



■ Article ■

Cultural Conflict Resolution Styles of Marriage-Migrant Women in Korea: From the Perspectives of Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Filipino Women

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Abstract

Interviews with 22 marriage-migrant women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines revealed that power distance in conjunction with individualism/collectivism influence their conflict styles. Moreover, women were more likely to engage in compromising style with their spouses; obliging with their in-laws; and avoiding with their spouse and in-law when they had emotionally given up on resolving the conflict. Furthermore, they were using avoiding when dealing with conflict outside the home with strangers and acquaintances. Though inconclusive, the findings suggest that women's educational level, work experiences, and financial status influence their conflict style. While these were cultural and social factors that influence the participants conflict style, their goal, namely, providing a better life for their children, was also found to be a major drive in resolving conflicts and in the process they empowered themselves to out-win (surmount) the conflicting situations rather than being compliant. Suggestions for future studies as well as a scale for Cambodia's power distance and individualism/collectivism are suggested.

■ **Keywords** : conflict style, marriage-migrant women, multiculturalism, power distance, individualism/collectivism

Introduction

As of June, 2016, there were approximately two million immigrants in South Korea (Korea Immigration Service, 2016). As immigrants from

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South Asian countries have different cultural backgrounds and skin tone compared with ethnic Koreans, they are emerging as a visible distinct minority group. Examination of immigrants' visa type show that many with marriage to Korean citizens visa (F-6) and non-professional employment visa (E-9) are from South Asian countries and these numbers are on the rise.

As Korea has largely remained as a mono-ethnic nation until recently, accepting people of other ethnic and racial groups has become a challenge. For instance, the number of foreigners residing in Korea in 2016 reached two million, more than twice the number of foreigners in 2004 (750,873). Hence, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the issues of cultural diversity and multiculturalism have become important social issues as result of the increase in foreign workers, marriage immigrants, returning Korean Diasporans, and North Korean refugees (Yoon, 2008).

However, changes in policies and social welfare have mostly focused on marriage- migrant women, because unlike other foreigners who return to their country after a short period of time, they will become permanent residents, ultimately acquiring Korean citizenship. Therefore, this particular group will be the most important group when it comes to cultural co-existence and social integration. Hence, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has changed policies to better assist marriage-migrant women in the process of settlement and adaptation and the Ministry of Education has introduced and implemented a number of programs to assist multicultural families so their children do not fall behind in schools (2006).

Yet, despite the length of residence, they are still experiencing cultural differences, conflicts, prejudice, and discrimination within their household and outside because of the differences in daily routine, child-rearing practices, and ways of doing things (Han, 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Lee, 2005; Seol et al., 2005). And for this reason, previous studies have focused on the type of problems they face with their spouses and parents-in-laws. However, there is a lack of study on antecedent fac-

tors that influence the ways in which they deal with and handle conflict situations. Therefore, there is a need to examine what factors such as cultural, social, and relational factors influence their conflict style. Understanding marriage-migrant women's conflict style in conjunction with their cultural background will only become more important in the near future.

The current study conducted in-depth interviews with 22 marriage-migrant women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines, four of the countries where most of the marriage-migrant women are coming from, in order to understand their conflict style. More specifically, the study examined how Hofstede's (1984, 1991) cultural dimensions influences their conflict style within household with their spouse and parents-in-law and outside the home setting with strangers. Examination of these issues contributes to the current literature on marriage-migrant women, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism in Korean society today.

Literature Review

Marriage-Migrant Women in Korea

The marriage-migrant women began to come to Korea at the beginning of the 1990s. As of June 2016, there were 128,448 marriage-migrant women in Korea with F-6 Visa and 110,683 marriage-migrant women who have become naturalized citizens, a total of 239,131 marriage-migrant women living in Korea today (Korea Immigration Service, 2016). According to the Korea Immigration Service, most of the marriage-migrant women are coming from Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, and Japan. In May 2016, most came from China, followed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, Cambodia, and Thailand.¹⁾

Table 1
Marriage-Migrant Women's Country of Origin

Ranking	Total number of arrivals	Marriage to Korean citizen (F-6)
1	China	China
2	U.S.A.	Vietnam
3	Vietnam	Philippine
4	Thailand	Japan
5	Uzbekistan	Cambodia
6	Cambodia	Thailand
7	Indonesia	Mongolia
8	Japan	Uzbekistan
9	Cambodia	Nepal

Source: Author's compilation based on May 2016 monthly immigration statistics from the Korean Ministry of Justice (2016)

Conflicts Marriage-Migrant Women Experience in Korea

A plethora of studies have examined the marriage-migrant women's situation in Korea and the conflicts and tensions that arise within the international marriage families. Some scholars have examined the marriage-migrant phenomena from the feminist perspective, arguing that international marriage migration is a result of economic imbalance between countries, sexualized labor market, feminization of poverty, and patriarchal family structure. Therefore, marriages between women from developing nations and men from developed nations are a reproduction of the inequality of women in developing countries only expressed in another way (Lee, 2005; Yoon, 2004).

Other scholars have examined multicultural families focusing on particular issues such as human rights (Yang, 2005), conflicts between marriage-migrant women and ethnic Korean mother-in-laws (Kong, 2009), marriage satisfaction (Han, 2002; Jung, 2008; Kim & Park, 2008), cultural adaptation (Choi, 2007; Park 2009), and law and policies related to marriage-migrant women and multiculturalism in Korea (Kang, 2006; Seol et al., 2005). These studies address issues that arise within multicultural

families. Whether the topic is on marriage satisfaction or conflicts between marriage-migrant women and in-laws, findings of these studies attribute the cause of the issue at hand largely as differences in culture, differences in expectations, and language barriers (Han, 2006; Kong, 2009).

For instance, studies that used in-depth interviews with marriage-migrant women and in-laws have shown they have conflicts when it comes to different lifestyle (rising time, having meals together, mannerisms, division of household labor), food (ingredients, types of food enjoyed, difference in basic seasoning, spices), and expectation (women being disappointed at the living standards of their husband's family, in-laws being disappointed at their wives wanting to support their family back home financially) (Han, 2006; Yoon, 2005). Most of these issues arise as a result of differences in expectation as a result of cultural differences. Indeed, Kim and colleagues' (2014) study which examined marriage-migrant women's characteristics by different stages of adaptation (while taking consideration of duration of residency and the age range of their children), found that women have different challenges in each stage of adaption. Overall, Language was found to be the biggest challenge, 59.8 percent of the participants identifying the factor to be the most difficult issue, followed by Loneliness 39.7 percent, Way of Life and Cultural Difference 31.5 percent, Financial Difficulty 27.9 percent, and Child Rearing and Education 25 percent. Although there are many studies that examine problems marriage-migrant women face, they have mostly pointed out what the differences are between Korean families and marriage-migrant women and what types of problems cause conflicts. As to how different cultural dimensions specifically influence how marriage-migrant women deal with conflict and how their conflict styles can be categorized have been under-explored.

Conflict Style

The definition of conflict varies but one general consensus is that conflict interaction is perceived as a situation where there are disagree-

ments among contending parties (Hammer, 2002). Constantino and Merchant (1996) viewed conflicts in terms of “the expression of dissatisfaction or disagreement with an interaction, process, product, or service” (p. 4), while Ting-Toomey and colleagues (2000) defined it as an “intense agreement process between a minimum of two interdependent parties when they perceive incompatible interests, viewpoints, processes, and/or goals in an interaction episode” (p. 48). In these ways varying definitions of conflicts include a disagreement component.

Literature on conflict styles has mostly used the dual concern framework to understand conflict style. Developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), the dual concern framework suggests that conflict style emerges from an individual’s concern for self-interest versus concern for the interest of the other. Rahim (1983) further developed the model and categorized conflict styles into five categories: *dominating* (high self/low other concern), *obliging* (low self/high other concern), *avoiding* (low self/other concern), *integrating* (high self/other concern) and *compromising* (moderate self/other concern). The dual concern model predicts that the integrating style is most likely to yield a win-win solution. Also, scholars argue that high concern for others is likely to occur when “there is an expectation of a long-term dependency on the other party” (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993 as cited in Cai and Fink, 2002, p. 69). Moreover, the literature suggests that obliging (low self/high other concern) (also referred to as yielding or accommodating) is used to preserve a relationship and unlikely to be used when a party fears appearing weak (Rubin et al., 1994). Forceful tactics such as threats or put-downs are used in dominating style, used when the focus is on winning. This style is used when one party is willing to yield and unlikely to be used when there is a risk of alienating the other party (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Scholars suggest that avoiding is often used when perceived benefit is small if the conflict is further pursued (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) and compromising, which can be characterized as dividing resources somewhat equally, is used when there is limited time, low aspiration to affect problem solving, or high cost in prolonging the conflict (Rubin et al., 1994; Yukl et al., 1976).

Scholars posit that contending parties decide which style to employ depending on the context. In other words, one will strategically choose one style over another based on the likelihood that a style will be successful given the situation (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). In general, scholars have argued that avoidance style, that is having low self/other concern, is employed in collectivistic cultures to maintain relational harmony and thus culturally reflects a *high* concern for self and other interests (Ting-Toomey, 1994; Hammer, 2001).

Conflict Styles across Cultures

Many Asian countries share similar cultural values that stem from Confucius traditions, often identified as patriarchal, hierarchical authority, and family and community oriented (Goodman et al., 1998). More specifically, East Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan are heavily influenced by Confucius values; Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia are also influenced by the Confucian philosophical worldview. Ways in which the philosophical traditions have influenced personal and communal endeavors, virtue, obligation, and filial piety in these countries are similar though different in degree (Reischauer, 1974). Although Asian countries share similar values at large, there are varying differences in specifics.

Southeast Asian countries share Confucian values yet they are different from that of East Asian countries. For instance, Cambodia, situated in the southern part of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia, has largely been influenced by Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and French colonialism. Also, numerous sociopolitical issues including corruption, lack of political freedom, and war have influenced the culture of Cambodia. Vietnamese culture encompasses characteristics of Confucian tradition such as giving rites to the ancestors and putting emphasis on family and community values. Philippine culture is a combination of Eastern and Western cultures; aspects of Asian cultures remain as it carries Malay heritage, yet displaying much of Spanish and American cul-

tural traditions (such as in architecture and festivals) (Baringer, 2006). Some of the elements in the Filipino value systems are optimism about the future, concern and care for others, hospitality, religious nature, respect for self and others, fear of God, and respect for female members of society (Talisayon, 2010).²⁾ As such, while some Asian values such as Confucian tradition seem to tie Asian countries together, when specifics are examined, there are varying differences across Asian countries. China and the Philippines, along with Korea, could be compared using Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimension theory which examines cultural values in four dimensions (the value of six dimensions for Vietnam and Cambodia are not available in the Hofstede cultural dimension).

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory analyzed the relationships between a culture and its members' values and behaviors. The theory explains such relationships and shows the differences across cultures in quantified values. Hofstede divided cultural values into six dimensions and uses the dimensions to analyze cultures. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework that describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members and how these values are related to behaviors. The six dimensions are: 1) the Individualism and collectivism dimension explores the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. Individualistic societies emphasize the "I" and value individual rights and achievements. 2) The power distance index is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. 3) The uncertainty avoidance index is defined as "a society's tolerance for ambiguity" in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. 4) In the masculinity vs. femininity dimension masculinity is defined as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success." 5) The long-term orientation vs. short-term dimension associates the connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges. Societies with a high degree in this index (long-term) view adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as a

necessity. 6) The indulgence vs. restraint dimension is essentially a measure of happiness; whether or not simple joys are fulfilled. Restraint is defined as “a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2015).

In terms of the power distance, the Philippines and China have high power distance, with the value of 94 and 80 each whereas Korea has only 60. This means Filipinos and Chinese accept power inequality more readily than Koreans. As for the uncertainty avoidance value, China, the Philippines, and Vietnam have values of 30, 44, and 30 respectively, whereas Korea has relatively higher value, 85, indicating low tolerance for ambiguity. In terms of the masculinity dimension, China and the Philippines have similar values, 66 and 64, whereas Korea and Vietnam have values of 39 and 40 indicating a high femininity value. When it comes to the individualism and collectivism dimension, China, Korea, and Vietnam all have low scores that are less than 20, indicating collectivism, whereas the Philippines scored 32, showing a little less collectivism compared to China and Korea (although not high enough to be identified as an individualistic culture). Korea and China also share similarity when it comes to high long-term orientation and low indulgence whereas the Philippines and Vietnam show lower long-term orientation scores and high indulgence levels compared to China and Korea.³⁾ Comparison of the four countries on cultural dimensions show that China and Korea share more similarities when it comes to individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence; Korea and Vietnam have similarities when it comes to power distance, masculinity, and individualism. Though different in degree and dimensions, the countries under examination share certain similarities yet have differences. Understanding how these similarities and differences influence the ways in which individuals from those countries engage in conflicts are important so that conflicts can be minimized or better resolved.

Table 2
Comparison of Asian Countries' Cultural Dimensions

	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
China	80	20	66	30	87	24
Korea	60	18	39	85	100	29
Philippines	94	32	64	44	27	42
Vietnam	70	20	40	30	57	35
Cambodia*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: author's compilation from the Hofstede' cultural dimension website <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions>

*The values of six dimensions are not available for Cambodia.

Scholars on conflict style have argued that cultures have different styles when it comes to handling conflicts (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Leung, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 1986; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Trubisky et al., 1991). Literature on conflict styles across culture has mostly used the individualism-collectivism framework to understand conflict styles of people in different cultures. Scholars argue that while emotion is universal (everyone experiences anger, happiness, joy, etc.) conflict style is culturally-contexted (Hammer, 2002). Therefore, intercultural conflict style ought to be examined considering a "culture group's preferred manner for dealing with disagreements and communication emotions" (Ibid., p. 9). The typology of individualism and collectivism considers the cultural values when examining conflict styles of individuals belonging to particular cultural groups (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1988; Yum, 1988; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). Hofstede (1991) defines individualism and collectivism as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioned loyalty (p. 51).

Therefore, when it comes to engaging in conversations, people from an individualistic culture “tend to stress the value of straight talk and tend to verbalize overtly their individual wants and needs” (Trubisky et al., 1991, p. 68), whereas those from a collectivistic culture “emphasize the group identity of the person with greater concern for the needs and goals of the group” (Guzley, Araki & Chalmers, 1998) and “stress the value of contemplative talk and discretion in voicing one’s opinions and feelings” (Trubisky et al., 1991, p. 68) perhaps “in order to maintain in-group harmony (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim, 1994). Individuals from collectivistic cultures were found to be less confrontational than participants from individualistic cultures. Ting-Toomey and her colleagues (1991) found participants from China and Taiwan to be more avoiding than those from Japan, Korea, and the United States, and those from China, Taiwan, and Japan to be more obliging than those from Korea and the U.S. How Hofstede’s other dimensions (masculinity, power, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence) and how the differences in these dimensions can influence conflict styles have not been examined.

In these ways, conflict styles of Koreans and Chinese have been categorized as that which follow collectivistic tendencies (Hofstede, 1984). Though there is little difference between Koreans and Chinese, at large, Koreans and Chinese have been found to prefer maintaining in-group harmony and avoiding confrontational situations (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987). However, there is also a lack of literature on the ways in which Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Filipinos engage in conflict and handle conflict situations. Therefore, the current study seeks to examine ways in which these dimensions including individualism and collectivism could influence how women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines handle conflict situations when facing conflict with Koreans within and outside family settings. Studies are needed to understand how conflict style differs when individuals from collectivistic cultures are involved in conflict situations. Also, as not all collectivistic cultures share the same cultural values, there needs to be examination as to how different

Asian values bring conflict and how different cultural groups manage conflict situations. Moreover, how individuals from collectivistic cultures handle conflict situations when there is power involved needs to be further examined to understand the family dynamics of international marriages in Korea. Therefore, the current research asks the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the marriage-migrant women make meaning of conflicts?

RQ2: How do power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance influence ways in which marriage-migrant women deal with conflict within the home?

RQ3: How do power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance influence ways in which marriage-migrant women deal with conflict outside of the home?

Research Methods

Given the explorative nature of the study in examining previously under explored areas and also given the purpose of the research questions, the study employed qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are appropriate for researchers who are “intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings participants themselves attribute to these interaction” (Marshall & Rossman, 1992, p. 2). In the process of obtaining the complexity embedded in the participants’ daily lives, the researchers are able to gather “detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observe behaviors” (Patton, 1980, p. 22).

This study used the in-depth interviewing method. The in-depth interviewing method is appropriate as its goal is to obtain in-depth and open-ended narrative rather than trying to fit participants’ experiences

into certain categories (Patton, 1987). Therefore, although the interviewer may guide the conversation, the interviewer still “respects how the participant frames and structures the responses” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 82). Hence, the greatest advantage of the interview method is its ability to understand the participants’ experiences in greater depth and breadth.

Sample

The study employed purposive and convenient sampling to recruit participants. Twenty-two interviews were conducted on individuals who identified themselves as marriage-migrant women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines. The data recruiting process started with personal and professional contacts as well as snowball methods to gather participants. All the marriage-migrant women participants had resided in Korea for more than four years at the time of the interview,⁴⁾ yet they varied in terms of occupation, age, and visa status so that diverse perspectives could be gathered. By having participants who come from different backgrounds, multiple perspectives can emerge through discussions and in-depth interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stressed that when a researcher provides a “variety of perspectives” which offer “different vantage points” (p. 67), the study’s credibility increases as result.

The in-depth interviews took about 90-120 minutes on average. The in-depth interviews were led by open-ended questions that were semi-structured. All the participants were asked to give consent to be audio taped. Audio taping interviews helped the researcher recall the material accurately. The interviews were conducted in Korean, English, or Chinese depending on the interviewees’ preference.⁵⁾ Once the interviews were audio taped, the researcher began the transcribing process and the interviews that were done in Korean and Chinese were meaning-translated into English to be used for this research. For analyzing and reporting purposes, the researcher employed the meaning-based translation method (Guest & MacQueen, 2008).

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was employed to analyze the data for this study. A grounded theory approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), seeks to explain and theorize about a phenomenon from the data. This approach takes a systematic and constant comparison approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Corbin and Strauss (2008), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest open coding, axial coding, and selective coding processes for data collection and analysis processes. These coding processes enable researchers to achieve a systematic and constant comparison approach during the data collection and analysis process. By identifying the topics or key terms that emerged consistently throughout the data collection process, the emerging themes or patterns were identified. The transcribed interview data were analyzed using grounded theory approach using Nvivo (v.10).

Results

Interviews with 22 marriage-migrant women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines revealed that power distance in conjunction with individualism/collectivism influences their conflict styles. Moreover, women were more likely to engage in compromising style with their spouses; obliging with their in-laws; and avoiding with their spouse and in-law when they had emotionally given up on resolving the conflict. Furthermore, they were using avoiding when dealing with conflict outside the home with strangers and acquaintances. Though inconclusive, the findings suggest that women's educational level, work experiences, and financial status influenced their conflict style. While these were cultural and social factors that influenced the participants' conflict style, their goal, namely, providing a better life for their children, was also found to be a major drive in resolving conflicts and in the process they empowered themselves to out-win (surmount) the conflicting situations rather than being compliant.

RQ1: How do the marriage-migrant women make meaning of conflicts?

Making Meaning of Conflicts

The interviewees were found to make meaning of the conflicts differently. A woman from Vietnam in her mid-twenties discusses how some of the problems that she had experienced in Korea have drastically changed her. At first, she had the Korean dream before coming to Korea from watching Korean dramas but after a couple of years of living in Korea, all of her dreams were shattered. She realized that despite her Korean citizenship she would “never become Korean.” At first when she experienced the discrimination, she thought it was because she did not speak Korean well enough or knew the culture well-enough to fit-in to the society. Therefore, she decided to get a job and get education to assimilate quickly. Now after about six years of living in Korea, her Korean is fluent, she has a job, and is about to graduate from college. One way in which the participants made meaning of the conflicts they faced (at the societal level) was attempting to surmount the problem by empowering themselves. This woman above received education and studied the language so she could be empowered to perhaps become an exception to the norm. Another woman was found to prepare to be a chef, and yet another woman was found to work in multiple jobs to secure financial stability; these women were striving in order to show to their families and the society what they are capable of doing. As marriage-migrant women are being categorized into a marginalized minority group, these women were found to try to pull themselves out of the “label” that the society has given to them so that conflicting issues could no longer be problems for them. When asked why they work so hard, they spoke about not wanting to become a barrier for their children. They were worried that them being marriage-migrant women could perhaps in the near future hinder their children’s success; therefore, they were willing to get multiple jobs and work extra hours to be able to support the children’s education and also to make sure they do not become a

barrier to their children.

While some of the interviewees expressed disappointments about their situations at home (because the conflicts have been long-harboring and there were no signs of their parents-in-laws or their husbands changing their attitudes and behavior), yet, they showed resilience. One woman discussed how she thought about getting a divorce but after finding out her husband would have the custody of their daughter she decided to hold on to the marriage. “I checked the facts. I asked people around to see if I can take my daughter with me [if I get a divorce] but [in Korea] I wouldn’t be able to take my daughter. So I changed my mind. I decided to save the marriage no matter what.” For this woman, being with her daughter was critical so she decided to endure all the marital issues for the daughter’s sake. The worst time has already passed and now that she speaks better Korean, she can express her thoughts better to her husband, and the relationship has improved. She also lives separately from her in-laws, which was also helpful and she now has hopes for the future. She wants to speak Korean better and learn more things so she could do more for her daughter. Some discussed how they are expecting a better future. One Cambodian woman spoke about how she wants to raise her daughter capable of speaking and understanding two cultures and languages. She is now teaching her daughter Khmer so that when the daughter grows up they can communicate in her language. One spoke about her wanting the kids to grow up as a teacher and a doctor, sending them to study abroad in Europe to become successful professionals. While they were somewhat dissatisfied at the current status, they were hopeful of the future because they had their children and they had high hopes for them. In these ways, the participants made meaning of the conflicts by considering them as “trouble to endure for a better future” as if by overcoming the sufferings today, they would be able to earn a better future. In a way, today’s trouble seemed as if it was the price they have to pay for a better future tomorrow.

RQ2: How do power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance influence ways in which marriage-migrant women deal with conflict within the home?

Compromising Style

The findings show that women participants were using various methods to resolve contending issue. One of the methods that was used by the participants to resolve cultural conflicts was having a conversation. One Chinese woman said, “You have to talk. If you don’t talk, the other person will never understand. We talk about what we did wrong and that take care of it.” She talked to her husband for five years to persuade him to think that their daughter and son are the same. After five years of persistent communication on that particular issue, the husband changed his mind. Another woman from Vietnam discussed how she was not able to engage in conversations with her husband when she first came due to the language barrier, hence many misunderstandings and conflicts ensued without much discussion. “At first I used to just let go but now that I can talk (in Korean), when there is something I don’t understand, I talk. At first there were misunderstandings because I didn’t speak the language. Now, I ask him. I ask him about things that happened in the past. Why did you do that? Then my husband explains it to me well.” As such, improvement in language is enabling women to engage in conversation with their spouses. Participants were found to much prefer discussing the matter with their spouse before making a decision or when there are things they do not understand about a situation; this method was generally found to be used amongst women when they were communicating with the spouses.

Sometimes this conflict style escalated to a more intense level. Of all the women who were interviewed, one from Cambodia went head-on with her in-laws. She had engaged in a number of arguments with the in-laws because the in-laws had strongly enforced Korean ways of doing things onto her. For instance, the in-laws wanted her to be submissive,

learn Korean quickly, eat all the meals together, follow the curfew, and yet treated her differently from their Korean daughter-in-law. Because she did not agree with these ways of doing things she raised her voice and clashed with the in-laws. Another woman from Cambodia discussed how she had done it that way because she really did not think she could maintain her marriage if she did not say what the problems were; because she would rather try to solve problems than get a divorce, she pursued her ways. Although she went head-on with her in-laws, she was able to compromise with the in-laws by moving out. She adds, “So there is less conflict and it’s good for all of us.” As such, she was able to find a way everyone could be satisfied to a certain extent; she was okay because she did not have to live with the in-laws and the in-laws were okay because they could see their son and grand-daughter often. Through much negotiation they were able to use the compromising method to solve their issue.

Obliging Style

Another style that was largely used by the women was avoidance. A number of women discussed how they have conflicts with their in-laws when it comes to child-rearing. For instance, a Vietnamese woman discussed how the in-laws still feed her nine year old daughter. She would like her daughter to learn how to be independent by doing the things she can do herself at her age yet despite her having raised this issue to the in-laws in the past, they still feed their grand-daughter. When asked what she does in times of such difference in opinion, with discouraged face, she said she does not pursue her ways. Such an answer resonated throughout interviews, especially with Vietnamese, Filipino, and Chinese participants. While women were more likely to engage in conversations and pursue their different opinions with their husbands, they were more likely to oblige to their in-laws so that the difference in opinion did not escalate into serious conflicts. When asked why they simply oblige rather than have an argument with the in-laws, a few said,

because they “ought to respect the elders” and “avoid conflicts if possible” and because they do not want their mother-in-laws to “not like them”. As such, although women did not necessarily understand or agree with the ways of the in-laws, they were regardless likely to give up their stance and follow what the in-laws suggest/prefer. Women from all the countries stressed the importance of showing respect to the elders and how they have learned to respect elders in their society as well back home. While cultural practices were different between the women’s native countries and that of Korea, because of shared values stemming from Confucian philosophy, women were likely to follow those values rather than pursue their own ways.

Another reason the participants obliged to their parents-in-law was because they feared breaking a harmonious relationship with the in-laws. They perceived that having an argument could bring more trouble in the long run; hence, they were unwilling to take the risks. One Chinese woman said, “[my mother-in-law] can be mad at [my husband] because he is her son, she will soon forget it but not with me,” implying that her relationship with the mother-in-law is sensitive and she should not say things to her mother-in-law that would make her upset because their relationship is fragile.

Avoiding Style

Another way in which the participants handled conflicts was to use the avoiding style. A few women discussed how their husbands are not interested in some of the issues they would like to resolve with their husbands. Because of the apathetic attitudes their husbands have on those issues, they have given up and decided to just let go of the problems. Other women also discussed how they tried to have their husband be on their side when they have conflict with the parents-in-laws, yet discussed how their husbands are of no help in times of need. Therefore, some of the women discussed how they had given up trying to resolve the conflicting issues they have with the parents-in-laws.

One of the Vietnamese women was getting counseling and is seriously considering getting a divorce. She had thought pushing her thoughts through would help her parents-in-law to finally realize how difficult it is for her to follow Korean cultural practices but that did not work as she had thought. “It’s so hot outside but [my parents-in-law] do not shower, they rarely wash their clothes. We take a shower several times a day in Vietnam. [My parents-in-law] think Korean ways are better but I don’t think that. No. but they don’t think that. I don’t understand.” She spoke about how tired she is now to argue with her husband and her parents-in-law. After much effort and persuasion she discussed how she has now given up on resolving the differences and hence does not try to make any more efforts.

RQ3: How do power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance influence ways in which marriage-migrant women deal with conflict outside of the home?

Conflicts outside of Home Settings: Avoidance

The interviews revealed that conflict styles the participants choose were different when it comes to having conflicts with non-family members. The interviewees discussed how they are mistreated sometimes when they are out shopping or riding public transportation. A number of women discussed how Koreans talk badly about them right in front of them. One of the interviewees discussed how she found a couple of Korean women talking badly about her when she was seated right next to them in the metro. Others discussed how the clerks ill-treat them when they are shopping. Although the women felt ignored, angry, and frustrated they did not address those issues on-site. They simply ignored the situation and walked away rather than raising their voice to address the problem.

Others discussed how difficult it is to make Korean friends in the first place and how challenging it is to maintain friendship when there are differences in interests. One of the women discussed how she had thought she had become a close friend with a Korean woman. She had

been hospitable and genuinely nice to this Korean friend and had thought the Korean woman also considered her to be a close friend. But after seeing how the Korean friend treated other Koreans, she was hurt because it was not the way the friend had treated her. The participant did not confront this to the friend but simply slowly broke off the relationship. She said, "Koreans do not open their hearts to foreigners. They think other race is not Koreans. But if you don't open up we can only have anti-Korea sentiments." Others also shared similar sentiments, saying, "I don't think Koreans are open-minded. They are not very open to foreigners." Another said, "Koreans don't easily open up. We have to make an effort to minimize prejudice." As such while the participants felt frustrated and angry in those situations, they did not try to persuade, question, or engage in conversation to resolve the issue. Rather, they simply avoided them because the other persons were strangers or someone not worth putting out an effort to change their minds.

Discussion

The findings showed that women were primarily using obliging, avoiding, and compromising styles and the type of conflict style differed depending who they were with and what stage of conflicts they were in. When they are in a conflicting situation with their spouse they were found to use the compromising style by engaging in many conversations. When it comes to resolving issues with the in-laws, participants were found to use the obliging style. Participants were found to use avoiding with their spouse or in-laws when they had emotionally given up on resolving the issues; when the participants realized that their issues cannot be resolved they chose avoidance style with family members. The interviews revealed that the majority of the women were stay-at-home wives, spending more time with the in-laws than with their husbands (most of the participants were living with the in-laws). Therefore, the participants had more conflicting issues with their in-laws than with their husbands. Issues included but were not limited to child-rearing, table manners, eat-

ing time, house chores, curfew time, when to shower, and how to do laundry. Therefore, because they were too many differences and two very different ways of doing things, the participants discussed how easier it is just to oblige than make an issue out of it, especially when they also grew up learning to respect elders in the community.

The findings show that the ways in which the participants handle conflicting situations are much influenced by their cultural background, namely, power distance and individualism-collectivism tendencies. First, in accordance with Hofstede's scale, all of the participants accepted the power difference between them and the in-laws; while they did not agree with their in-laws, they readily accepted and changed their ways of doing things. However, they were more accepting of the power difference they have with their in-laws in comparison with their husbands. Especially Cambodian women found it difficult to accept that men are "above" women in Korea because it is the other way in Cambodia. Although women from Vietnam, China, and the Philippines all mentioned gender equality, Cambodian women spoke out the most.

The findings also suggest that the participants' conflict style was complicated by individualism and collectivism tendencies. Women from China, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam all considered maintaining group harmony as critical. Therefore, regardless of their frustration and anger, they internalized those emotions and obliged rather than engaging in dominating style (high self/low other). This is in line with previous studies that found individuals from collectivistic cultures use avoidance rather than the dominating style of conflict resolution (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) and that people who chose the obliging style are those who want to preserve relationships (Rubin et al., 1994). Therefore, obliging in collectivistic culture is a result of high self/other concern. Findings of the current study that extend previous studies is that the participants used different tactics depending on who they were with; and even women from the Philippines whose culture has largely been influenced by Spain and America, were also choosing similar conflict styles as those who are from China and Vietnam. This is in line with Hofstede's cultural

dimension, although the Philippines' individualism and collectivism score is 32, somewhat different from that of Korea's (18), China's (20) and Vietnam's (20), still the ways in which women from the Philippines wanted to maintain harmony was just as strong as women from China and Vietnam. Because most of the participants (Cambodia is uncertain) were from cultures where elders are highly respected with strong emphasis on collectivism, their personal dissatisfactions were overridden in order to maintain harmony. The obliging style was identified by all of the participants, especially when they are dealing with their in-laws.

As to how Cambodia's power distance would span out per Hofstede's cultural dimension was uncertain. Past studies suggest that Cambodian women are not encouraged to engage in discussion or voice opinions. As a male dominant society, women in Cambodia are considered good when they follow *chhab srey* or "Rules for Girls" (Smith-Hefner, 1999). Rules for Girls have been long adopted as junior high students' curriculum in the Cambodian educational system. The rules for a perfect girl include "talking softly, walking softly without making noise, sitting appropriately with her legs to the side, no screaming or yelling, and obeying and pleasing her husband" (as cited in Eng et al., 2009, p. 239). In Cambodia, men are perceived as rational, strong, and powerful and women as weak and emotional (Smith-Hefner, 1999). Evidence shows that Cambodians hold strong positive attitude towards male dominant gender roles. According to the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ORC Macro, 2006), almost half (45 percent) of the respondents agreed with the following statement, "It is better to educate a son than a daughter," and more than half (53%) agreed that "the important decisions in the family should be made by the men of the family." Similar to past studies that suggest a patriarchal social norm within the Cambodian society, the findings of the current study also reflect the participants endorsing the patriarchal norm within the family setting. Yet, as to how Cambodia would span in terms of the power distance scale was uncertain. Namely, different from past studies, women were submissive only to their pa-

rents-in-law and not so much to their spouses. Also, one woman was very outspoken, independent, and opinionated. Whether she is an exception to the norm or whether Cambodian women today are different from the past needs further investigation. Again, more studies need to crystallize and concretize what factors influence ways in which Cambodian women deal with conflicts and the intersection of power, gender, and culture in choosing conflict styles.

In terms of individualism and collectivism tendencies for Cambodia, women discussed the importance of community, underscoring collectivistic tendencies. Therefore, based on earlier studies and the findings of the current study, one can suggest that Cambodian women are influenced by collectivistic tendencies. Perhaps follow up studies can be conducted using quantitative research to see if there is a significant relationship between individualism/collectivism and their conflict styles.

The current study yields some insights on the relationship between power distance and individualism/collectivism on conflict style for marriage-migrant women from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Evidence on how uncertainty avoidance and the masculinity/femininity dimension influence their conflict styles was somewhat inconsistent. However, though preliminary, researchers noted that conflict style was also complicated by the economic situation of the women's family and their education/working experience. Women who were more financially settled seemed to have less conflict with their in-laws and husbands. Women who were financially better off were more educated and had more working experiences. A few women who either had a Master's degree or working experiences back home seemed to have better and equal power relationships with their spouses and less conflict with the in-laws. Moreover, women who had working experience in a professional field were more likely to engage in conversation and chose compromising conflict styles to solve issues with the spouses. However, all of these women were Chinese so as to whether these two factors are related to the country of origin needs more research.

One of the interesting things to note is that the researchers assumed

that Filipino women might be different from others. This is because the Philippines were under Spanish and American colonial rule for more than 400 years. However, during this time, the Catholic Church actively fostered the ideology of female domesticity through preaching and limiting women's education to home crafts and Christian doctrine. "Laws were passed that deprived women of their legal adulthood and made them dependents of their husbands" (Israel-Sobritchea, 1990, p. 28) and these patriarchal beliefs and practices remained even during American colonial rule (Mendoza-Guazon, 1928). The Filipino also maintain a traditional division of labor, that is, men are expected to sustain the family and women are to reproduce family life (Williams & Domingo, 1993; Tiefenthaler, 1997). Because of the traditional division of labor, fathers are not expected to do house chores and they only devote a small amount of time to do housework (Tiefenthaler, 1997). Therefore, participants from the Philippines discussed the importance of respecting the elders and being fully responsible for house chores. One of the participants had endured her mother- and sister-in-laws' long-term verbal and labor abuse because she believed in the importance of family and labor.

Women from Vietnam also showed similar behaviors and attitudes to that of other women. Vietnamese women stressed Confucian values when discussing their experiences and stories. In Vietnam, women must conform to Confucian gender norms regarding filial piety and be obedient to male family members. They are also "responsible for preserving family harmony...[which] often requires giving in, keeping quiet, and making sacrifices for the family" (Schuler et al., 2006, p. 298). To maintain a happy and harmonious home means women doing most or all of the house chores (Santillan et al., 2002). Influenced by Confucian, Taoism, and Buddhist philosophy (Tung, 1972), Vietnamese culture emphasizes filial piety in which the older generation is given higher status and patriarchal values and practices so that men have higher status than women (Sue & Sue, 1999). Women are socialized to be domesticated so that the husband's status is higher than the wife's on all levels (Uba, 1994, as cited in Nghe et al., 2003, p. 246). Because of these traditions, women

from Vietnam were focused on maintaining harmony, showing respect to their husbands' parents, and making sacrifices for the family.

All in all, findings show that the ways in which the participants choose conflict styles are largely influenced by a mix of Confucian values, individualism/collectivism, power distance, and historic/religious/socio-economic factors of their home country and are complicated by educational level and work experiences. Moreover, despite the Philippines having different traditions (Catholic), the ways in which Filipino women behaved and held attitudes were very similar to that of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Chinese women. In other words, while the roots were different, the end results in choosing conflict styles were very similar if not the same. Furthermore, these traditional values or beliefs seem to function as a safety-pin in maintaining peace within the participants' families (although there were exceptions). If the participants were from countries that have different values and traditions as that of Korea (or of Asian countries) the conflict styles would have been very different and how those conflicting situations might have resulted would also have been very different.

Conclusion

The number of marriage-migrant women in Korea is only growing. Considering the number of marriage-migrant women in Korea and their families, the types of issues they face and how they resolve conflicts at home and outside of home setting is critical to understand. In solving conflicts and finding ways to resolve cultural conflicts in home settings for the multicultural families, participants suggested education for the in-law parents and husbands. Mutual understanding and open-mindedness to engage in conversation to understand each other's thoughts, biases, preferences, and opinions are much needed to resolve conflicts that could further escalate into more serious situations.

Studies show that Korean in-laws do not seek to learn the language and culture of the daughter-in-law's country; should they make more efforts

to learn the daughter-in-law's culture and language, there would be much easier transition during the initial period of settlement for the marriage-migrant women. Furthermore, there would be fewer conflicts to begin with as both parties would be more willing to compromise and understand where the other party is coming from. Additionally, Korean parents-in-law need to understand the gender inequality and patriarchal practices at play in Korean families so that more compromising solutions could be found to better help the daughter-in-law in the process of adaptation.

While the current study extends previous studies on marriage-migrant women, still the current study was limited in understanding how power distance and individualism/collectivism influences conflict styles of Chinese, Cambodian, Filipino, and Vietnamese women when in conflict situations within and outside home settings. Because there has been so much research on multicultural families, the Multicultural Family Support Centers were unwilling to introduce women for research purposes and women themselves were somewhat hesitant in discussing details of their family problems. For these reasons, it was difficult to recruit more participants for the study. Follow up studies are needed to examine how other cultural dimensions influence conflict styles of marriage-migrant women and how Cambodians pan out in all six dimensions quantitatively.

Through learning about the beliefs and values of the other culture one can acquire much knowledge and based on the new recognition one can do away with the previous prejudices. The quickest ways to reduce conflicts and biases with cultural groups that are different are to meet often, thereby breaking the barriers, and building a bridge between the segregated groups (UNESCO Commission, 2010, p. 41). Here, organizations such as the 217 Multicultural Family Support Centers across the nation, Foreign Workers' Centers, and Foreign Citizen Centers can function as bridges to minimize the gap between Korean families and marriage-migrant women. While contacts between the immigrants and the natives can bring conflict and tension, they can also be opportunities to introduce ones' culture and cultural uniqueness. In these ways, cultural diversity can bring cultural awakening to the natives and can function

as cultural synergy. Cultural synergy at the nation level will bring “bottom up” changes, rather than “top down” as Social Integration Policy has, in bringing cultural co-existence.

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- 1) The study excluded Japanese as many are affiliated to the Church of Unification and the researchers believed that their religious beliefs could influence the ways in which they make meaning of and resolve conflicts.
 - 2) Examination of all aspects of cultural similarities and differences of China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Philippines from that of Korea were beyond the scope of the study. Therefore, the authors only included brief mention of cultural similarities and differences. Also, as the purpose of the study was to examine how the participants’ make meaning of cultural similarities/differences between their culture and that of Korea, detailed description of cultural heritage, major religion, and other factors that influence a culture is not explained in the literature review.
 - 3) Each cultural dimension was measured by societal level for this international intercultural research (lowest possible score is 1, the highest being 120 : 1-20, 21-40, 41-60, 81-100, 101-118). The studies were done from 1967-1973 (in 50 countries), 1990-2002(in 14-28 countries), 1991 (23 countries), and in 2010 (93 countries).
 - 4) In recruiting the participants, the study used Kim and others’ (2013) categorization of immigrants: Early Adaptation stage: those who have resided for less than 3 years; Social integration preparation stage: those who have resided between 4-7 years; Social integration stage: those who have resided between 8-14 years; and settled stage: those who have resided for more than 15 years. Based on this categorization, the current study recruited women who have resided in Korea for more than four years because findings of earlier studies indicate that immigrants begin to recognize cultural differences and conflicts after the early adoption stage.
 - 5) One of the authors speaks Korean, English, and Chinese and therefore the interviews were conducted in a language preferred by the participants. For some Vietnamese interviewees who felt more comfortable speaking Korean, multicultural experts who have been their friends for the past few years sat by the interviewees and helped explain/translate/and provided background information when needed. Another reason for interviewing women who have been living in Korea for more than five years was language; most women spoke Korean well enough to fully explain their thoughts, culture, emotions; for those who did not have strong language abilities, they spoke their native language or mixed English and Korean when needed. Also, interviewing experts whom the participants were familiar with were helpful as these experts further explained and confirmed the situations the participants had experienced.

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Appendix

Table. A1

Demographic Information of the Marriage Migrant Women

Case number	Name	Location of residency	Duration of residency in Korea	Age	Current occupation	Number of Children
Vietnam 1 (hereafter V-1)	Han	Seoul-Gwanak-gu	10	31	Translator/Interpreter	1
V-2	Kim	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	5	32	Translator/Interpreter	1
V-3	Park	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	5	25	Housewife	1
V-4	Do	Seoul-Gwanak-gu	10	30	Translator/Interpreter	
V-5	Bu	Seoul-Dongdaemun	4	24	Housewife	1
China 1 (hereafter C-1)	Kim2	Seoul-Yongsan-gu	13	37	Chinese language teacher	1
C-2	New	Seoul-Yongsan-gu	5	37	Housewife	1
C-3	Kim3	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	11	39	Translator/Interpreter	
C-4	Jang	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	5	40	Housewife	2
C-5	Wee	Seoul-Dongdaemun	6	34	Part-time worker	1
C-6	Wang	Seoul-Dongdaemun	11	39	Translator/Interpreter	1
Cambodia 1 (hereafter Cam-1)	Kim4	Seoul-Dongdaemun	5	25	Part-time worker	1
Cam-2	Han2	Seoul-Gwanak-gu	5	30	Part-time worker	1
Cam-3	Mei	Seoul-Gwanak-gu	4	27	Housewife	2
Cam-4	Nup	Seoul-Dongdaemun	8	29	Housewife	2
Cam-5	Hee	Seoul-Dongdaemun	5	26	Housewife	1
Pilipino 1 (Hereafter P-1)	Jay	Seoul-Gwanak-gu	7	38	Housewife	2
P -2	Rhee	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	4	27	Housewife	1
P -3	Lee	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	20	52	Housewife	2
P -4	Pur	Gyeonggi-do-Gimpo	6	34	Housewife	2
P -5	Seul	Seoul-Dongdaemun	16	42	Academic institute teacher	1
P - 6	Jo	Seoul-Dongdaemun	15	43	Part-time worker	2

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