This brief is intended to provide an overview of research produced by the Changing Family in Asia Cluster at the Asia Research Institute.

Hyunok Lee has been a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Changing Family in Asia Cluster at ARI for the past two years. In August 2013, she will start a new job as Assistant Professor in Yonsei University, South Korea.

This research brief addresses the question of why Korea has recently emerged as a new destination for marriage migration within East Asia. It is based on the above article published by Lee in *Feminist Economics* in 2012.

Lee argues that the current marriage migration in Korea is conditioned by a crisis of social reproduction, which has developed alongside industrialisation and the recent economic restructuring. Within this context, marriage migrants contribute to the social reproduction of families with low income by providing unpaid care labour at home. Furthermore, the state promotes the role of marriage migrants in the family to contribute to the restoration of traditional family values.

**Background**

Cross-border marriage between Korean men and women of foreign origin emerged as a visible trend in the Republic of Korea in the late 1980s as a solution to the so-called “rural bachelor’s marriage problem,” and its prevalence increased dramatically in the 2000s with the deregulation of commercial matchmaking businesses in 1999. As of 2011, 211,468 marriage migrants were living in Korea, 89.2 percent of whom were women (Ministry of Administration and Security 2011) and cross-border marriages made up 10.5 percent of all marriages in Korea in 2010 (Statistics Korea 2011).

With the increase in cross-border marriages, the Korean government implemented a series of policies, including the Act to Support International Marriage for Rural Bachelors (2006–7), the Act on Regulation of Marriage Brokerage Agent (Act No. 8688) in 2007, and the Support for Multicultural Families Act (Act No. 8937) in 2008. With these policies, the discourse around cross-border marriage shifted from the “rural bachelor’s marriage problem” to one concerning “multicultural families.” The primary purpose of this study is to examine the recent increase in cross-border marriages in Korea and the changes in discourse and policies around cross-border marriage.

**Methodology**

This research combines statistical and archival data by reviewing policy documents; newspapers; and statistical data, including the 2009 National Survey on Fertility, Family Health and Welfare in Korea (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs [KIHASA] 2009) and the 2009 National...
Selected Findings
- Multicultural families belong predominantly to the lower socioeconomic strata.
- Although belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata, the majority of women in these marriages do not participate in the labour market.
- According to the survey results, 86.2 percent of migrant women who are not employed at present show an interest in engaging in paid work. More than 50 percent cited childcare and household chores as reasons they do not work in the labour market. Public support for childcare is insufficient and paid childcare is costly.
- Marriage migrants play an important role in providing care for elderly and handicapped in the family, given the patterns of multicultural family.

Conclusion
The increase of cross-border marriages in Korea may be an example of a globalised strategy to deal with the problem of social reproduction. Cross-border marriage is not just a national policy concern, but also a strategy for low income families who are trying to find a solution for their reduced welfare and employment prospects after the economic restructuring in the late 1990s.

The influx of foreign wives into low-income families is expected to create a new political and cultural dynamic in Korea, whose population has been relatively ethnically homogeneous. The government’s discourse of multiculturalism can be interpreted as a positive effort to take initiative in dealing with the potential conflicts. Yet, it is important to notice the discrepancy between the discourse of multicultural Korea and the segment of population with which this discourse is associated. The discourse of multicultural Korea obscures the fact that the increase in multicultural families is conditional upon the state’s failure to meet the social-reproduction needs of many low-income families. Finally, the solution to the labour and care needs raises questions about the identity of Korean society and creates a new need to revise the mechanisms of social cohesion or social reproduction as a whole.

Further Information
For further reading of the full article, please visit the website of the Feminist Economics:

Editors of this issue: Lee Hyunok, Saharah Abubakar and Suzanne Naafs
Awards & Honours
Lee Hyunok has been selected for the NCID Emerging Diversity Scholar citation by the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID), University of Michigan, 30 June 2013, in recognition of her outstanding early career work.

Professor Jean Yeung was invited to serve on the Editorial Board of *Demography*, a top journal in population research.

Research Grants
Project title: China’s “leftover women”: A real story or socially constructed myth; PI: Ji Yingchun; S$5,000 awarded by ARI, NUS; August - October 2013

Project title: Cognitive achievement for Chinese children; PI: Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Co-PI: Li Haibin; S$6,190 awarded by ARI, NUS; July 2013 - March 2014

Project title: Women’s decision making and child outcomes: Role of family in development; PI: Dhiman Das; S$5000 awarded by ARI, NUS; August 2013 - August 2014

Project title: Age of retirement and intergenerational transfer in China and India: Implications for human capital and labour market, PI: Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Co-PI: Feng, Q.; S$168,000 awarded by the Global Asia Institute, NUS; March 2013 - February 2015.

Conference Presentations & Announcement
“A multigenerational view of the black-white achievement gap”, by Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Asia Research Institute

*6th International Indonesia Forum,* Yale University and Sunan Kalijaga University; Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 21-22 August 2013
“Negotiating jobs: The politics of un(der)employed youth in Banten, Indonesia”, by Suzanne Naafs, Asia Research Institute

*XXVII IUSSP International Population Conference,* International Union for the Scientific Study of Population; Busan, Republic of Korea, 26 August - 31 August 2013
“The analysis of early life courses: The transition to adulthood in China”, by Lin Qianhan and Wei-Jun Jean Yeung , Asia Research Institute

“Debt as entrapment or strategy?: Livelihood strategies and patterns of remittance use amongst transnational families in Thailand”, by Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Grace H. Y. Baey, Dhiman Das, Asia Research Institute, & Aree Jampaklay, Mahidol University

Jean Yeung and Adam Cheung are organising a session in the 2014 World Congress of Sociology on *Emerging New Family Forms in Asia and Beyond*; see call for papers in: http://www.isasociology.org/congress2014/rc/rc.php?n=RC06

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