

*Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, by Ji-Yeon Yuh. New York: NYU Press, 2004. 283 pp., US\$ 25.00, ISBN: 978-0-8147-9699-3 (paperback)

The subtitle of this book, “Korean Military Brides in America,” refers to Korean women who got married to U.S. servicemen in Korea beginning in the 1950s and subsequently immigrated to the United States. Along with Korean adoptees and biracial Korean Americans, they comprise one of the marginalized Korean-American groups who have not been accepted as full members of the community and who have been neglected by researchers. However, while most Korean adoptees and biracial Koreans may hold weak Korean ethnic identity and few attachments to Korean culture, that is not the case for Korean military brides. These women were born and grew up in Korea and are strong in terms of Korean culture and Korean identity. As the author, Ji-Yeon Yuh, points out in Appendix 2 of the book, previous studies of Korean military brides were overwhelmingly conducted by social service providers, pastors, and researchers in social work and the family. Thus, those studies were focused on marital adjustment, conflict, spousal abuse, and related issues in bicultural marriages.

In this book, Yuh provides fresh new interpretations of Korean military brides’ life experiences by using American cultural domination in Korea, sexism and gender stereotypes in Korea and the Korean immigrant community, and racism and sexism in the U.S. as the frameworks. In six chapters, she shows multiple difficulties—poverty, unskilled and semi-skilled labor, a deep sense of dislocation, severe loneliness, divorce, humiliation, stereotypes, and prejudice—that Korean military brides have encountered in America. However, she does not end the book on a negative note as a result of the women’s terrible and difficult experiences, which may have served only to reinforce negative stereotypes of Korean military brides as a whole. In the introduction, Yuh emphasizes that *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* “focuses on the negotiations Korean military brides engage in with both American and Korean cultures” (4). In every chapter, she tries to document their subtle resistance to racism, sexism, and prejudice, and their efforts to maintain Korean-American identity in their encounters with Americans and Korean immigrants, both of whom reject them as American or Korean, respectively.

Yuh used tape-recorded in-depth personal interviews with sixteen

Korean military brides who immigrated to the U.S. in different time periods, participant observations of many family settings, meetings, and other public events, and historical and media documents. These are three major components of ethnographic research. However, as a historian, she used historical documents to a greater extent than ethnographic researchers usually do in their research projects. She also used personal interviews and participant observations extensively. As a result, her interpretations of particular aspects of Korean military brides' life experiences are well supported by one or more of the three types of data in all chapters. Moreover, her compassionate approach to her subjects—her effort to capture stories from their own points of view—makes the book very provocative and insightful, helping to correct many stereotypes and misconceptions about Korean military brides. No doubt, the author's sympathetic approach to these disadvantaged and misunderstood women is the primary strength of the book. The author's effort to connect major findings with the relevant literature is another one of the book's strengths that makes it truly academic.

Yuh indicates that previous studies of Korean military brides have not paid enough attention to their immigration experiences. She devotes two chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) to describing hardships these women went through in adapting to their husbands' families and American society. Her ethnographic research indicates that these women endured much greater hardships in their initial adaptation to American families than we can imagine, mainly because their husbands and parents-in-law tried to immediately Americanize them, giving them little to no opportunity to speak Korean and practice Korean culture. Moreover, most informants were not allowed to cook Korean food or even eat *gimchi* at home. Most Korean immigrants who came to the U.S. before 1970 had difficulty eating Korean food because they had no easy access to Korean grocery stores and restaurants. However, other Korean immigrants who immigrated after 1970 were increasingly able to obtain most basic Korean food ingredients. By contrast, even most Korean military brides who immigrated in the 1980s and 1990s were not allowed to eat *gimchi* and to cook other Korean food in their American households, regardless of whether they had access to Korean grocery stores or not. Additionally, all of them had to learn how to cook American food during their initial adaptation, which other Korean immigrant women did not have to go through. Thus, they had much greater hardships in their initial adaptation to American society than other Korean immigrants.

Yuh considers American military families' rejection of the language, food, and customs of the Korean brides as efforts to erase their Korean identity, which Korean brides subtly resisted. In her personal interviews and participant observations, the author insightfully captures this cultural deprivation or "a persistent sense of dislocation" encountered by most Korean military brides.

Yuh's book reveals that, in addition to this problem of semi-forced cultural assimilation, Korean military brides also encountered more severe forms of racial discrimination and prejudice than other Korean immigrants. Of course, those Korean military brides who immigrated to the U.S. before 1970, like other Asian immigrants, encountered serious forms of racism, such as denial of access to public restrooms at highway rest stops. Moreover, even the Korean military brides who arrived in the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s encountered racial prejudice and stereotypes because of their status as wives of American servicemen. Most of them are likely to have started their relationships with their husbands in military camptowns in Korea, while many others met their husbands through more conventional modes of dating in Korea. Regardless of the original nature of their relationships, all military brides had to deal with stereotypes associated with "Asian prostitutes." The author indicates that some of her informants with no military-camp history were still viewed merely as "working girls" by their white neighbors, and therefore, they were compelled to oversee their own behaviors to prove the dignity of Korean women.

The book shows that Korean military brides, in addition to having to deal with rejection from their American in-laws and their neighbors, also had very negative experiences with Korean immigrants in the U.S. and their family members in Korea. First of all, their marriages to American servicemen caused strained relationships with their parents and siblings in Korea. Within the span of several years, many of them resumed their relationships with their parents and siblings in Korea, sending money to them and inviting them to America for permanent residence. In fact, Korean military brides not only sponsored their parents' and siblings' immigration to the U.S., but also helped them get settled by giving them money, providing information, translating when needed, and a variety of other tasks. They also helped other Korean immigrant families with their adaptation to American society in a number of ways. However, their interviews reveal that their siblings and other Korean immigrants whom they had helped often cut off relationships later due to their prejudice against them as military brides. In particular, the informants who married black husbands

reported serious difficulties in dealing with their relatives and other Korean immigrants because of extreme prejudice against blacks. Yuh says that a group of women at a church even rejected a Korean military bride's offer to help prepare food for the annual Thanksgiving dinner because they believed that "military brides were dirty, unclean and unsanitary" (185).

In the last chapter, entitled "Sisters Do It for Themselves: Building Community," Yuh examines associations and friendship networks among Korean military brides. As a result of being rejected by both their intermarried American families and the Korean community, they have built their own self-help community. According to the author, "the socializing of Korean military brides seeking familiar companionship in a strange new world created spaces where the women define themselves and their world, provide critical assistance to each other, affirm self as they affirm one another" (191).

Impeccably researched, persuasively argued, and beautifully written, this book makes a significant contribution to Korean/Asian-American studies and Korean studies. It could be a very good reader for courses in Korean-American/Asian-American, immigration, and gender studies. This book is a revision of the author's dissertation, which was completed at the University of Pennsylvania, and it could be very beneficial to doctoral students who are about to start writing their dissertations. I have reviewed about 40 books for publication in various journals, and this is one of only a few books in which I have not found any major problems or issues.

Pyong Gap MIN

Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York