

Academic Activity Documentary - Toward Healthy Development among Biethnic Adolescent Children of Marriage Immigrant Women in South Korea, Keynote Speech by Professor Grace H. Chung

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At the fourth Conference on Child Development and Family Studies, hosted by the Department of Child and Family Science at National Taiwan Normal University, a keynote speaker Professor Grace H. Chung was invited. Professor Chung is a professor in the Department of Human Ecology at Seoul National University in South Korea, specializing in Human Development and Family Studies, including marriage, multiculturalism, acculturation, and ethnicity. This documentary presents the speech by Professor Chung titled “Toward Healthy Development among Biethnic Adolescent Children of Marriage Immigrant Women in South Korea” .

Professor Chung was born in Korea and resided there until the age of fourteen. She completed both her undergraduate and postgraduate education after moving to the United States. Despite for a long period of time residing in the U.S., where she received her citizenship and doctorate, she had hardly gained a sense of belonging there. Consequently, she took an interest in adolescents who grow up in the households where two distinct cultures coexisted. Upon returning to Korea as a professor, she anticipated to explore adolescents’ experience of being raised in a multicultural family background and the effective ways to support their development.

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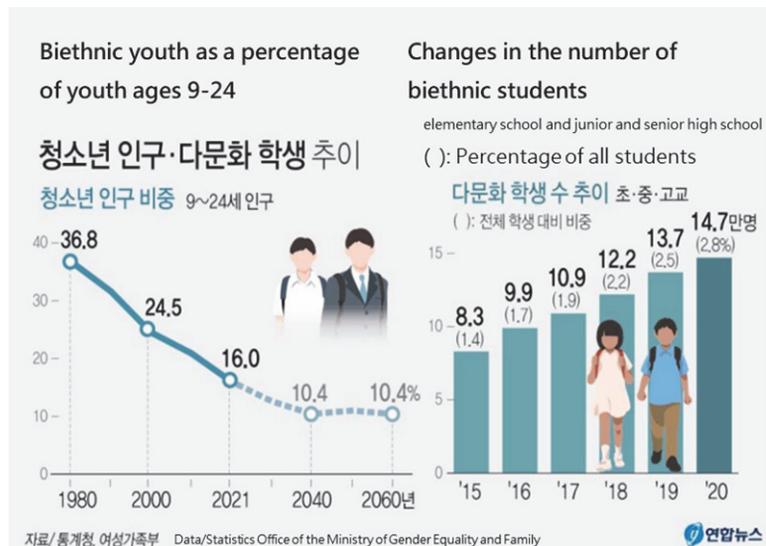
Background in Korea

Korea has enacted multiple legislative regulations concerning multiculturalism. Multicultural Family Support Law defines Multicultural Youth as adolescent (9~24) children of internationally married parents, with one parent being a Korean national. The Ministry of Education and the Youth Welfare Support Law broadens this definition to encompass children whose parents are both foreigners.

Due to international marriages and immigration, the demographic of multicultural families in contemporary Korea has increased. About 81.5% of these multicultural families in South Korea consist of Korean husbands and foreign wives. International marriages accounted for 7.8% of all marriages in the country between 2015 and 2017. It is worth noting that there has been an upward trend in the number of school-age children born in these families, as illustrated in the bar chart for the years 2012 to 2021 in Figure 1 (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2020). While the number of youth in Korea has been decreasing since the 1980s due to low birth rates, the number of multicultural students has been steadily increasing.

Figure 1.

Youth population in Korea



Source: obtained from Professor Chung's presentation

Given this context, South Korea establishes a fundamental policy framework for multicultural families every four or five years. The 4th Basic Agenda for Multicultural Family Policy (2023~2027) embodies goals for ensuring the well-being of multicultural family youths. The agenda prior to 2023 was primarily focused on supporting the initial adaptation of multicultural families and young children, the 4th agenda concentrates more on creating a friendly environment for multicultural families and support for adolescents because these young children mentioned in earlier policies have now become adolescents. Consequently, there is a need for research to inform policy about what is an optimal environment for biethnic adolescents' healthy development. Professor Chung presented three studies and suggested key factors to consider when implementing programs to encourage the healthy development of biethnic youth of immigrant mothers in South Korea.

Empirical research

The presentation showcased three studies based on data from the Panel Survey of Korean Multicultural Youth Adjustment (PKMYA I). Biethnic adolescents in the fifth and sixth grades were selected through convenience sampling from elementary schools and social service organizations dedicated to multicultural families nationwide. The sample specifically included adolescents with mothers from China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Japan, reflecting the prevalent demographics of transnational marriages in South Korea.

Study 1: Context of biethnic acceptance, affirmation, and life satisfaction among biethnic adolescents

The research applied latent profile analysis (LPA) to examine profiles of contexts of biethnic acceptance among 358 biethnic adolescents. This analysis was based on three indicators: peer discrimination, school multicultural climate and familial ethnic socialization. Additionally, Biethnic Affirmation was measured by the

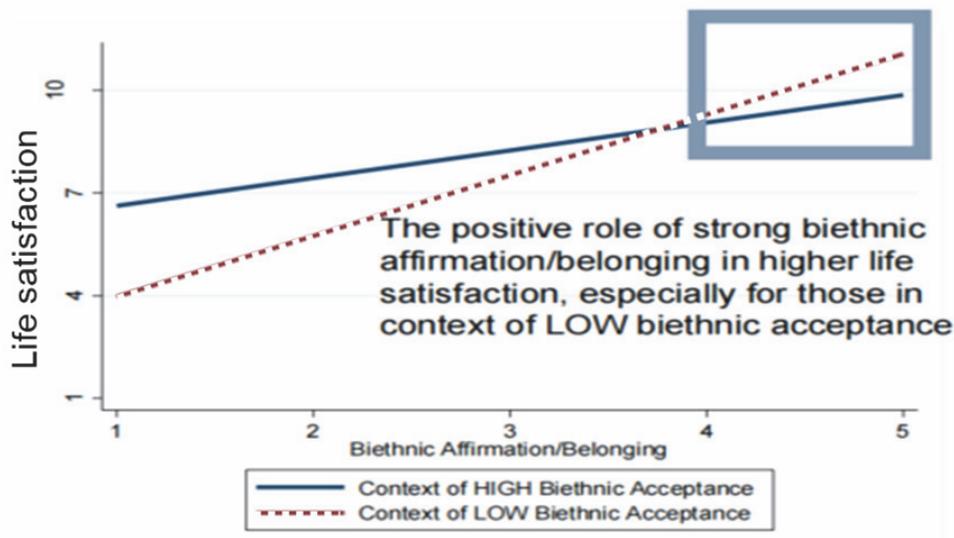
modified version of ethnic affirmation/belonging subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. This modification included items, such as “I have a strong sense of belonging towards other families composed of Korean father and foreign mother as my family.” and “I have good feelings about the cultural background of those families composed of Korean father and foreign mother.”

The analysis revealed that 60% of these adolescents lived in the context of high biethnic acceptance, while the remaining 40% were faced with a contrasted situation. Furthermore (see Figure 2), the linear relationship revealed that the stronger the biethnic affirmation /belonging they acquired, the more satisfied they were with their lives, especially for those in the context of low biethnic acceptance.

Consequently, it is pivotal to cultivate a school environment that respects, accepts, and embraces diverse cultures and promote biethnic affirmation/belonging among biethnic adolescents.³

Figure 2.

Interaction effect of biethnic affirmation



Source: obtained from Professor Chung’s presentation

³ Chung, G H., Lee, J. & Gonzales-Backen, M. (2020). Context of biethnic acceptance, biethnic affirmation, and life satisfaction among Korean biethnic adolescents. *Journal of adolescence*, 80, 242-253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.03.004>

Study 2: The transition of biethnic acceptance and adjustment among biethnic adolescents

Upon identifying profiles of biethnic acceptance context, the study applied latent transition analyses to data from Waves 1 and 3, displaying the changes in biethnic acceptance contexts for these adolescents. It found that 60% of them consistently experienced high biethnic acceptance ($n = 137$, high-high), and 20% remained in a low biethnic acceptance context ($n = 50$, low-low). Furthermore, a transition from low to high biethnic acceptance was observed in 13.9% of the participants ($n = 34$, low-high), and 9.8% experienced a shift from the context of high to low biethnic acceptance Wave 3 ($n = 24$, high-low).

The result presented a notable concern, wherein 9.8% reported transitioning from a high to a low biethnic acceptance context, indicating that these adolescents experienced lower self-esteem, higher depression, and lower ethnic affirmation at wave 3, compared to participants in other groups after controlling these demographic characteristics. In summary (see Table 1), while the majority of biethnic adolescents remained in the positive context, the ones who suffered a decrease in biethnic acceptance were at greater psychological risks. Therefore, maintaining a high biethnic acceptance is significant for facilitating positive psychological adjustment of biethnic adolescents.

Table 1.

Multiple regression model for predicting self-esteem, depression, and ethnic affirmation at wave 3 among biethnic children in South Korea

	Self-esteem (W3)		Depression (W3)		Ethnic affirmation (W3)	
	Coeff.	Robust S.E.	Coeff.	Robust S.E.	Coeff.	Robust S.E.
Context (ref. high-high)						
low-low	-0.18*	0.07	0.16*	0.08	-0.26**	0.08
low-high	0.16	0.08	0.05	0.11	-0.05	0.09
high-low	-0.34**	0.11	0.33**	0.11	-0.32*	0.13
Mother's country of origin (ref. Vietnam)						
China	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.08	-0.08	0.07
Japan	-0.17	0.09	0.06	0.09	0.04	0.10
Philippines	-0.06	0.10	0.04	0.08	-0.04	0.08
Girl	-0.15**	0.06	0.17**	0.06	-0.05	0.06
7 th grade at W3	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.07
Financial hardship at W3	-0.12	0.07	0.05	0.06	-0.1	0.07
Dependent variable at W1	0.45***	0.07	0.54***	0.07	0.22***	0.06

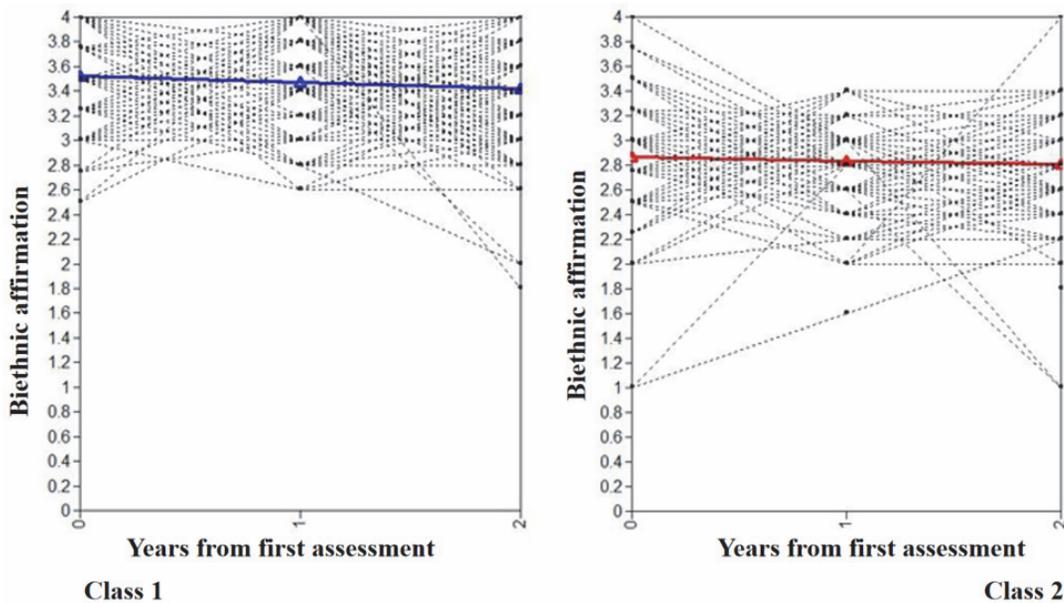
Source: obtained from Professor Chung's presentation

Study 3: The latent growth trajectories on biethnic affirmation

Study 1 underscored the importance of promoting biethnic affirmation/belonging among biethnic adolescents. Complementing these findings, Study 3 investigated the latent growth trajectories on biethnic affirmation over three years (see Figure 3), indicating that 60% adolescents consistently exhibited high levels of biethnic affirmation, while 40% displayed persistently low levels. Logistic regression analyses confirmed that ethnic socialization at Time 1 predicted a high level of biethnic affirmation. Adolescents from the consistently high biethnic affirmation group had significantly higher self-esteem and life satisfaction than those from the consistently low biethnic affirmation group. This study identified the importance of the family context in promoting biethnic children’s sense of belonging and affirmation and the necessity for practical interventions.

Figure 3.

Estimated means and observed individual growth trajectories for each latent class



Source: obtained from Professor Chung’s presentation

Policy Recommendations

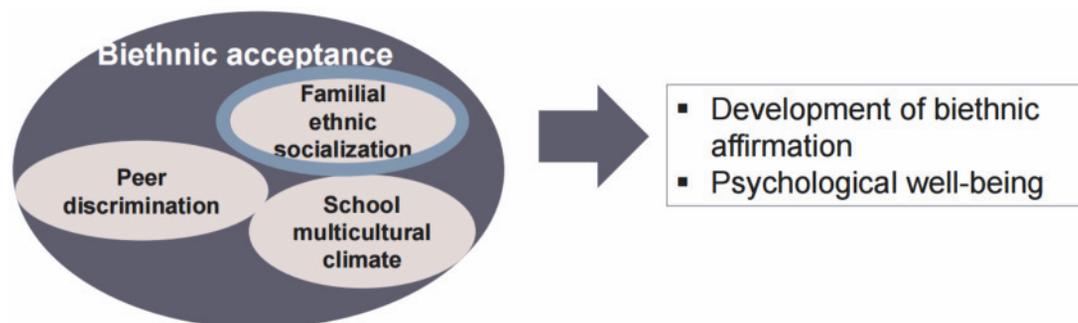
Based on the results, Professor Chung puts forward three policy suggestions to promote the healthy development of bi-ethnic youths of immigrant mothers in South Korea.

1. Focus on biethnic acceptance to improve biethnic adolescents' psychological well-being.

To foster biethnic affirmation and the psychological well-being of adolescents from multicultural families (see Figure 4), governmental initiatives should target the reduction of peer discrimination, the enhancement of school atmosphere to support multiculturalism and the strengthening of familial ethnic socialization practices.

Figure 4.

biethnic acceptance on biethnic affirmation and the psychological well-being



Source: obtained from Professor Chung's presentation

2. Address the need for parent education curriculum that includes familial ethnic socialization

Interviews with Vietnamese marriage migrant women identified diverse biethnic socialization practices, categorized as natural, active, struggling, silent, and

suppressed.⁴ Further research on Korean Fathers' Biethnic Socialization, consisting of 14 fathers, delineated three paternal categories: Strong Multicultural Membership, Negative Multicultural Membership and Denial and Rejection of Multicultural Membership⁵. These findings indicate the need for educational curricula for parents in multicultural families to facilitate adequate biethnic socialization.

3. Help multicultural youth to foster biethnic affirmation

Lack of biethnic or multicultural model due to a relatively short history of multicultural families in South Korea, which renders it imperative to develop biethnic socialization practices effectively. Hence, policies are essentially required to be grounded in empirical research, while research initiatives are to be designed to inform and shape relevant policy-making.

Implication in Taiwan

In Taiwan, the term “the new immigrant children” has been used to refer to the children who grew up in multicultural families. The number of new immigrants has been growing over the last decade due to an increase in international marriages. In 2021, there were 296,000 new immigrant children, accounting for 7.2% of the total population of school-age children. According to the Ministry of Education⁶, there was a slight decrease in absolute number of new immigrant children between 2016 and 2021 but their proportion in the total school-aged population increased by 0.4 %. Given the demographic trend of new immigrants in Taiwan, it is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of ethnic adolescents with the purpose of establishing an empirical

⁴ Lee, J. & Chung, G. H. (2020). Bi-ethnic socialization of marriage migrant women from Vietnam: The five practices at the intersection of hierarchies. *Family and Environment Research*, 58(3), 375-390. <https://doi.org/10.6115/fer.2020.027>

⁵ Jang, H. & Chung, G. H. (2022). Korean fathers' biethnic socialization: Classification and implications. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 81, 67-79. <https://doi.org/10.7466/JFBL.2022.40.2.47>

⁶ Ministry of Education (2022). School Enrollment Status of New Immigrants. Retrieved from https://stats.moe.gov.tw/files/analysis/110_son_of_foreign.pdf

foundation for effective policy-making, which relies heavily on in-depth research focusing on ethnic identity construction among these adolescents. By addressing the immediate needs of these new immigrant adolescents, such policies are expected to foster their long-term well-being and integration into the broader society.

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