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Imagining diversity in Seoul: Gender and immigrant identities

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ABSTRACT

While immigrant studies focus on the role of local-level migration and integration policies to respond to the immigrant groups in their areas, the research on how urban policies mediate the social inequality which ethnic minorities face are still not sufficient, particularly in the context of the new immigrant-receiving countries. This article analyzes the construction of immigrant groups and the social oppression experienced by immigrant groups in Seoul. Specifically, this article focuses on multilayered social pressure experienced by low-income foreign-born workers and marriage migrants, who account for 36% and 7.9%, respectively, of the city's foreign-born population. This article shows that diversity policies in Seoul ultimately reaffirm, rather than challenge, national definitions of the different ethnic groups by strengthening the categories and associated social oppressions of gender, ethnicity, and class. The study is based on a documentary analysis of policies on immigrants in Seoul and interviews with public officials and immigrants.

KEYWORDS

Seoul; diversity; migration; urban policies; oppression

Introduction

Cities have become increasingly important in the understanding of diversity and inequality as playing roles as critical nodes of the global economy (Yeoh, 1999). The globalization strategies of cities play roles in shaping the lives of immigrant groups in not only economic but also cultural dimensions since they often rely on the symbolic meaning of globalized urban culture and the construction of identities (Kong, 2010; Paul, 2004). Promoting the image of global cities has been shown in the discourse of cultural regeneration strategies, and social integration and cohesion have become important concerns of urban policies as the members of cities became unprecedentedly diverse.

This growing diversity in metropolitan areas also sheds light on the role of local government in integration policies. Along with the interest in multilevel governance and their roles in democracies, local-level migration and integration policies tend to be understood as the means to sensitively respond to the immigrant groups by pointing out the limitations of immigrant policies at the national level (Bache & Flinders, 2004). While there is growing literature investigating the differences between local immigrant strategies and national immigrant policies, the research looking into local policies by focusing on the social inequalities, which immigrant groups experience in local policies, is still insufficient. The investigation on how this possibility of different policy responses in local government

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mediate social inequalities apart from national policies is important, and in order to investigate it, looking into the interaction of ethnic minorities with local policies seems to be essential.

This study investigates the construction and involvement of immigrant groups in Seoul Metropolitan city by focusing on the dimension of social oppressions that immigrant groups are facing in Seoul. Newly growing global cities in Asia such as Singapore, Tokyo, and Seoul witness discrimination toward immigrant groups over the last three to four decades of rapid migration movements. Hence, the limitation of national immigrant policies and the understanding of ethnic minorities in these countries began to be discussed (Kwon, 2020; Ong, 2006; C. S. Lee, 2017). However, the research on local policies, especially regarding the experiences of immigrant groups on urban policies, is rarely found. Migrant studies need to consider “the spatial aspects of socio-economic power and relational inequalities within networked space” (Çağlar, 2007, p. 1073). In this sense, cities are an important scale to understand how the unequal power is organized through the immediate interactions between migrants and long-established groups. While this article analyzes urban policies as an important institutional setting shaping the everyday lives of immigrants, it focuses on the experiences of immigrant groups based on interviews with them. By doing so, it aims to unpack the overlapping dimensions of the social discrimination, which immigrant groups face, and to examine the interaction of discourse in urban policies within those experiences. When we consider that cities are crucial settlements for immigrants in terms of resources and networks that cities provide, the understanding of interactions between local immigrant residents and structure of policies is essential.

This article, first, explores literature on local immigrant policies and Asian urban immigrant studies and, second, introduces the dimensions of domination/oppressions, which minorities experience to investigate the operation of urban policies. Third, it examines the policies of Seoul and the experiences of immigrant groups. The documentary analysis of the first and second Seoul Foreigner¹ Basic Plans was initiated in 2007 and 2014, respectively, and semistructured interviews with 22 participants are composed of the data of this article (see the methodology section).

The “local turn” of integration policy and Asian cities

National models of citizenships have been central in the study of immigrants and integration. However, as government is decentralized and localized integration policies become needed, there is emerging literature that has pointed out the limitation of studies focusing on national models of immigrant policies in recent years (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; N. G. Schiller, 2008; Scholten et al., 2015). The recent literature points out that the national-level analysis of integration policies tends to have led to oversimplification of national philosophies and cultures of integration (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012). Along with the investigation into how regional and municipal integration policies can differ from national policies, the studies began to emphasize the role of a subnational level of government in the integration and participation of immigrant groups (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Schmidtke, 2014; Scholten, 2016).

When it comes to the differences between national policies and local policies, Poppelaars and Scholten (2008) highlighted the pragmatic aspect of local policies. The local policies tend to show a more accommodative approach, which can be characterized by pragmatic problem-

coping compared to the national-level policies, which focus more on central policy coordination (Penninx & Martiniello, 2004). However, as M. Schiller (2015) posits, although local governments sometimes reconfigure the policies of the national level, the local and national level policies cannot be entirely divided and are seen as a dichotomous form. Apart from these pragmatic characteristics, local governments are also based on a certain paradigm, which might be interconnected to the national policies and exposed to local pressure. Any attempt to define the characteristics of local policies seems to carry the danger of oversimplification as much as the attempt to simplify the philosophies embedded in national policies. Scholars, however, tend to agree that local policies can respond differently from the national government apart from the discussion of how we can define them (Penninx et al., 2004; Uitermark et al., 2005). The understanding of local immigrant policies is crucial since cities are an important geographical focus to understand the relations between immigrants and long-established groups as a larger number of immigrants settled down in urban areas (Beebeejaun & Modarres, 2020). Therefore, cities are viewed as the space where the immediate interactions of immigrants and governing bodies happen and where the participation and incorporation of immigrants are observed.

Apart from the importance of local immigrant policies, local-level policy analysis is still not sufficient, particularly in Asian cases. It is rather limitedly found mainly in studies on European cities, which have observed the growing tendency of the decentralization of central government. It is partly because top-down policymaking is still believed to be dominant in the Asian context, as well as them having a relatively shorter history of immigrants. For example, the decentralization only began in South Korea in the 1990s (J. H. Lee & Suh, 2021). The studies on immigrants at the city level in Asian cases are seen in two different strands: first, the studies on the recent globalizing strategy of city (Choi & Han, 2019; J. -Y. Lee & Park, 2021; K. Park, 2013), and second, the studies on the interactions and integration of different social groups at local neighborhood level (Im & Kim, 2019; H. Kim, 2019; Liu et al., 2012; B. -G. Park, 2009; Wang et al., 2016). While the first strand of studies focuses on the analysis of the discourse of “global” in the Asian context focusing on spatial projects, the latter strand of studies investigates the social relations of migrants by using cities as a geographical boundary where immigrant groups are concentrated. The context of involvement of local immigrants in urban integration policies is relatively missing apart from these two strands. Investigating the interaction between local policies and local immigrant groups can be the way to fill this gap.

This study will look into the local policy as a complicated assemblage that is interconnected to the national immigrant policies and as the immediate frame which local immigrant groups are experiencing. Investigating the way to involve the immigrant groups in urban policies from the aspect of equal participation will be a central focus of analysis. The dimension of oppression will demonstrate the equal/unequal involvement of immigrant groups in urban policies.

Construction of group categorization and embedded oppression

Ethnicity and gender as a socially constructed category

Ethnicity is frequently assumed as a “natural product” which is biologically given. Along with the biological categorization, when the groups who have different attributes such as gender, race, or age, they are often assumed to have different qualities. This essentialist understanding of ethnicity is commonly found in the South Korean context.

Shin (2006) explains that the ethnic nationalism of Korea has been strengthened as the means to build solidarity to counteract against Japanese imperialism and to assert the reunification of North and South Korea after the Korean War. However, as South Korea experienced a notable number of immigrants, this view on ethnic nation received criticism for the reason that it produces lack of tolerance toward different ethnic groups (Y. -S. Kim, 2014). The belief that the emphasis of Korean ethnicity would build solidarity among Koreans also came into question since the social discrimination issue of Korean Chinese² groups gained attention. Although Korean Chinese have the same ancestors with long-established Koreans, their social positions were changed along with the policies (Shin & Ma, 2017).

Contrary to the essentialist view, many explained ethnicity as a socially constructed concept (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1995). They argued that ethnicity is difficult to perceive as a fixed form, which is inherited and the society where ethnic groups are located shaped their group identities. Those groups existed as a reality by influencing members, but the memberships are not exclusive and shifted in different contexts (Anthias, 1992). In this sense, ethnic groups can be rather understood as social groups, which shared similar experiences induced by social meaning attached to the ethnicity in a given society rather than group division due to biological differences.

In the process of immigration, gender is considered as another important social category that influences the process of settling for immigrants. The process of immigration is sometimes not experienced in the same way for both men and women, and it sometimes requires the performance of different gender roles. Gender scholars have shown that the process of migration and settlement differ depending on gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011; Kurien, 1999). Gender relations and constructs are reworked during the course of immigration within the influences of the gender system of both the origin and destination contexts (Chang, 2020; Gupta, 1997).

Understanding the mechanism of the construction of social categories is important to unpack the dimension of inequalities where ethnic minorities are located. The receiving society sometimes builds assumptions, which do not necessarily reflect facts, toward minorities, and the preexisting social norms seem to be rooted in this process. Policies, including national and local, shaped and constructed such locations of social groups (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). Those presumptions toward groups shape the boundary of membership of ethnicities and gender groups by frequently forming uneven social relations with long-established groups.

The dimensions of oppression

Many studies explained social inequality associated with these categorizations through the social power relations between dominant social groups and minorities (Fraser, 2005; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Taylor, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The notable part is, in the experiences of minorities, the dimensions of different social categories are intertwined, as we can see in the case of ethnic minority women. The intersectional analysis, which McCall (2005, p. 1771) argued as “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s study, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far,” became mainstream due to this difficulty and limitation in simplifying the group categorization. It explains the overlapping aspects of a person’s social and political identity and their combination in creating different modes of

discrimination (Crenshaw, 1990). McCall (2005) explains these overlapping categories through the approaches call “inter-categorical” and “intra-categorical.” However, this view draws questions about the process of identifying groups that seem to be unlimitable (Knapp, 1999). Listing social divisions is sometimes impossible to encompass all different dimensions of social positions and any attempt to group them is also reductionist if it is generalized. Due to this, Salem (2018) argues that “we should not spend time debating what intersectionality is but rather focus on what it does” (p. 405).

The intertwined dimensions of disadvantaged positions, which intersectionality shed light on, pointed out that analysis, which only relies on one specific aspect of groups such as classism and sexism, might not be sufficient to understand social inequality, which minority groups experience. In order to avoid reductions and exclusions, focusing on dimension of oppressions, which form domination-oppressed relations rather than a certain group categorization, might be useful. In that sense, the five faces of oppression, which Young (1990) suggested, seem to be still insightful.

Oppression is used to illustrate the everyday practices of structure in her definition. This structural oppression is not always related to the intentional oppression of one group by others but rather reproduced by everyday living without recognizing themselves as the agents of oppression (Foucault, 1977). In this sense, Fraser (1995) argues that the culture embedded in an institutional setting regarding normal and inferiors needs to be reexamined and transformed in order to mediate inequality.

Young (1990) suggested five different faces: oppression, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Among these five faces, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism are particularly useful to look into the urban social cohesion policies. Investigation of these oppression-and domination relations can unpack how overlapped and intertwined inequalities are shown in the policies. Public policies can reinforce the existing unequal relations and can be seen as “constituting structural domains of power” (Collins, 2019, p. 26).

First, in a link with the division of labor, marginalization is useful to see the different degrees of accessibility depending on their productivities in liberal society. Friedman (2003) argues that dependency should not be a reason to be deprived of choice and respect. However, it is frequently observed that there is an assumption that productive activities would address the right to participate. The marginalization of the labor market tends to make people depend on others and prevents them from exercising capacities in socially recognizable ways.

Second, Young (1990) adds the concept of powerlessness in order to explain the power relations between professionals and nonprofessional workers. In contemporary society, although the division between capitalists and workers is not clearly observed in daily lives, throughout the meritocracy “menial labor” which immigrant workers are frequently associated with locates them in a position without autonomy in working spaces. In this sense, nonprofessional workers suffer from both exploitation and powerlessness.

Regarding the cultural aspects, cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture and its establishment as the norm. Fraser (1995) argues that some groups have exclusive and primary access to means of interpretation and communication in a society. Through this domination-oppression relations, a certain group’s culture tends to be considered desirable or abnormal.

The recent studies on immigrant groups in South Korea pointed out the discrimination of ethnic minorities and conflicts as Korea enters a multicultural society (Ahn, 2012; Hundt et al., 2019; Yi & Jung, 2015). Integration policies through assimilation tend to induce marginalization of minorities, and the strong ethnic nationalism tends to be understood as a basis of this assimilation policy (Walton, 2018). Constructing separate systems of oppression for each group, such as racism, sexism, and classism, has a limitation in investigating the immigrant groups in Seoul. As can be assumed, low-income migrant groups are exposed to both cultural discrimination due to their ethnicity and economic inequality due to a division of labor, and marriage migrants tend to show the issue of gender inequality.

Research method

Two qualitative methods, documentary analysis and semistructured interviews are used. Firstly, the first and second Seoul Foreigner³ Basic Plans, which were initiated in 2007 and 2014, respectively, will be analyzed. The three ordinances, which have been the grounds of the policies and social support programs, will also be visited, but two Basic Plans will be the main documents for the documentary analysis since the ordinances do not include the detailed contents of policies but specify the definition of terms and purpose. The Seoul ordinance on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity has been enacted in 2017. However, the main analysis in this article focuses on the first two Seoul Foreigner Basic Plans that were implemented before the fieldwork.

Semistructured interviews were conducted from March to June 2016 with 22 participants, including two public officials, one researcher, 11 organization leaders, including both Koreans and immigrants, and eight local foreign-born residents. Interviewees were recruited focusing on the southwestern part of Seoul, including *Guro-gu*, *Geumcheon-gu* and *Yongdengpo-gu* where foreign workers and marriage migrants have settled. The interviews were conducted at their workplaces and public spaces in neighborhoods.

I established contact with immigrant participants through the local civil society organizations, which support foreign-born workers and marriage-migrant women. All participants have been anonymized, and pseudonyms in this paper have been used as substitutes for actual names. The interview data were transcribed and coded by the NVivo 11.0.0 for Mac. The analyzing interview data were conducted in mainly inductive ways. Their experiences in Seoul are grouped by inductive themes by referencing the five oppressions. Those themes linked to the analysis of each policy of metropolitan Seoul, formed through the documentary analysis.

Immigrant groups in Seoul Metropolitan city

The growth in the number of immigrants in Korea has been led by the arrival of low-income foreign-born workers and marriage migrants from the 1990s (A. E. Kim, 2009). The number of immigrant groups has been growing since the government commenced policies to encourage companies to solve shortages at the bottom end of the labor market by hiring immigrants (B. Lee & Kim, 2011). Thus, in 2019, foreign-born residents in Korea accounted for 4.87% (2,524,656) of the total national population, which has tripled since 2005 (which stood at 1.5%, 747,467; Ministry of Justice, 2019).

Low-income temporary immigrants comprised the largest proportion of Korea's foreign population, with visas that permitted them to work only in the low-skilled industries (23%). The Korean Chinese population, Korean ethnicity born in China, is the largest group,

accounting for 48% of these visa holders in 2019. The second-largest group was marriage migrants, although the overall number (166,025) was much lower than that of low-income workers, accounting for 6.5% of the overall immigrant population. Asian female immigrants represented the highest number in this group with 79.2% and Vietnamese female immigrants accounted for 26% of the total marriage-based immigrants with 44,172 (166,025; Ministry of Justice, 2019). The total immigrant population, both long-term and short-term immigrants, decreased in 2020 due to the effect of COVID-19 (2,524,656 in 2019 to 2,036,075 in 2020; Ministry of Justice, 2020).

The composition of the immigrant population in Seoul has shown a similar tendency. In 2020, low-income foreign-born workers comprised the highest percentage of the overall immigrant population at 25%, and marriage migrants accounted for 8.7% (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2020). The data indicated that both groups mainly resided in the southwest parts of Seoul, *Yeongdeungpo-gu*, *Geuncheon-gu*, *Guro-gu*, and *Gwanak-gu*.

Due to the growing number of immigrants, the Seoul Metropolitan Government enacted *Söult'ükpyölshi Källöböltoshi Ch'okchin Chorye* (the Ordinance on the Promotion of Seoul Global City; Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2007) and *Söult'ükpyölshi Tamunhwagajong Chiwöne Kwanhan Chorye* (the Ordinance on the Support of Multicultural Families in Seoul; Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2011). The “Ordinance on the Promotion of Seoul Global City” aimed to promote Seoul as a global city by attracting foreign companies and visitors, and the Ordinance on the Support of Multicultural Families in Seoul mainly focused on marriage migrants. The two distinct Seoul Metropolitan ordinances were integrated into *Söult'ükpyölshi oegugin min tamunhwagajong chiwön chorye* (the Ordinance on Support of Foreign Residents and Multicultural Families in Seoul) in 2014 (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2014). By including the definition of “foreign residents” as “foreigners and their children who have been living in a Seoul Metropolitan area for more than 90 days,” this ordinance has provided a basis to include wider groups of immigrants.

Three different groups, international companies and visitors, multicultural families, and foreign low-income workers, are seen in the Seoul policies. In the next section, after the analysis of the global plan, which was promoted the most among the agendas regarding immigrant groups in Seoul, marriage migrants and foreign-born workers in Seoul policies are analyzed, respectively.

Low-income migrant laborers and marriage migrants in the “Global City”

The Ordinance on the Promotion of Seoul Global City was the foundation of *Oegugin kibon kyehoek* (the first Foreigner Basic Plan) namely, the “*Söul källöböl toshihwa kibon kyehoek* (Seoul Global City Basic Plan)” (2007–2012). The first foreigner basic plan aimed to improve the competitiveness of Seoul as one of the “top ten global cities.” The aim was frequently described by comparing Seoul with other cities, such as Paris, New York, Tokyo, and London. The following excerpt is taken from Mayor Oh’s speech:

Seoul, the capital of Korea, is the first city in history to become one of the top 10 global cities while leaving behind such cities as Washington, Seattle and Geneva. Seoul, which is shoulder to shoulder with New York, London, Paris and Tokyo, has created a record of our dreams. (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2010).

Increasing the urban competitiveness of Seoul was the main aim throughout the administration of Mayor Oh Sehoon (2006–2011) and that of the previous Mayor Lee Myeong-Pak (2002–2006). For example, Mayor Oh Sehoon emphasized that his main aim in implementing urban policies was to enhance the rank of Seoul regarding urban competitiveness (W. Lee, 2011), and the Global City Plan was mainly implemented by a department of the Seoul Metropolitan Government called the *kyōngjaengnyōk kanghwa ch’ujinbonbu* (Competitiveness Promotion Office).

In this context, references to foreigners in the first basic policy tended to signify visitors or investors, who were assumed to raise the competitiveness of Seoul as a “global city.” Common expressions in Mayor Oh’s policies included: “the global city Seoul where foreigners want to live, visit and invest,” “the city where creativity and diversity are respected,” “the improvement of the environment for foreign investors,” and “global attractions” (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2007). Creating the conditions for innovation by inviting entrepreneurs and talented workers were observed in the policies of Mayor Oh, and those talented workers did not seem to include low-income Asian workers and marriage migrant women who comprised the majority of the foreign-born population.

This understanding of immigrant groups is also shown in spatial projects under the Seoul Global City Basic Plan. The plan included three different types of spatial projects, namely, Global Business Zones, Global Villages, and Global Cultural Exchange Zones (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2007). Global Business Zones and Cultural Exchange Zones were designated in mainly central commercial areas of Seoul, and Global Villages were focused on ethnic enclaves. However, the neighborhoods that were designated in those three projects were areas populated mainly by foreign-born residents from the U.S., Canada, and Germany, while the areas with Asian migrants, which consisted of a significantly larger population, were not included.

[The] Global Village is, rather than a policy of directly supporting immigrant groups, a bit of a showy policy. It’s mainly focused on foreign tourists and investors. The government set up some global villages in *Gangnam*, *Itaewon*, and *Seorae Village* in *Seocho*. *Seorae Village* is known as a neighborhood with French people, but only 500 people live there. . . . 50,000 people were living in *Garibong-dong* [Southwest area of Seoul with low-income Korean Chinese immigrants], but there are no plans. (“Gangil,” researcher at Korean Research Institute, interview, 26 May 2016.)

The marginalization of low-income workers and marriage migrants seems to be induced by both the labor system and the cultural dimension in an intertwined way with the growth-oriented perspective of Seoul policies. The immigrants who are involved in nonprofessional industries are not visible in the global strategy. As Young (1990) pointed out, the division of labor tend to lead the powerlessness and marginalization of nonprofessional or dependent women, and it was shown as the uneven right to be involved in urban policies in Seoul case.

In addition, as can be seen in the Global Villages policy, which focuses on residents not high-skilled workers, the policy relies on the symbolic image of global cities, which tend to value a certain group’s culture over others. It can be seen as cultural imperialism but tends to have a particular context of growing competitiveness discourse rather than placing the dominant group’s culture – Korean culture – as a cultural norm. Cultural hierarchy among countries according to the global city index is internalized through the ambitions of growth of Seoul, and immigrant groups were selectively included as a means

to achieve this higher rank. Through this process, foreign-born groups were judged based on whether they could promote the image as a global city, which mainly references Western developed cities.

Embedded gender roles in multicultural families policies

In the Korean context, multicultural families have a specific meaning, which refers to individuals, who are mainly Asian females and who have immigrated to Korea as a result of arranged marriages (Chang, 2020; H. -K. Lee, 2008). Seen in a wider context, the policies encouraging international marriages such as the local governments' incentive policies,⁴ which support the marriage between Korean males and females from other countries, aim to mitigate the declining birth rate and decreasing population, which was pointed out in government policy reports as a factor possibly resulting in reduced national competitiveness (Kang, 2016). Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodian women who marry Koreans do so through brokerage systems, and a recent study of the marriage brokerage system has shown there to be a significant age gap between husbands and wives (average gap is shown as 18.4 years; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2017). This tendency of international marriage became less notable as marriage brokerage systems are considered socially problematic (Ministry of Justice, 2021). However, the context of international marriage, which had been formed throughout the early years, seems to still have an influence on recent migrant policies.

Within this context, marriage migrants in the multicultural family policy tend to be gendered by focusing on mainly female immigrants. While they are supported in public policies such as the Ordinance on Support of Foreign Residents and Multicultural Families, the groups are situated in a rather subordinate position with respect to those immigrants who need to be assimilated into Korean society (Ha, 2007). The understanding of female marriage migrants seems to have been problematic due to the arrangements of the marriages.

In some cases, there are conflicts because of the Korean people's perspective. People think that the Philippines and Vietnam have lower economic standards than our country. . . . Sometimes people pay a certain amount of commission to bring them [brides]. So, in some cases, husbands tend to consider their wives as a kind of possession. ("Joengsook," a member of a marriage immigrant women organization, interview, 8 April 2016.)

The understanding of migrant women merely as a part of families seems to be reflected in the Seoul government's ordinance. The Ordinance on the Support of Multicultural Families in 2011 specifies the purpose of the ordinance as "to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life and social integration of multicultural families residing in Seoul Metropolitan Government by allowing them to lead *a stable family life* [emphasis by the author]." Twenty-five locations of multicultural family support centers based on this ordinance focused on helping the migrants to adjust to Korea by providing Korean language training, legal information, translation services, and family support such as family counseling (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2011, p. 2). The Ordinance had replaced the new one in 2014, but the supports for marriage migrants are shown in a similar way (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2014).

Their social roles are limited to being wife and mother at home by depending on the husband in both legal and economic status without building social relationships independently. While this gender role plays the central role in the process of settling in South Korea for marriage migrant women, this context tends to make migrant women invisible in public participation and maintains the issues such as domestic violence as family issues rather than racial discrimination. Seoul policies seem to offer some remedy to help marriage migrants through such family consulting centers and services, but heavily rely on the form of family which might deliver the existing gender system consisting of an unjust migrant women experience. For example, when it comes to the contents in programs, the interviewees pointed out that the education programs for immigrant women tend to be highly gendered and based on the purpose of assimilation. The contents, which are mainly Korean norms and etiquettes, tend to emphasize the role of immigrant women as mothers and wives. These uneven relations appearing in the policies were pointed out in the interviews. Immigrant women interviewees argued that the emphasis on the traditional role of mother and wife was one of the main reasons that they struggled to adjust in Korean families.

One immigrant woman who had stayed a long time in Korea mentioned that those traditional roles are criticized and challenged among Korean families but tend to appear strongly in social programs for immigrant women. “Nam,” a participant of a social program, said that “I don’t understand why we need to follow the Korean traditional rules which even Korean women refuse” in her interview on April 8, 2016. The gender roles were strongly required for migrant women, and it forced them to follow Korean cultural norms without an attempt to build mutual cultural understanding. Furthermore, it limited the social participation of migrant women by limiting their lives as dependents of their husbands.

As some migrant women recognized the limitations of governmental programs, they acted together to mediate them. For example, a group of migrant women organized cultural education activities at elementary schools to make visible the cultural identity of each migrant woman’s home country.

It is very difficult to find education program that people learn other countries’ cultures. Majority of multicultural program is for immigrants to learn Korean culture. . . . When I met other mothers in Korean language class, we thought we can do something together. (“Hong,” a leader of a marriage immigrant women organization, interview, 8 April 2016.)

The marriage migrants experience multiple overlapping dimensions of oppression. From the arrangement of marriage, their social roles are limited as wife and mother at home. In this sense, performing the gender role, which is expected in the South Korean gender system, has been an essential aspect in settling down in South Korea for marriage migrants. In this context, the dimensions of oppression, which have been observed in the interviews of migrant women, can be understood as the exploitation of affective labor and marginalization from the public participation due to dependency. Moreover, Seoul Metropolitan policies and social programs at local level tend to reflect this understanding of marriage migrants rather than provide a different approach. At urban level, the dimension of oppression tends to be rather organized or formalized to cultural imperialism by normalizing Korean culture in the social programs of Seoul Metropolitan policies. The integration policy at urban level tends to be experienced by migrant groups as overlapped oppressions even more obviously as it shapes cultural meaning of specific group, Asian migrant women.

Marginalization of low-income migrants in Seoul policies

Before 2014 when the two distinct ordinances were replaced by the Ordinance on Support of Foreign Residents and Multicultural Families in Seoul, low-income migrants were not included in policies even though they account for the largest proportion of the immigrant population. For example, the children of foreign immigrant parents were not recognized as recipients of multicultural family support, which is targeted at families based on marriages between Koreans and foreign-born spouses (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2018).

A foreign family is not [considered] a multicultural family, and their children cannot go to the nursery. . . . That's why we are working with "children's villages" that have not been approved as a nursery. The center is for children who are not recognized as multicultural families. ("Sung," a local church minister, interview, 1 April 2016.)

The low-income immigrants were considered necessary as a workforce but were controlled by the strict limitations of their visas, which last from 1 to 3 years. In the view of them as part of a "use and discard" philosophy, the local policies also did not consider social services as a way to improve their quality of life in Korea or any other means to provide opportunities to integrate them into Korean society.

This selective inclusion can be seen as a form of marginalization and exploitation due to the economic status of nonprofessional workers, and it is relatively more notable when it comes to the legal and social status of overseas Koreans or returning Koreans from different countries. For example, before 2004 when the act was amended, *Chaeoedongp'oŭi ch'ur-ipkuk kwa pŏpchŏng chiwie kwanhan pŏmnyul* (the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of overseas Koreans) had excluded overseas Koreans who emigrated before 1948. As a result, Korean Chinese and Korean Russians who consisted of the largest part of overseas Koreans were not able to have the same rights as the overseas Koreans in other countries. The Overseas Korean Act was claimed in the Constitutional Court as a case of human rights violation because it tended to be based on an attempt to differentiate the rights of overseas Koreans according to their economic status (J. -E. Lee, 2013; B. Lee & Kim, 2011; Seo, 2014). The Act was reformed in 2004 to include Korean Chinese and Korean Russians, but the majority of Korean Chinese groups still hold a temporary working visa by the restriction in the number of visas for overseas Koreans. Within the restriction, the Korean Chinese groups had formed the social position as low-income workers in South Korea. The economic status, as low-income workers in Korean society, has been perceived as a pivotal aspect to understand Korean Chinese in South Korean policies, and the groups tended to be "otherized" from other overseas Koreans and long-established Korean groups.

At the city level, as the first Seoul Global Basic Plan was replaced by the second Seoul Foreigner Basic Plan, "*Tagach'i Seoul Masterplan* (Multi Values Seoul Master Plan)," the policy included immigrant groups as part of local neighborhoods by emphasizing the quality of life for foreign residents. Nevertheless, when it comes to an understanding of each group, the existing categorization seems to reappear. The notable parts which have been observed distinctively in the policies regarding low-income immigrant groups were the encouragement for them to exercise their duties as citizens. In the second Seoul Foreigner Basic Plan, the agendas related to the low-income immigrant groups are "accompanied growth" and "capacity building" with more specific action plans, "academy to

become a citizen,” “enforcing tax payment,” and “expanding foreigner self-policing teams,” along with vocational training and Korean language education. This emphasis on responsibility as citizens seems to show that there is an assumption regarding the right to be involved and attributes as desirable citizens. In this assumption, low-income immigrants are yet considered to lack these conditions.

The mechanism in shaping this discourse regarding the low-income immigrants’ lack of capacity involves various assumptions about the groups. The full participation as citizens is considered as the right to be only allowed to someone who contributes to the growth of the nation and productive activities, and low-income immigrant groups are frequently judged from this perspective. Through this lens, the division of labor between migrant menial workers and professional high-skilled workers tends to expand to the marginalization of low-income migrants in urban policies and reduce their power to argue the rights to participate in urban policies. During the interviews, many interviewees mentioned the conflict between immigrants and long-established Korean groups regarding public support. “Jung,” a member of a Korean Chinese organization, said, “[If we go to the governmental service] Then, do you know what Koreans say? They say that Korean Chinese, who didn’t work and who didn’t pay the taxes, used the public services” (interview, March 28, 2016).

This antagonism that has been experienced by immigrant groups seems to build a barrier for them to interact with long-established groups. Several interviewees were not aware of the policy changes that had been expanded, and one of the participants mentioned that “the previous experiences of being unwelcomed which had been stuck in people’s memories” make immigrant groups reluctant to be involved in urban policies (“Jung,” local foreign-born resident, April 10, 2016). The integration with long-established groups in the local policies and programs tends to build tension rather than playing a role in integration.

Although the existing fame of policies tended to be experienced as a barrier for immigrant groups, the means to reconsider these categorizations were rarely found. A member of a local civil society organization supporting low-income migrants and undocumented migrants mentioned that collaboration from an equally respected position is important to solve this rooted conflict.

We [low-income Korean Chinese migrant workers] are treated as second-class foreigners, so they have a sense of resentment or being damaged. . . . We are generally requested to be involved when the frame of policy is already set. The policy makers invite us because we are the biggest group, but the prioritized group is always foreigners from Western countries, and then multicultural families. We are only considered as labor forces. . . . We need to create a bottom-up exercise so that we can participate in voluntary discussions and make it together. I think that’s a difficult part. (“Hae,” a member of a local civil society organization, interview, 28 March 2016.)

The local involvement without reconsidering of frames of group categories and hierarchy seems to build apathy and antagonism. The Seoul Metropolitan policies tend to be extended by mentioning both marriage migrants and low-income migrants. However, both groups experience difficulties in participating and marginalizing them in policies is based on different expectations toward the two groups. While marriage migrants are required to be assimilated as a part of Korean families, low-income workers are requested to contribute to economic growth and to be model citizens. The categorization of immigrant groups has not been challenged in local urban policies, and the social cohesion programs in Seoul policies are still developed according to this categorization.

Their marginal and powerless status due to division of labor tended to be still reflected as the boundary of a group at city level. The group boundary of low-income immigrants, which had been formed through national immigrant policies, was not loosened in urban policies, and instead, the assumption regarding “who are worthy or deserve to be involved” is persistently applied to the group and strengthens the uneven social position of them compared to dominant social groups. Low-income immigrant workers are frequently mentioned as “essential” members of society to make the industries of Korea function, but social support has remained minimal and was provided only when the immigrants have proved themselves as good members who benefit Korean society.

Conclusion

The frame of oppression shows the benefit of understanding the multilayered discriminations of immigrant groups. The division of labor and gender inequality is observed in the relational inequalities such as marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism in Seoul urban policies. It is not possible to analyze by looking into the existence of policies for given immigrant groups but require the understanding how the groups experience the marginalization within the relations with other dominant social groups.

Moreover, the dimensions of inequalities that immigrant groups in Seoul are not fully explained through only racism or classism. The social oppression facing marriage migrants, who consist of mainly Asian females, overlaps gender, labor, and race issues, and foreign-born workers also have multiple social statuses such as ethnic minorities and low-income workers. Three main groups in Seoul Metropolitan policies, migrants from Western countries, marriage migrant women, and low-income migrant workers, tend to form social hierarchy through multiple criteria, such as economic status and gender, and the social inequality, which those groups experience are described through the lens of oppression.

The integration policies at the urban level, in the case of Seoul Metropolitan policies, did not challenge the approach, which is shown at the national level. Instead of that, those group categorizations, which urban policies reflected throughout national policies, have been experienced as a concrete boundary that immigrant groups face in local participation. The oppression was observed through not only the unbalanced distribution of rights but also the embedded social meaning of groups in the means of being involved in the urban policies. The structural inequality of the groups is deeply rooted due to the national immigrant policies, which encourage high-skilled workers, assimilate marriage migrants, and control low-income workers as studies regarding Korean multicultural policies have pointed out (Hwang, 2009; Kim, 2014). Within this context, the Seoul policies tend to interpret this division of labor and gender as the roles of groups. These roles heavily rely on cultural assumptions, which have been socially built, and through this process, the economic and legal divisions at the national policy level tend to be shown as cultural assumption toward the groups at the urban policy level. The position of migrant women tends to deliver social meaning as wife and mother, and the division of labor of professional and nonprofessional workers is interpreted as the responsibility of citizens through the implementation of Seoul Metropolitan policies.

As a growing number of global migrations draw significant attention, urban policies began to recognize the importance of the diversity and encounters of differences. However, when it comes to how the policies consider the involvement of groups, it seems to still rely on discriminatory categorizations. The dimensions of oppression that immigrant groups are facing are not fully analyzed through seeing mere inclusion and exclusion. An in-depth understanding of oppression in relations to dominant groups is required in investigating policies at the city level.

Notes

1. The immigration policies and national census in South Korea use the term *Oegugin* (foreigner).
2. “Korean Chinese,” who are also called *Joseonjok*, are categorized as the Korean population in China who began to return to Korea after the 1980s.
3. The immigration policies and national census in South Korea use the term *Oegugin* (foreigner).
4. For example, *Yangpyeong-gun* in *Gyeonggi-do* supports 10 million KRW (approximately 65,000 GBP) for single males aged between 35 and 50 who work in the agriculture, fishing, and forestry industries and want to get married to foreign females.

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