterritorial reach, the United States effectively positioned itself as a “global sheriff” in the fight against trafficking. While some argue that such measures create incentives for legislative reform and institutional strengthening, and that there is evidence that numerous governments have adopted new policies in response, Chuang also argues that unilateral sanctions risk undermining the cooperative framework envisioned by the Palermo Protocol by privileging U.S. norms over internationally negotiated standards. Moreover, according to Chuang, the minimum standards themselves have been criticized as ambiguously formulated and inconsistently applied, raising concerns about subjectivity. Reliance on

punitive measures creates another dilemma from the standpoint of human rights. Penalizing governments may unintentionally increase the vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit because trafficking is deeply rooted in poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence; since trafficking often involves private actors driven by financial gain, sanctions targeting states alone may have little effect on the structural drivers of exploitation (UNODC, 2008). Therefore, addressing the larger cycle of abuse requires incorporating fundamental human rights concepts into anti-trafficking policies.

The UN Principles and Guidelines, which encourage states to establish safe return procedures, give legal assistance, and address demand as the main cause of human trafficking, complement this approach (Rani, 2025). Prevention strategies must also address factors that make people more vulnerable, like socioeconomic inequality and public sector collaboration. These initiatives demonstrate a rising awareness that effective administration requires extensive social protection programs rather than the simple criminalization of the issue. By encouraging data sharing, mutual legal aid, and cooperative investigation processes, regional cooperation frameworks support these international efforts. These procedures recognize that traffickers take advantage of jurisdictional division and that successful prosecution requires coordinated action.

South Korea offers a useful example of how transnational aid networks and NGOs shape state responses to trafficking and migrant vulnerability. Protective measures do not develop only from domestic reforms, but from a constant interaction between feminist organizations, international human rights laws, and government institutions. Feminist groups in South Korea had a very significant role in redefining the conditions migrant women, including marriage migrants, were facing in the country. By mobilizing the language of trafficking and victimization, these organizations challenged the tendency to treat abuse within cross-border marriages as a private matter and instead positioned it within the realm of public responsibility (Choo, 2013).

This effort contributed to several concrete policy developments. Support services were improved and expanded to include multilingual domestic violence hotlines, counseling programs, shelters, and alternative pathways to visa residency for migrant wives

experiencing abuse that are often further trapped because of fake visas. Feminist NGOs partnered with state agencies to provide specialized counseling, legal aid, medical treatment, and housing to foreign women trafficked into sexual slavery (Choo, 2013). These programs successfully show how humanitarian organizations and community-based organizations function as both service providers and intermediaries that can transform human rights talks into concrete measures. Legal reform was also aided by pressure from advocacy organizations. The Korean government changed its nationality laws in 2003 in response to concerns about the dependency caused by spousal visa regulations. This change permitted migrant wives to petition for permanent residency following a divorce in cases where the husband was judged to have abused them (Choo, 2013). Through multicultural integration initiatives that engage civic and religious organizations in the supply of language education, cultural orientation, and community-building programs, the state has further addressed the condition of migrant spouses since the mid-2000s (OSCE, 2018). These collaborations show that rather than relying solely on governmental action, anti-trafficking governance increasingly depends on collaboration between state and non-state actors.

Feminist organizations' tactics were strongly linked to international human rights frameworks. Activists framed migrant safety as part of a larger international commitment and bolstered the legitimacy of their demands by linking their claims with international treaties and worldwide campaigns against violence against women (OSCE, 2018). This interaction demonstrates how domestic lobbying, as opposed to foreign imposition, is frequently used to operationalize global norms. At the same time, these interventions addressed established forms of control that restricted the autonomy of migratory women. Reports detailed practices that made it much harder for women to escape abusive situations, including passport confiscation, mobility limitations, and lying about work or marital status (DoCarmo, 2019). Civil society actors contributed to the redefining of exploitation in marriage migration as a component of a broader trafficking chain by drawing attention to these activities.

The establishment of National Referral Mechanisms, which unite law enforcement, social services, and non-governmental organizations in organized collaborations to safeguard

victims' rights, is encouraged by international policy frameworks (DoCarmo, 2019). These strategies, which represent an integrated approach to victim identification and help, usually incorporate awareness campaigns, legal support, and outreach programs aimed at immigrant communities (Limoncelli, 2016). These agreements show that cooperation between civil society and state institutions is becoming more and more important for successful anti-trafficking measures.

Across regional policy environments, the role of NGOs has been further consolidated through participation in national coordination systems. Civil society actors contribute to legislative development, assist victims in accessing justice, and implement prevention programs funded through public or donor resources (Limoncelli, 2016). Their activities have a wide range of responsibilities, from managing helplines to supporting prosecutions and engaging in expert consultations, illustrating responsibilities assigned to non-state organizations within contemporary anti-trafficking frameworks (ASEAN, 2010). Through cross-border cooperation, mutual legal assistance, and extradition procedures, regional cooperation initiatives encourage states to strengthen their legal responses, reinforcing this multi-actor structure of cooperation (ASEAN, 2010). It is anticipated that increasing international cooperation will strengthen investigations, reduce traffickers' impunity, and increase victims' access to justice (ASEAN, 2010). Despite functioning at the regional level, these mechanisms influence the institutional framework that national policies are developed in. These improvements are further supported by capacity-building initiatives. Professionals who work with victims of human trafficking, such as social workers, psychologists, hotline operators, and employment service agents, are encouraged to receive specific training through collaborative programs to improve early detection and standardize preventive practices by formalizing expertise (OSCE, 2018).

Despite these developments however, there are still disparities in how rights are applied in real life. According to research, a large number of migrant women are aware of the safeguards that are available to them but are reluctant to use them because they frequently consider the financial and social consequences of being publicly labeled victims (Choo, 2013). Although it is crucial for obtaining policy change, the victimization narrative may also uphold moral hierarchies that depict migrant women as submissive rather than

independent subjects (Choo, 2013). This conflict is a reflection of a larger dilemma in the governance of human rights: recognition can increase protection while also perpetuating marginalization.

On this matter, it is significant to the research to understand how the vulnerability is perceived by migrants themselves. Vulnerable subjects are frequently identified by institutional systems using set categories, such as women, children, victims of abuse, people with disabilities, or other groups seen to need extra protection. However, migrants often see vulnerability as something that arises from unique circumstances and social contexts rather than as a fixed trait that belongs to specific individuals (Marchetti, 2024). Therefore, rather than being a predetermined personal characteristic, vulnerability is perceived as situational, dynamic, and in constant evolution.

A key argument on this topic is that from the migrants' perspective, vulnerability is often produced by the very institutions that are supposed to provide protection and security. When meeting with immigration authorities, in fact, migrants often feel sentiments of uncertainty, helplessness, and discomfort rather than protection. Therefore, vulnerability can be viewed as something that could be created or perpetuated by laws, regulations, and bureaucratic procedures rather than just a preexisting condition.

If, for example we take into consideration asylum interviews, these are considered by many migrants as intrusive, unpleasant, and even dehumanizing. They frequently feel that they are being handled more like suspects whose accounts needed to be continuously verified than like people looking for safety even comparing the procedure to a police interrogation, highlighting the officials' lack of trust, the constant questioning, and the need to verify the legitimacy of their experiences. These processes often cause anxiety and embarrassment, which add to the belief that institutional structures can indeed create new vulnerabilities (Marchetti, 2024).

Another recurring theme in migrants' narratives is the importance of human relationships, trust, and social support. As we have seen in the case of migrant wives, the isolation, loneliness, and the absence of meaningful social connections can be a major source of

vulnerability. Reception facilities often tend to be viewed as places of social exclusion, lack of privacy, and insecurity. Furthermore, vulnerability involves emotional and relational aspects in addition to material deprivation. Feelings of vulnerability and exclusion are heightened by the inability to build trustworthy connections as well as experiences of racism, discrimination, or harassment (Marchetti, 2024).

Marchetti also draws attention to how migrants criticize the categorical approach that is frequently used in migration policy. In fact, the variety of lived experiences is not properly represented by institutional definitions. Authorities run the risk of ignoring types of suffering that do not fit into predefined categories of vulnerability. In order to properly address the situation, it is fundamental to implement a more adaptable approach that acknowledges how vulnerability can develop and worsen suddenly, vary over time, and, most importantly to this research, impact people differently based on their particular circumstances and social environment.

The notion that vulnerability should be viewed as something relational and contextual is another important argument. The experiences of migrants indicate that social relationships, political circumstances, family dynamics, legal status, and larger institutional settings are all factors that can influence vulnerability. It is something that develops through encounters with specific situations rather than something that is permanently held by an individual. Vulnerability can rise, fall, or take on new forms when conditions change (Marchetti, 2024). This viewpoint casts doubt on essentialist depictions of migrants as intrinsically vulnerable groups and instead focuses on the social and political systems that foster vulnerability.

The contradiction between the rhetoric of protection and the reality of migration regulation is arguably the most significant criticism coming from the viewpoints of migrants. The widespread usage of vulnerability in policy debate is usually met with mistrust. In fact, bureaucratic procedures, legal uncertainty, shifting legislation, and lengthy asylum proceedings significantly exacerbate migrants' living conditions, despite the fact that institutions typically portray themselves as operating in the name of helping vulnerable individuals (Marchetti, 2024).

Applied to this case study on bride trafficking, vulnerability should not therefore be viewed as an inherent trait of migrant women. Instead of just assuming that women in transnational marriages are vulnerable solely due to their gender, nationality, or economic status, vulnerability should also be examined in light of the circumstances they face, the legal dependencies they encounter, the social isolation they endure, and the institutional structures that influence their lives. According to Marchetti, the emphasis should therefore change from identifying "vulnerable women" to analyzing the circumstances that lead to vulnerability as well as how migrants perceive and comprehend those circumstances.

Nevertheless, the case of South Korea is a testimony that transnational aid and NGO engagement substantially impact institutional responses to trafficked related vulnerabilities. Non-governmental organizations have helped promote legislative reforms, improve support services, and reinforced migrants' protection within integration policies. Moreover, international cooperation has encouraged more efficient investigations and greater attention to the victims' needs.

What stands out from this research is that there is not a simple pattern of external influence regarding vulnerability and bride trafficking, but a layered process of governance in which domestic institutions, advocacy networks, and international norms continuously interact. Anti-trafficking policy is therefore shaped through negotiation rather than unilateral actions. Furthermore, rather than functioning as secondary actors, NGOs and transnational partners participate directly in defining the operational boundaries of protection. Their involvement shows that contemporary anti-trafficking governance increasingly distributes responsibility across interconnected institutional fields, where prevention, assistance, and enforcement are shared rather than centralized.

4.3 Domestic Policies and Contradictions

South Korea's transition from a migrant-sending society into a migrant-receiving state has pushed a reconfiguration of domestic governance around migration, family formation, and social reproduction. The history of marriage-related migration began in the mid-1990s initially involving large-scale recruitment of ethnic Korean women from China as wives for rural Korean men, before expanding to include women from Southeast and Central Asia (Torneo, 2016). By the early 2000s, international marriages transformed from a marginal little known phenomenon to a structurally significant channel, with foreign spouses constituting at least a tenth of all marriages since 2004 and foreign brides being part of the majority of these unions (Torneo, 2016). These marriages were not simply private family matters; they became entangled with demographic challenges, including rural bride shortages and the state's search for reproductive labor in an aging society (Torneo, 2016). This demographic and governance context is central to understand why South Korea's anti-trafficking policies display persistent internal contradictions. The state has progressively adopted formal anti-trafficking frameworks, combining victim protection, institutional coordination, and regulatory oversight of brokerage markets, yet it has also normalized transnational marriage migration as a functional response to structural inequalities and demographic decline (Kim, 2010). The main issue, therefore, is not an accidental policy "gap," but a structural duality: anti-trafficking interventions operate alongside family and immigration policies that can feed the very market conditions that generate demand for foreign brides and create vulnerabilities to coercion and fraud (MacLean, 2014).

Historically, South Korea has taken a proactive approach to immigration policy, aiming to control migration flows through planning that is guided by the state and in line with national development plans (Won, 2024). The organization's distinctive feature is exactly this system connecting ministries and agencies, which is managed by extensive planning procedures that establish long-term policy direction and assign implementation to specialized actors, is its distinctive feature (Won, 2024). While low-skilled labor migrants are often handled through temporary and limited frameworks, marriage migrants are

positioned as a target group for settling and integrating attempts under this structure (Won, 2024).

The Master Plan for Multicultural Family Policy, which has been in place since 2010, serves as a fundamental guideline that organizes governmental assistance for multicultural families. It is subject to regular revisions and establishes national goals, plans, and resource distribution (Won, 2024). In practice, the plan places marriage migrant women and their children at the center of multicultural governance. Strengthened regulation of international marriage brokerage, pre-immigration verification procedures, domestic violence prevention and response systems, and human rights protection for marriage migrant women are just a few of the key tasks and policy objectives outlined in the following plans that demonstrate this prioritization (Won, 2024). These measures matter as they represent a policy recognizing that marriage migration may involve dangerous risks of exploitation and violence, requiring state intervention rather than mere reliance on private family arrangements (Kim, 2010). Still, by incorporating the system of brokered international marriage into a larger state-supported architecture of settlement services, the institutional status of marriage migrants within integration strategy may have an unintended consequence of stabilizing and legitimizing the system (Won, 2024). In addition to potentially reducing some harms, the state's allocation of resources to support multicultural families, such as language training, counseling, welfare support, and specialized centers, may also subtly reinforce the notion that transnational marriage is a common, controllable, and adaptable solution to social and demographic issues (Kim, 2010). In this way, integration policy may also aid in the institutional reproduction of marriage migration rather than simply respond to it.

These contradictions become sharper when the governance of “protection” is examined more closely. South Korea’s domestic policies have increasingly reflected the internationally influential set of prosecution, prevention, and protection, yet implementation often remains uneven and shaped by institutional capacity, political priorities, and the social framing of victims (Amahazion, 2014). The consequence is that policy interventions may center procedural compliance, such as registration requirements, formal oversight bodies, administrative coordination, without fully changing the deeper

drivers of demand: rural marital stratification, gendered expectations of care work, and state anxieties about fertility decline (MacLean, 2014). In the remainder of this chapter, these dynamics are traced through two intersecting policy domains: first, South Korea's evolving anti-trafficking framework and its victim-protection strategies; second, the regulation and governance of international marriage brokerage and multicultural family policy, as grounds where anti-trafficking rationales coexist with demographic strategies that sustain demand for foreign brides.

One of the main indicators of South Korea's commitment to combating human trafficking is the enactment of the Act on Prevention of Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims, which establishes a comprehensive legal framework grounded in prevention, protection, and institutional coordination.

The Act explicitly defines eligible victims as both Korean nationals trafficked domestically or abroad and foreign nationals residing in Korea who have suffered trafficking-related harm (KLRI, 2021, art. 3). Such provisions are significant because they extend legal protection beyond citizenship boundaries, reflecting and acknowledging trafficking as an international crime requiring inclusive safeguards. A crucial fact to mention is that, according to the law, victim consent does not absolve criminal liability. The alleged permission "shall not affect the establishment of a crime" committed by traffickers, even in cases when the victim seems to have consented to exploitation (KLRI, 2021, art. 4(1)). This provision acknowledges that structural pressure frequently overshadows meaningful consent, which is consistent with international anti-trafficking standards. Furthermore, victims may receive reduced or remitted penalty for crimes they committed throughout the trafficking process, indicating a move away from punitive methods and toward victim-centered justice (KLRI, 2021, art. 4(2)).

The state is likewise subject to complying action and obligations under the Act. Research, education, and public awareness campaigns must be carried out by national and local governments, institutional and legal processes must be established, and preventative victim-support programs must be funded (KLRI, 2021, art. 5(1)). Additionally, in recognition of the fact that trafficking networks operate internationally and cannot be adequately tackled by domestic measures alone, the state must enhance international

cooperation through information exchange, criminal investigations, and extradition procedures (KLRI, 2021, art. 5(2)). The language used to codify victim rights is very explicit: the right to assistance and recompense, the right to know about the investigative and trial processes, the right to participate in court proceedings with support, and the right to privacy and personal safety (KLRI, 2021, art. 6). Such affirmations point to a growing emphasis on rights in Korea's anti-trafficking policies.

In order to support local agencies, conduct research, train professionals, receive reports, and coordinate domestic and international cooperation, the law requires the establishment of a Central Agency for Protection of Rights and Interests of Victims of Human Trafficking (KLRI, 2021, art. 15(1)). On the other hand, local organizations oversee victim follow-up management, emergency response, counseling, and on-site investigations (KLRI, 2021, art. 15(2)). This multi-layered structure is a reflection of a policy that is designed to ensure continuity of care while facilitating quick victim identification. These measures seem to be an advanced and all-encompassing anti-trafficking system at first glance. However, a deeper examination shows that structural prevention is not always connected with institutional efficiency. The law places a lot of emphasis on administrative coordination and post-identification protection, but it pays less attention to the sociodemographic factors, such as the institutional normalization of marriage migration, that contribute to the demand for bride trafficking.

While commercial marriage brokers have long operated legally in South Korea, systematic regulation emerged only after media reports of fraud, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and even the deaths of foreign wives drew public attention (MacLean, 2014). In response, the government enacted the Marriage Broker Management Act alongside enforcing regulations beginning in 2008, later amended in subsequent years (MacLean, 2014). The law introduced mandatory registration requirements for individuals and businesses engaging in international marriage brokering, along with professional and ethical training obligations and liability insurance mandates (KLRI, 2018, art. 3-4). Certain categories of offenders, including those convicted of crimes involving imprisonment or trafficking-related activities, are barred from registering for defined periods, while businesses employing such individuals are likewise prohibited from

operating (KLRI, 2018, art. 6). These measures signal an effort to professionalize the industry and rule out high-risk actors.

Domestic operations constitute only one aspect of regulation. Brokerages that operate in source countries are required to abide by local regulations, protect personal information, establish contracts with recruitment partners in writing, and avoid deceptive or discriminatory advertising (KLRI, 2018, art. 4). Additionally, Korean brokers are not allowed to work with foreign partners that are prohibited under Korean legislation (Marriage Broker Management Act, 2018, art. 3). Theoretically, this kind of international regulation aims to plug any gaps that traffickers could take advantage of. The Act also covers criminal and administrative sanctions. Serious crimes, such as operating without registration, giving false information, or disclosing personal information, can result in fines of up to ten million won or prison sentences of up to two years, while minor infractions may only result in administrative orders or fines (KLRI, 2018, art. 26-28). The most severe sanctions, which include fines of twenty million won or jail sentences of up to three years, are directed at false registration or continuing operations after revocation (KLRI, 2018, art. 26). In cases of noncompliance, businesses may potentially be physically closed (KLRI, 2018, art. 19).

From a regulatory perspective, these policies embody a classic monitoring strategy: by requiring registration and inspections, the government gains visibility into an otherwise dark industry. Indeed, regulation should in theory enable active classification of trafficking risks, however, enforcement remains uneven. Local governments are responsible for processing broker registrations but often prioritize other administrative demands, resulting in sporadic inspections (MacLean, 2014). Moreover, the state's ability to police intervention abroad is, according to international law, quite limited by questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction (MacLean, 2014). Thus, while the regulatory structure appears solid on paper, its practical reach is limited. More importantly, legalization combined with regulation carries a paradoxical implication: rather than dismantling the brokerage market, the state has effectively institutionalized it.

Parallel to brokerage regulation, South Korea has developed an extensive integration regime targeting marriage migrants and multicultural families. Beginning in the early 2000s, government ministries, in particular the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, started implementing projects addressing the protection and welfare of migrant women, including a multilingual hotline for victims of family abuse and state-supported language education programs (Kim, 2010). A multicultural society through organized integration was proposed in the 2006 Policy Plan to Support the Social Integration of International Marriage Female Migrants, Their Families, and Children, also known as the "Grand Plan" (Kim, 2010). Its seven objectives included protecting foreign wives before entry, regulating marriage agencies, increasing support for victims of domestic abuse, offering orientation programs, enhancing children's educational outcomes, extending welfare and healthcare, encouraging multicultural awareness, and creating comprehensive policies for migrant families (Lee, 2008).

New laws required that marriage agencies give foreign brides accurate information on potential husbands prior to their first encounter in order to promote transparency and prevent abuse (Kim, 2010). In order to lower the risk of instant undocumented status for migrants, the government concurrently increased shelters, hotlines, and legal protections, such as a program permitting divorced foreign wives to stay in Korea while courts decided responsibility for the end of the marriage (Kim, 2010). Support infrastructures multiplied rapidly. The number of centers assisting international married families more than doubled within a few years, fostering networks between central and local governments as well as civil society organizations and, most importantly, welfare benefits and medical care were extended even to noncitizen spouses married to low-income Korean men with young children, reflecting a notable expansion of social rights (Lee, 2008).

These policies undeniably mitigated certain vulnerabilities. Yet they also entrenched a governance model in which marriage migration is treated as both a social reality and a policy object requiring ongoing state management. Integration policy thus functions not simply as a protective mechanism but as an institutional acknowledgment that transnational marriage is a stable component of Korea's demographic future. Structural drivers of demand, such as demography, culture, and marriage markets, force

understanding the contradictions of Korean policy adopted that often sustain demand for foreign brides. One major factor is the outmigration and socioeconomic mobility of Korean women, many of whom pursue education and careers rather than marrying into rural or lower status households. Those who remain are increasingly unwilling to assume traditional caregiving responsibilities, such as caring for elderly in-laws (MacLean, 2014). At the same time, Korean society continues to emphasize patrilineal family continuity, placing pressure on men, in particular in rural areas, to marry and produce male heirs (MacLean, 2014). These pressures generate a “marriage squeeze” that pushes men to search abroad for spouses. Marriage brokers have capitalized on this demand through aggressive marketing campaigns (Park, 2011).

Agencies frequently depict foreign women as more “traditional,” “submissive,” and family-oriented, reinforcing gendered stereotypes that align with domestic expectations (MacLean, 2014). These dynamics are heightened by demographic decrease. From 1960, when there were more than six children per woman, to 1990, when it was just above replacement level, Korea's fertility rate dropped sharply until it was no longer high enough to maintain population stability (MacLean, 2014). In response to these demographic challenges, the government has subtly supported overseas marriages due to its understanding of declining fertility and rural depopulation. The result is a legislative framework where anti-trafficking efforts coexist with institutional incentives that promote international marriage markets.

When demographic dependence and regulatory control coexist, an important dilemma arises. The state conveys that the trade is permissible as long as it complies with the law rather than outright outlawing brokers. Such a strategy may reduce blatantly obvious abuses while also stabilizing the supply network that connects Korean husbands and foreign brides. Furthermore, integration programs like welfare support, language training, and educational services lower the long-term social costs of international marriage, making it a more desirable option for potential spouses as well as local governments. Thus, policies designed to protect migrant women coexist with incentives that implicitly legitimize their recruitment. Upstream prevention can be obscured even by the focus on victim protection. Policy frameworks that place a high priority on post-entry rights,

counseling, and shelters quietly acknowledge that some degree of harmful migration will take place. Relatively little is known about structural prevention, which addresses population imbalance, rural marginalization, and gender inequity. This difference reflects more general worldwide patterns. Prosecution, prevention, and protection are the three main pillars of anti-sex trafficking efforts, although nations usually execute these in different ways, with protectionist policies closely following prosecuting ones (Amahazion, 2014). The effectiveness of such measures is further influenced by differences in political priorities and governance capabilities.

The regional backdrop also influences South Korea's anti-trafficking initiatives. Supply-and-demand dynamics originating from economic differences drive trafficking flows throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Regional organizations, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Bali Process, and ASEAN forums, have encouraged collaboration on victim assistance, preventative tactics, and legal frameworks (Emmers et al., 2006). The ASEM is an intergovernmental dialogue established in 1996 that encourages cooperation between Asia and Europe on political, economic, financial, social, cultural, and educational issues; the Bali Process is a regional forum that addresses the need for dialogue, cooperation, and development of policies regarding irregular migration across, and beyond, the Asia-Pacific region; finally the ASEAN was established in 1967 bringing together countries from the Southeast Asian region, with the aim to promote regional peace and stability and economic growth.

However, institutional constraints continue to exist. Since they serve mainly as platforms for collaboration rather than as supranational authorities, many regional groups lack enforcement mechanisms (Emmers et al., 2006). As a result, even when regional cooperation increases awareness and the spread of policies, domestic legal frameworks continue to play a major role in effective implementation. The significance of national policy cohesion is emphasized by this; domestic inconsistencies have the potential to damage regional commitments if anti-trafficking legislation, immigration governance, and demographic strategies are not in harmony.

In conclusion, after analyzing the sources used for this brief research, we can say that the domestic laws in South Korea that fight human trafficking, bride trafficking, and marriage exploitation show a governance model characterized by structural unsureness rather than inconsistency. The protection of victim rights, centralized agencies, broker regulation, and extensive integration programs are only a few examples of the state's increasingly complex institutional and legal structures toward the issue. However, transnational marriage has also become a useful aspect to stabilize labor market changes, cultural expectations, and demographic pressures. Policy coexistence, not policy failure, is the source of the conflict. Anti-trafficking policies aim to lessen the negative effects of a system that the government also supports. Integration programs normalize mixed families, demographic concerns sustain demand, and regulation legitimizes the brokerage profession.

In the end, South Korea serves as an example of a larger problem that industrialized countries dealing with population decline must face: how to balance human rights obligations with a systemic dependence on migrant labor and reproductive bodies. The conflict between protection and demand is likely to continue unless policies move away from reactive protection and toward more profound structural change, addressing issues like gender hierarchies, rural inequality, and the marketing of marriage.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Bride trafficking, as examined throughout this thesis, emerges as a phenomenon that cannot be understood through a single disciplinary lens or confined within the boundaries of a single legal definition. It is a deeply layered issue that unfolds at the intersection of gender, migration, socioeconomic inequality, and global governance. What becomes clear through this research is that bride trafficking is not an anomaly within the institution of marriage, nor is it merely a criminal deviation from otherwise legitimate migration flows. Rather, it is a structural result of larger systems that limit women's options, limit their mobility, and subject them to exploitation under the pretense of marriage. The capacity of bride trafficking to conceal itself within a socially acceptable institution, one that is frequently protected from inspection by cultural norms, legal traditions, and presumptions about privacy and family life, is what makes it so complex. This thesis has attempted to shed light on the processes by which exploitation is normalized, concealed, and perpetuated within transnational marriage systems, in the context of East Asia and South Korea in particular.

One of the central insights that emerged from this study is the profound ambiguity that surrounds the concept of bride trafficking in international law. The Palermo Protocol, despite its global influence, offers a definition of trafficking that is both flexible and incomplete. Its opened structure allows for the inclusion of forced marriages, yet it stops short of explicitly naming marriage as a possible form of exploitation. The political tensions and cultural complications surrounding marriage as an institution that states are frequently hesitant to regulate beyond acceptable boundaries are reflected in this silence,

which is not accidental. Although the Protocol's dependence on the act, means, and purpose triad offers a helpful analytical tool, it also highlights the drawbacks of legal systems that mostly depend on consent. In situations when women's decisions are influenced by poverty, gender discrimination, family expectations, and restricted mobility, consent is a highly ambiguous concept, as discussed in this thesis. The legal focus on consent runs the risk of hiding the structural factors that expose some women to exploitation long before they are married. In this way, the fundamental ambiguity grey zone surrounding bride trafficking reflects deeper social and economic injustices that international law has not yet adequately addressed, rather than only being a legal issue.

Another example of how structural factors influence the dynamics of bride trafficking is the socioeconomic and cultural setting of South Korea. Significant demographic imbalances have resulted from South Korea's quick transition from an agrarian society to a highly industrialized and urbanized country, especially in rural areas. The need for foreign brides is fueled by a continual "marriage squeeze" brought on by population decrease, aging, and gender inequality. In these situations, marriage ceases to be a completely romantic or personal decision and instead becomes a means of assuring work, caring, and family continuity. The constraints of governmental policies that prioritize population control over gender equality, as well as the pressures experienced by rural communities, are reflected in the institutionalization of marriage migration as a demographic strategy. When migrant women enter such environments, they frequently have to negotiate a complicated web of expectations based on patriarchal norms, Confucian family structures, and economic dependence. Their vulnerability is rooted in the structural constraints of rural life, where access to social networks, healthcare, transportation, and employment possibilities is limited. The thesis has highlighted the subtle and widespread nature of bride trafficking by demonstrating how these structural elements foster an atmosphere where exploitation can take place even in the absence of explicit coercion.

Additionally, the global governance aspect of trafficking introduces an additional level of intricacy. The impact of the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report on South Korea's anti-trafficking measures shows how national responses are shaped by international

monitoring mechanisms. By using a tier-based structure, the TIP Report puts a lot of normative pressure on states to adopt particular policy frameworks, frequently giving priority to criminal justice strategies and measurable parameters. The changing rankings of South Korea in recent years provide as an example of how outside assessments can lead to institutional reorganization, legislation changes, and a greater focus on victim identification.

However, the thesis has also demonstrated that these monitoring systems are not impartial, rather, they are a reflection of methodological constraints, moral beliefs, and geopolitical interests. The impact of the TIP Report highlights the conflicts between national sovereignty and global governance, between international standards and local conditions, and between the necessity of responsibility and the danger of oversimplification. By advocating for the rights of migrant women, exposing violations, and offering essential services, civil society organizations, especially feminist NGOs, play a critical role in reconciling these conflicts. Their work emphasizes the value of survivor-centered, rights-based frameworks and draws attention to the shortcomings of state-centered methods.

When considered collectively, the results of this thesis indicate that bride trafficking needs to be viewed as a phenomenon that results from the interaction of international governance processes, national socioeconomic structures, and global inequality. It is a reflection of larger institutions that influence women's mobility, choices, and vulnerabilities rather than just criminal networks taking advantage of weak women. The phenomenon highlights the shortcomings of policies that treat marriage as a private or culturally neutral institution, the limitations of legal terms that fail to capture structural forms of exploitation, and the difficulties of governance mechanisms that put quantifiable results ahead of structural change.

By providing a comprehensive study that incorporates international law, socioeconomic environment, and global governance and by emphasizing the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches that go beyond specific legal or criminological frameworks, the thesis adds to the body of scholarly research. The thesis has some shortcomings that indicate areas for further investigation despite its broad scope. Direct testimonials from migratory women, whose voices would offer a fuller understanding of the lived realities

of marriage migration and exploitation, are absent from the study, which mostly depends on secondary sources. Understanding how various socioeconomic and legal contexts influence the dynamics of bride trafficking across destination nations -- including Taiwan, Japan, and Singapore -- is also an important aspect of this research and creates a dynamic comparative setting. Additionally, research on digital platforms, statistical biases, and online recruitment tactics employed by traffickers would update the analysis for the digital era as matchmaking moves more and more online.

In the end, this thesis emphasizes that tackling bride trafficking requires dealing with the deeply ingrained disparities that influence women's lives and decisions. It necessitates reconsidering marriage as a place where power, vulnerability, and exploitation can converge rather than as a private institution shielded from scrutiny. It demands admitting that, despite their influence, global governance institutions need to be closely monitored to make sure they advance justice rather than perpetuate inequality. Bride trafficking is a mirror of the larger systems that govern our world, not just a legal issue or a social anomaly. Confronting difficult realities about gender, power, and inequality is necessary to fully comprehend bride trafficking. Ongoing dedication, interdisciplinary research, and willingness to question deeply ingrained norms are necessary to address it. I hope that further research will deepen and broaden my understanding of this crucial subject, while this thesis is just one small contribution to this complicated matter.

List of references

- Ahn, Yang-Heui. "Immigrated, Interculturally-Married Women in South Korea: Mental Health Status, Health Care Utilization, and Suggested Policy Directions." *World Cultural Psychiatry Research Review*, June 2012.
- ASEAN. *ASEAN Handbook on International Legal Cooperation in Trafficking in Persons Cases*. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 2010. <http://www.aseansec.org>.
- Asis, Maruja M. B., and Nicola Piper. "Researching International Labor Migration in Asia." *The Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (August 2008): 423–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2008.00122.x>.
- Bachan, Anna. "An Exploration of the Gender-Migration-Development Nexus: The Impact of Labor Migration on Women's Empowerment." *Consilience*, no. 20 (2018): 1–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760100>.
- Basa, Charito, Violeta De Guzman, and Sabrina Marchetti. "International Migration and Over-Indebtedness: The Case of Filipino Workers in Italy." *International Institute for Environment and Development* 36 (2012). <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep01285.7>.
- Bélanger, Danièle. "Marriages with Foreign Women in East Asia: Bride Trafficking or Voluntary Migration?" *Population & Societies*, no. 469 (2010): 1–4.
- Bressan, Serena. "Louise Shelley: Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective." *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 17, no. 4 (April 7, 2011): 349–52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-011-9145-z>.
- Cheng, Sealing. "The Male Malady of Globalization." *Current Anthropology* 62, no. S23 (December 22, 2020): 79–91. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711664>.

- Choo, Hae Yeon. "The Cost of Rights: Migrant Women, Feminist Advocacy, and Gendered Morality in South Korea." *Gender & Society* 27, no. 4 (April 15, 2013): 445–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213483896>.
- Christou, Anastasia, and Eleonore Kofman. *Gender and Migration*. Springer Nature, 2022.
- Chuang, Janie. "The United States as Global Sheriff: Using Unilateral Sanctions to the United States as Global Sheriff: Using Unilateral Sanctions to Combat Human Trafficking Combat Human Trafficking." *Michigan Journal of International Law* *Michigan Journal of International Law* 27, no. 2 (2006). <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjil/vol27/iss2/2>.
- Chung, Ji-Sun. "Women's Unequal Access to Education in South Korea." *Comparative Education Review* 38, no. 4 (November 1994): 487–505. <https://doi.org/10.1086/447272>.
- Chung, Min-Su, and Keunjae Lee. "Hypergamy among South Korean Women and Its Implications for the Marriage Rate." *Population Research and Policy Review* 41, no. 3 (August 25, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-021-09672-5>.
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. United Nations, 1981.
- . *General Recommendation No. 26 on Women Migrant Workers*. United Nations, 1981.
- . *General Recommendation on Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Economic Consequences of Marriage, Family Relations and Their Dissolution)*. United Nations, 1981.
- Craggs, Sarah, Laura Lungarotti, Michela Macchiavello, and Agnès Tillinac. "Issue Brief Responding to Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Times of Crisis Reducing the Vulnerabilities of Migrants in Preparedness, Response and Recovery Efforts." International Organization for Migration (IOM), January 2016.
- Den Boer, Andrea, and Valerie Hudson. "Patrilineality, Son Preference, and Sex Selection in South Korea and Vietnam." *Population and Development Review* 43, no. 1 (2017): 119–47. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44202631>.

- DoCarmo, Tania E. “Major International Counter-Trafficking Organizations: Addressing Human Trafficking from Multiple Directions.” *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2019, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63192-9_78-1.
- Eklund, Lisa. “Marriage Squeeze and Mate Selection: The Ecology of Choice and Implications for Social Policy in China.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 35 (2013): 62–69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23528756>.
- Emmers, Ralf, and See Seng Tan. “Functional Cooperation against Human and Drug Trafficking in East Asia.” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2009. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/resrep05894.9>.
- Feng, Wang, Shen Ke, and Cai Yong. “Household Change and Intergenerational Transfers in China: China’s Changing Family Structure.” American Enterprise Institute, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24663.6>.
- Fresnoza-Flot, Asuncion, and Gwénola Ricordeau. *International Marriages and Marital Citizenship*. Routledge, 2017.
- Gabaccia, Donna, Leslie Page Moch, Marcelo J. Borges, Franca Iacovetta, Madeline Y. Hsu, Patrick Manning, Leo Lucassen, and Dirk Hoerder. “Cultures in Contact.” *International Review of Social History* 49, no. 3 (November 29, 2004): 475–515. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020859004001762>.
- Gao, Ming. “‘A woman is not a baby-making machine’: a brief history of South Korea’s 4B movement – and why it’s making waves in America”. *The Conversation*, (2024). <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.cfjkgfkvn>
- Gehring, Brianna. “What is the Trafficking in Persons Report?”. *Human Trafficking Institute*. (July 19, 2022). <https://traffickinginstitute.org/what-is-the-trafficking-in-persons-report/>
- Geymonat, Giulia Garofalo, Sabrina Marchetti, and Alice Morino Baquette. *Vulnerabilità in Migrazione Sguardi Critici Su Asilo E Protezione Internazionale in Italia*. Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2024. <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-786-9/>.
- Giammarinaro, Maria Grazia, and Letizia Palumbo. “La Nozione Giuridica Di Vulnerabilità in Un’ottica Di Genere E Intersezionale.” In *Vulnerabilità in*

- Migrazione Sguardi Critici Su Asilo E Protezione Internazionale in Italia*, 65–78. Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2024.
- Guerry, Linda, Françoise Thébaud, and Siân Reynolds. “Women, Gender and Migration.” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 51 (2020). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27076662>.
- Guilmoto, Christophe Z., and James Tovey. “The Masculinization of Births. Overview and Current Knowledge.” *Institut National d’Etudes Démographiques* 70, no. 2 (2015): 184–243. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24638273>.
- Han, Min Wha, Eun-Jeong Han, and JeongHwa Lee. *Displacement, Mobility, and Diversity in Korea*. Routledge, 2025. 10.4324/9781003452836.
- Han, Soojung. “Gender, Migration, and Daily Mobility: Marriage Migrants in Rural South Korea.” *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*, August 12, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981251350646>.
- He, Canfei, and Patricia Gober. “Gendering Interprovincial Migration in China.” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (December 2003): 1220–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00176.x>.
- Hiroo, KAMIYA, and LEE Chul Woo. “International Marriage Migrants to Rural Areas in South Korea and Japan: A Comparative Analysis.” *Geographical Review of Japan Series B* 81, no. 1 (2009): 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.4157/geogrevjapanb.81.60>.
- Hoffman, Diane M. “Blurred Genders: The Cultural Construction of Male and Female in South Korea.” *Korean Studies* 19, no. 1 (1995): 112–38. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ks.1995.0019>.
- Hwang, Min-Chul. “Exploring Marriage Migrants’ Citizenship Acquisition in South Korea.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 24, no. 3 (August 17, 2015): 376–402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0117196815596291>.
- Jang, Joon Oh, Kyungseok Choo, and Kyung-shik Choi. “Methodological and Ethical Challenges to Conducting Human Trafficking Studies: A Case Study of Korean Trafficking and Smuggling for Sexual Exploitation to the United States.” *Women & Criminal Justice* 20, no. 1-2 (April 12, 2010): 167–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974451003641461>.

- Jeong, Jin Young, and Moon Sook Shim. "Immigrant Women's Health Status, Health Behaviors and Health Care Utilization." *Journal of Korean Public Health Nursing* 28, no. 2 (August 31, 2014): 200–210. <https://doi.org/10.5932/jkphn.2014.28.2.200>.
- Kang, Hanna. "Cross-border Marriage and Religion in South Korea: a Study on Foreign Brides and their Membership in Local Protestant Churches." *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 5, no. 2 (2019): 27-52.
- Kim, Hee-Kang. "Marriage Migration between South Korea and Vietnam: A Gender Perspective." *Asian Perspective* 36, no. 3 (2012): 531–63. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2012.0020>.
- Kim, Joon K., and May Fu. "International Women in South Korea's Sex Industry: A New Commodity Frontier." *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3 (May 2008): 492–513. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2008.48.3.492>.
- Kim, Keuntae. "Cross-Border Marriages in South Korea and the Challenges of Rising Multiculturalism." *International Migration* 55, no. 3 (March 10, 2017): 74–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12331>.
- . "The Changing Role of Employment Status in Marriage Formation among Young Korean Adults." *Demographic Research* 36, no. 5 (January 10, 2017): 145–72. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2017.36.5>.
- Kim, Minjeong. "South Korean Rural Husbands, Compensatory Masculinity, and International Marriage." *Journal of Korean Studies* 19, no. 2 (2014): 291–325. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2014.0030>.
- Kim, Yi-Seon, Yunjeong Choi, Hee-Young Jang, Dohye Kim, and Shin Park. "Policy Measures for the Social Inclusion of Marriage-Based Immigrant Women: Focusing on Expanding Social Participation." *Www.kwdi.re.kr*. Korean Women's Development Institute, 2021.
- Koh, Eunkang. "Gender Issues and Confucian Scriptures: Is Confucianism Incompatible with Gender Equality in South Korea?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 02 (June 2008): 345–62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0041977x08000578>.

- Korea Legislation Research Institute (KLRI), *Act on Prevention of Human Trafficking and Protection of Victims.*, 2023.
- Kye, Bongoh, Park Heejin. “Land, Education, and Reproduction: Changing Socioeconomic Differentials in a Rural Korean Village.” *Journal of Asian Sociology* 53, no. 3 (September 2024): 225-248.
- Lansink, Annette. “Migration and Development: The Contribution of Women Migrant Workers to Poverty Alleviation.” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 81 (2009): 126–36. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27868987>.
- Lee, Eunkoo. “Educational Differences in Period Fertility: The Case of South Korea, 1996–2010.” *Demographic Research* 38, no. 13 (January 23, 2018): 309–20. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2018.38.13>.
- Lee, Hyunok, Lindy Williams, and Florio Arguillas. “Adapting to Marriage Markets: International Marriage Migration from Vietnam to South Korea.” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 47, no. 2 (May 2016): 267–88. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.47.2.267>.
- Lee, June J.H. “A Review of Data on Trafficking in the Republic of Korea.” *International Organization for Migration (IOM)* 9 (August 2002): 7–82.
- Lee, Mary. “Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family.” *Korean Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 56–85. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ks.0.0010>.
- Lee, Min Joo. “Korean Women All Make Bad Wives”: Misogyny and Nationalism in Online Discourses Promoting Interracial Relationships Between Korean Men and White Women. *Men and Masculinities*, (2024), 27(1), 42-60.
- Lee, Min Joo. “Why so many South Korean women are refusing to date, marry or have kids”. *The Conversation*, (2023). <https://doi.org/10.64628/AAI.m9uq9rx6y>
- Lee, Misun, Zuzanna Brzozowska, and Tomáš Sobotka. “Declining Appeal of Marriage? Trends in Marital Intentions in South Korea, 1991–2018.” *Asian Population Studies* 21, no. 3 (December 11, 2024): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2024.2428026>.
- Lee, Taehoon. “Migration Data and Marriage Migrants in the Republic of Korea.” *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2022.

- Lhomme, Laetitia, Siren Zhong, and Billie Du. "Demi Bride Trafficking: A Unique Trend of Human Trafficking from Demi Bride Trafficking: A Unique Trend of Human Trafficking from South-East Asia to China South-East Asia to China." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 3 (April 2021): 28–39. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss3/4>.
- Liang, Zai, and Yiu Por Chen. "Migration and Gender in China: An Origin-Destination Linked Approach." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 52, no. 2 (January 2004): 423–43. <https://doi.org/10.1086/380594>.
- Limoncelli, Stephanie A. "What in the World Are Anti-Trafficking NGOs Doing? Findings from a Global Study." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2, no. 4 (September 2016): 316–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1135605>.
- Lu, Yao, and Ran Tao. "Female Migration, Cultural Context, and Son Preference in Rural China." *Population Research and Policy Review* 34, no. 5 (March 4, 2015): 665–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-015-9357-x>.
- MacLean, Douglas. "Commercial Marriage Trafficking: Uncovering a Growing New Form of Transnational Human Trafficking, and Shaping International Law to Respond." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2014, 1–51. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2122859>.
- Mahler, Sarah J., and Patricia R. Pessar. "Gender Matters: Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery toward the Core of Migration Studies." *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (March 2006): 27–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00002.x>
- Marchetti, Sabrina. "Quale vulnerabilità? Il punto di vista di persone in migrazione." *Edizioni Ca' Foscari*, 2024, pp. 79-94.
- Marriage Brokers Business Management Act*. Korea Legislation Research Institute (KLRI), 2017.
- May, Laura. "Lessons Learned by NGOs in the Fight against Human Trafficking." *International Affairs Forum* 7 (July 16, 2016): 1–15. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309417537_Lessons_Learned_by_NGOs_in_the_Fight_Against_Human_Trafficking.

- Miers, Suzanne. "Contemporary Forms of Slavery." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, no. 3 (December 1996): 238–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399608575195>.
- Min Joo Lee. "'Korean Women All Make Bad Wives': Misogyny and Nationalism in Online Discourses Promoting Interracial Relationships between Korean Men and White Women." *Men and Masculinities* 27, no. 1 (January 23, 2024): 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x241229675>.
- Mittal, Ashita. *Compendium of Best Practices on Anti Human Trafficking by Non Governmental Organizations*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2008.
- Molony, Barbara, Janet Theiss, and Hyaeweol Choi. *Gender in Modern East Asia*. Routledge, 2018.
- Muse, Mohammed. *Anti-Trafficking in Humanitarian Responses a Brief Overview and Analysis of Current Practices and Challenges in Addressing Trafficking in Persons Based on Interviews with Protection Cluster and AOR Coordinators*. International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018.
- Nam, Sanghui. "The Women's Movement and the Transformation of the Family Law in South Korea. Interactions between Local, National and Global Structures." *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 67–86. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156805810x517670>.
- OECD. *OECD Rural Studies Perspectives on Decentralisation and Rural-Urban Linkages in Korea*. OECD Publishing, 2021.
- Oh, Heaeun, Kong Jung Won, Kwon Hyun-Jung. "Asian Marriage Migrant Women's Labor Market Participation: Korean Husband's Egalitarian Gender Role Attitudes and Resources." *Gender Issues* 41, no. 22 (2024): 1-26.
- OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. *THE CRITICAL ROLE of CIVIL SOCIETY in COMBATING TRAFFICKING in HUMAN BEINGS*. Vol. 8. OSCE, 2018.
- Park, Sangyoub. "Korean Multiculturalism and the Marriage Squeeze." *Contexts* 10, no. 3 (August 2011): 64–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504211418459>.

- Piper, Nicola. "Feminisation of Migration and the Social Dimensions of Development: The Asian Case." *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 7 (October 2008): 1287–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802386427>.
- Rani, Nisha. "Human Trafficking & Bride Trafficking." *International Journal of Advanced Legal Research* 6, no. 1 (August 2025): 1–23. <https://ijalr.in/volume-6-issue-1/human-trafficking-bride-trafficking-dr-nisha-rani/>.
- Raymo, James M., and Hyunjoon Park. "Marriage Decline in Korea: Changing Composition of the Domestic Marriage Market and Growth in International Marriage." *Demography* 57, no. 1 (January 9, 2020): 171–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00844-9>.
- Schrover Marlou, and Et Al. *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*. Amsterdam University Press, 2008.
- Scobey-Thall, Jake. "Asia's Bride Market." *Foreign Policy*, no. 211 (2015): 28–29. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24577646>.
- Shim, Young-Hee, and Sang-Jin Han. "'Family-Oriented Individualization' and Second Modernity an Analysis of Transnational Marriages in Korea." *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft* 61, no. 3-4 (2010): 237–55. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23060001>.
- Shin, Gi-Wook, and Rennie Moon. "Korea's Migrants." *Asian Survey* 59, no. 4 (2019): 595–606. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26848392>.
- Shipper, Apichai W. "Introduction: Politics of Citizenship and Transnational Gendered Migration in East and Southeast Asia." *Pacific Affairs* 83, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 11–29. <https://doi.org/10.5509/201083111>.
- Singh, Divya. "Piercing the Veil on Trafficking in Women." *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 37, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): 340–63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23252164>.
- Sinke, Suzanne M. "Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives." *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (March 2006): 82–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00004.x>.

- Smith, Russel B. "The United States Army and Combating Human Trafficking in Korea." United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, March 22, 2017.
- The Korea Times. "US report returns South Korea to Tier 1 group for human trafficking elimination efforts". *The Korea Times*. (June 25, 2024). <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/foreignaffairs/20240625/us-report-returns-south-korea-to-tier-1-group-for-human-trafficking-elimination-efforts>
- U.S. Department of State. *Trafficking in Persons Report June 2024*, n.d. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.
- U.S. Department of State. "2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Korea," 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/south-korea/>.
- U.S. Department of State. "2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Korea," 2024. https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/south-korea/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- U.S. Department of State. "2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Korea," 2025. https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/south-korea/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- U.S. Department of State. "Republic of Korea 2023 Human Rights Report," 2023. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_KOREA-REP-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf.
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN WOMEN. "Human Rights Violations & Concerns Protections under the Framework Pre-Departure in Countries of Origin. Decision to Migrate Recruitment and Immediate Pre-Departure." UN WOMEN, n.d.
- United Nations Human Office of the High Commissioner Rights , United Nations. *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*, 1957.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *Interlinkages between Trafficking in Persons and Marriage*. United Nations, 2020.
- UNODC. *An Introduction to Human Trafficking : Vulnerability, Impact and Action*. New York: United Nations, 2008.

- . *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. United Nations, 2024.
- Weiss, Ayla. “Ten Years of Fighting Trafficking: Critiquing the Trafficking in Persons Report through the Case of South Korea,” 2012.
- Wijerathna, Mandari Pabasara, and Gertrude I. Hewapathirana. ““Hidden Stories behind Global Love’: Acculturative and Social Integration Challenges of Marriage Migrant Women in South Korea.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 89 (July 2022): 111–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.05.008>.
- Won, Sook-Yeon. *Immigrants as “New” Precariats in the Korean Immigration Policy Regime*. Taylor & Francis, 2024. 10.4324/9781003566762-3.
- Won, Sook-Yeon. *Immigrants as “New” Precariats in the Korean Immigration Policy Regime*. Taylor & Francis, 2024. 10.4324/9781003566762-4.
- Won, Sook-Yeon. *Immigrants as “New” Precariats in the Korean Immigration Policy Regime*. Taylor & Francis, 2024. 10.4324/9781003566762-6.
- World Health Organization. “Child, Early and Forced Marriage Legislation Country Profiles.” World Health Organization, 2016. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep33059.15>.
- World Health Organization. *Women on the Move Migration, Care Work and Health*. World Health Organization, 2017. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep55737>.
- Yeoh, Brenda S.A., Shirlena Huang, Theodora Lam, and Franchesca Morais. “Transnational Family Dynamics in Asia.” In *Handbook of Migration and Globalisation*, 369–86. Elgaronline, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800887657.00035>.
- Yoon, In-Jin. “Social Integration of Migrant Workers and Marriage Migrant Women in Korea.” *Source: Journal of Asian Sociology* 50, no. 4 (2021): 573–98. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27100572>.
- Yu, Sojin. “Migrant Racialization in South Korea: Class and Nationality as the Central Narrative.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 10 (December 21, 2022): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2153608>.

Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA)

Il/La sottoscritto/a (*indicare nome e cognome*), matricola numero (*indicare numero di matricola*), iscritto/a presso Ca' Foscari al corso di Laurea/Laurea magistrale in (*indicare il nome del corso di studio*), autore/autrice dell'elaborato finale/tesi di laurea (*indicare il titolo*), relatore/relatrice (*indicare nome e cognome*), consapevole delle sanzioni previste dall'art. 76 del Testo unico, D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n.445, e della decadenza dei benefici prevista dall'art. 75 del medesimo Testo unico in caso di dichiarazioni false o mendaci, sotto la propria personale responsabilità ai sensi degli artt. 46 e 47 del D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445,

DICHIARA

- ☒ di NON aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare vari aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura del suo elaborato finale/della sua tesi di laurea;
- ☐ di aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare vari aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura del suo elaborato finale/della mia tesi di laurea, in particolare (*per ogni punto scrivere per esteso quanto viene richiesto*):
 - *indicare il nome dello strumento (es. "ChatGPT" se applicazione o "GPT" se modello) con riferimento alla versione specifica (ad esempio, "ChatGPT-4, versione rilasciata a marzo 2024")*;
 - *se sono stati utilizzati più strumenti, specificare ciascuno di essi indicandone nome e versione*;
 - *fornire informazioni su come è stato utilizzato lo strumento*:
 - ☐ *revisione e ottimizzazione dei testi per migliorare chiarezza e coerenza*;
 - ☐ *generazione di grafici e diagrammi per la presentazione dei dati*;
 - ☐ *supporto alla scrittura automatica di frasi*;
 - ☐ *produzione di immagini illustrative per integrare la parte metodologica*;
 - ☐ *altro (specificare)*;
 - *indicare le sezioni/i capitoli interessate/interessati*;
 - *indicare come è stata verificata la correttezza, la qualità e l'attendibilità delle informazioni o dei testi eventualmente generati*.

DICHIARA INOLTRE

che tutto il materiale generato dall'IA è stato attentamente verificato, rivisto e rielaborato dall'autore/dall'autrice, che si assume la piena responsabilità per la qualità, l'accuratezza e l'integrità scientifica del lavoro.