Title:
Transnationalism and the Production of Education Migrants: A Case Study of South Korean Migrants in Canada

Abstract:
This article illustrates the close transnational ties between host and home countries practicing neoliberal ideas that result in the creation of education migrants. We take international students from South Korea in Canada as a case example. These two countries are not a unique case but serve to illustrate the multiple political agendas intersecting at global, national and local levels to produce this phenomenon. Using a theoretical framework of transnationalism and postcolonialism, we critically examine the relevant policies that permit or limit education migration in both South Korea and Canada; how these policies result in splitting transnational family structure which we situate historically in the tradition of labour immigration patterns; and how cultural propaganda is used to mask the social effects of marginalization and disjuncture rather than social integration and multiculturalism in a global era as promoted in the field of international education.

Key Words:
Education migrants; Transnational Families; Kirogi (wild-geese) families; Neo-liberalism; and Globalization
Transnationalism and the Production of Education Migrants

Introduction

In addition to historical migration that sought work and/or asylum, migrating for education (i.e. education migration) has been significantly increasing globally over a half century mainly countries from the east to west and/or the south to the north. Especially, in the last decade there has been an emerging trend of increasing numbers of younger foreign students in Canada and other English-speaking countries ((CIC), 2007; E. Lee, 2010; E. Lee, Johnstone,M., in press). Since they are minors and require accompanying parents or guardians, international education becomes “a family project” (Y. K. Lee, H., 2006) in which families strategize their mobility transnationally to acquire westernized education and cultural capital for their children.

In examining this education migration phenomenon, we focus on Canada as a major immigrant-receiving country and the Republic of Korea (henceforth South Korea) as a major immigrant-sending country. It has been well documented that education migration brings significant benefits to Canada by creating a lucrative international education industry (Kwak, 2008; (Roslyn Kunin and Associates, 2009). Also well documented are the benefits and disadvantages that education migrants and their accompanying families have been faced with. However, what has not been explored in the literature is how social policies and legislation in both sending and receiving countries actively and strategically produce and maintain this phenomenon and how this bigger picture has impacted contemporary transnational family structure and social integration of these transnational families in both host and home countries.

Using a theoretical framework of transnationalism and post-colonialism, we conduct a close reading of Canadian and South Korean social policies, especially education and immigration policies, and how they permit or limit South Korean education migrant family life and social integration in Canadian and South Korean societies. In detail, we illustrate (1) how the gradual granting of citizenship in the host country to education migrants and their
transnationalism and the production of education migrants

accompanying parents are ingrained in social policy while relying on “foreign” sources (e.g. tuition and living expenses, social provisioning services, etc.) from the home country to contribute to the nation building of the host country, whereas the home (source) country uses education migration to diffuse internal/national tension (e.g., economic crisis) and globalize their citizens to be competitive in a global market to build their nation; and (2) how the gendered division of migration strategies and its consequence impinge upon the family structure to bolster and maintain economic survival and growth of both the host and home countries in a neoliberal and global era. Despite the benefits for both countries engrained in their social policy, we argue that the impacts of this invisible political agenda on both countries result in splitting families, creating social margins/inequity and damaging social integration in both countries.

theoretical frameworks: transnationalism and post-colonialism

Traditionally, immigration has been regarded as a linear process of push and pull whereby people moved from one place to another driven by economic motivation or seeking asylum/refugee status (Knowles, 1997). A transnational theory recognizes that people are multiple movers and that the structural implications of these moves are far more complex than push and pull factors between host and home countries (Harzig, 2009). Transnational migrants experience social processes that reflect geographical, cultural and political borders as they travel abroad. Mental maps of their plans and life course intersect with what they have heard and read and been told from both private and public discourses circulating in society even before they arrive. We argue that the mental map of education migrants for their family and social life is politically produced and then culturally socially sanctioned and accepted. We further assert that the mental maps of education migrants are produced, maintained, molded, limited, and negotiated, often invisibly, by social policies of both the host and home countries that have their own nation building political agendas.
In an examination of the history of immigration studies, Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) linked these studies with the changing discourses on immigration that were orchestrated by social science research. Historically, they traced an increasing focus on the nation-state across the twentieth century with immigration regulations becoming more restrictive and exclusionary. This intensification of nationalism correlated with the construction of the projected image of immigrants as paradoxically required for nation-building (usually low paying jobs) but simultaneously problematized as an impediment to national cohesion.

Wimmer & Schiller identified that immigration research “divides a State’s affairs into internal, national matters and international affairs that have to do with State-to-State relations, [while] the history of trans-border and transnational nation-State building becomes invisible” (Wimmer,Glick Schiller 2003, p.581). In other words, a social phenomenon is scrutinized only partially (i.e., internal, national or international), which results in losing sight of the complexity and the interwoven nature of a close transnational linkage between the States’ agendas for their nation building. Expanding the notion of this invisibility from Wimmer & Schiller, our paper charts some of the “invisible” transnational migration patterns which are occurring in the domain of education migration using students from South Korea in Canada as a case study.

Postcolonialism continues the anti-colonial resistance of the past by contesting the hegemony of the West not only in terms of access to resources and an equivalent standard of living but also in terms of the relative value of cultural practices and ideas. Colonial rule was legitimimized with anthropological theories which constructed colonized peoples as inferior (often aligned with the concept of race) and needing the rule and guidance of the colonizer (Young, 2003). This has left a legacy of exoticism (a romanticized stereotypic representation of colonized people) and a static formulation of identity which has continued to characterize attitudes from the west even after the withdrawal of imperial rule (Said, 1994). Noam
Chomsky (2002) developed *a model of propaganda* as a presentation of information in a selective manner that suppresses opposing or inconvenient material and that serves the power interests or agenda of the disseminator. We extend Chomsky’s propaganda model to a cultural context and look at how cultural values and ideals are used to mask inequity and promote compliance with public policy in producing and maintaining education migration in both countries.

**Social Policies and Legislations**

*Changing Social Policies in Canada and the Production of Education Migrants*

Since 2001, Canada has received over 130,000 students from abroad (CIC, 2009). Currently, *Citizenship and Immigration Canada* (CIC) assesses that there are 218,243 foreign students in Canadian schools (CIC, 2011). Public discourse supports the Globe and Mail headline “International students are an opportunity not a cost” where it is detailed that “international students spent about $8-billion on tuition, accommodations, discretionary spending and associated tourism in 2010” (Globe and Mail, 2012). This media coverage has contributed to a mental map among Canadian citizens that welcoming them is beneficial to our economy and that unlike permanent immigrants there is no competition for job or education opportunities.

At first glance this seems like a transparent migrant flow occurring in an era of globalization. However, a close reading of social policies in Canada soon reveals intentions that proactively produce and maintain education migration as well as the tensions that education migrants and their families experience as they struggle for their rights and a sense of belonging in their temporary country (Johnstone, in press) Here we would like to position seemingly separate and irrelevant internal (provincial), national, and international social policy in Canada in order to provide a context of the close linkages that produce the phenomenon of education migration.
In Canada, the immigration is regulated by the federal government but the provinces hold the responsibility for education. In the past two decades, there has been a shift towards neoliberal values with a focus on market principles rather than the public good, with education positioned as a training ground for industry and commerce while immigration policies change to fit with this need (Jefferson, 2008; Majhanovich, 2008). The Ministers of Education and the Ministers of Immigration collaboratively ensure seamless entry and renewal for this lucrative class of migrants.

The late 1990s were marked by financial cuts to the public education system – making a deficit budget in the school board illegal thus losing a series of educational resources. As a result, fundraising became an increasingly significant part of the school board responsibility. As one of the survival tactics, the school board looked into increasing the number of international students. This is also prompted and fostered by the provincial government. In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) which is the largest school board in Ontario, which in turn is the largest immigrant receiving province in Canada, a marketing director was hired to work full-time on recruitment (Benzie, 2010; Hammer, 2009; Spence, 2009). Recently the Harper government boasted that foreign students brought $8 billion into the Canadian economy in 2010 and announced that the federal government’s goal was to double international student intake by 2022 (Globe and Mail, March 25, 2013). This move to educational standardization and accountability is not unique to Canada and has been instituted in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and the United States resulting in teaching for testing rather than more comprehensive curriculum agendas (Majhanovich, 2008).

A couple of recent legislations in immigration policy that are seemingly irrelevant to education migrants on their onset have clearly targeted temporary visitors and the production of education migration. For example, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) was implemented in 2002 in which approximately 60 countries including Korea and the People’s Republic of China are beneficiaries of a new 6 month-visa exemption. The
implication of this visa waiver is that families can shop for an education product during the school break in Canada without going through a visa application process. They can enroll their children in a summer ESL program, and investigate available educational programs in person as well as explore accommodation and living options and return home with plans in place for a lengthier stay in Canada in the future (Mueller, 2010). Meanwhile, the local market can be increased by these travelers/visitors for education, such as demanding brokers and entrepreneurs in the education business, language institutions for ESL programs, summer school programs, rental housing, banking services, and other living expenses.

Another example is the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), which was introduced in 2008 to provide quick access to Canadian permanent residency, by allowing highly skilled temporary workers and international students to remain in Canada while they apply for permanent residence. This new immigration program aims to retain highly skilled international workers and students who have already adapted to Canadian life (CIC, 2009). This seamless fit between education and immigration allows international students to furnish revenue to Canadian educational institutions and then join the high skill labour force, all using the sources (e.g., tuition, living expenses, and social provisioning) from the home country but actively building the nation in the host country.

**Changing Social Policies in South Korea and the Production of Education Migrants**

According to the 2008 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) report, *Development Strategies, Welfare Regime and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Korea*, the South Korean government launched the ‘Seven-year Development Plan for High-tech Industry’ in 1990 with the aim to bring high technology into the Korean economy in order to successfully compete in a global world. The Kim Youn Sam government (1993-1998) was fully on board with this aim and made globalization (*Segyehwa*) a national policy agenda.
Several Korean scholars note job insecurity for the regular jobs drastically increased with middle income earners whereas new jobs were being created either at the low end of the labour market (e.g., temporary contract workers) or in the high tech area with high income (Chun, 2003; Chun & Kim 2005; UNRISD, 2008). When the South Korean economy was impacted severely by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis in 1997, the idea of pursuing globalization was already deeply embedded in their mental map was even further strengthened. This social policy and social change heightened insecurity and fear of unemployment. Moreover, the fear of passing failure on to their children if they did not educate them to be globally competitive was increased.

In order to reflect the national project of globalization, education policy and practice have significantly been changed. One example is the direction of educational policy change illustrated by changing the name of the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in order to link education to occupation and job training to ensure economic growth. Another example would be, in a practical sense, loosening the strict restrictions on overseas travel and transferring foreign currency to support citizens seeking global education. In her study of South Korean international students in Vancouver, Canada, Kwak (2008) notes that “the Korean Ministry of Education has for some time prohibited K-12 students from leaving to pursue an education abroad. However, this rule is routinely broken [permitted] and between 1995 and 2001, unapproved international education accounted for more than 80 percent of the total cases [even] registered in official data (the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2002)” (p. 94).

The phenomenon of “English language mania” resulted from the changes in education policy that were also introduced during the globalization policies initiated in the 1990s. English language classes were introduced into public education beginning in Grade 3 and continued through into university education (S. J. Park, Abelmann, N., 2004). This policy change precipitated a growth of private English teaching facilities as well as contributing to
Transnationalism and the Production of Education Migrants

the production of the education migrant. This government initiated change for English education had undeniable and inescapable ripple effects on people’s minds. Aforementioned changes in public policy and practice evidenced that the production of education migration in both countries is not only motivated by the individual and the family but also driven by social policies with a nation building agenda.

Education Migration as a Family Project and Its Impacts on Family

Education migration from South Korea to Canada has resulted in the formation of a transnational split family where most commonly, father remains in Korea to continue breadwinner earning functions and mother accompanies the children, fulfilling guardianship, social provisioning and single parenting roles. This splitting of families is not a new phenomenon but continuously produced by Canadian immigration policy. The gendered practice of education migration has often been discussed as a family choice of maximizing the family resources (Kim, 2010) but we question the nature of the choice that accompanies this decision. Moreover it is not new to see social policy permeate into family life and define and limit family structure.

Immigration policy regulates entry and maintenance of immigrants as well as the rights and responsibilities of citizens and visitors. Historically this pattern is evident in the racialized immigration legislation of white settler societies like Canada. Designed primarily to exclude non-white settlers but also to allow needed non-white labour, much of the legislation acted to exclude families (wives and children) and to permit only the laboring male. For example, Canada’s first Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald introduced a head tax of $10.00 per person for all Chinese immigrants in 1885. This was a selective additional tax intended to discourage “undesirable” Chinese immigrants such as wives and children from coming to Canada leading a form of fractured families across nations (Boyko, 2008). Similarly, the Live-in Caregiver Program has a history beginning with confederation of
allowing only “unaccompanied women” meaning women without her husband and/or children to migrate to Canada for indentured employment as domestic servants and caregivers, mostly Filipinos in the present (E. Lee, Johnstone, M., in press). More recently, the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program which began in 1966 permits the temporary entry of single labourers into Canada assigned to a specific employer for a specific job. Mostly Mexican, these men leave wives and children at home receiving regular financial support from their husbands but navigating the complexities of parenting and daily life as fractured transnational families.

Characteristically processes of migration are understood from a macro level economic approach and the social, familial, and emotional costs remain invisible (Ferguson, 2007). With the more recent global increase in the female migration of caregivers the number of fractured transnational families has been steadily increasing with a gendered impact in both the host and source countries (Parrenas, 2008). Similarly, accompanying guardians or parents often mothers of South Korean education migrants immigrate with their children to Canada leaving their partners at home.

Although the family is split based on gendered functions in this family project of education migration, it works for both sending and receiving countries (E. Lee, Johnstone, M., in press): From the sending country’s point, they are globalizing their citizens educated abroad to have them competitive in the global market while keeping the main labor force (i.e., fathers) within the country who now have to work even harder to support themselves and their families abroad, which leads to the nation’s labor in full force and strengthened. Mothers who were in the labour force leave the country thus reducing employment competition and unemployment. This was much needed in Korea especially after the economic crisis. From the receiving country’s point of view, they are making a lucrative market niche from the international education market with tuitions and living costs and exempted from providing fundamental welfare services as well as social provisioning for minors. Moreover they do not have to worry about any competition between citizens and migrants around the
job market since accompanying mothers are not allowed to enter the labor market or attend schooling for themselves.

**Social Margins and Social Integration**

Seth (2002) suggests that a Confucian emphasis on filial piety and the importance of the total family similar to a corporate unit has resulted in an ethos of individual sacrifice for the benefit of the family. This tradition has purportedly continued in Korean culture for centuries and is currently used as an explanation of the motivation of education migrant families. This “explanation” resonates with known cultural patterns but also serves as a form of cultural propaganda (Chomsky, 2002).

The tradition of the sacrificial mother masks the benefits of education migration to the Korean State and distracts attention from the gendered nature of the *kirogi* family distribution of labour and privation. In her study of study mothers travelling from China to Singapore, Huang (2005) identifies how women struggle to manage as *de facto* single parents alone in a new country with their children. Her interviews revealed that these women placed motherhood ahead of wifehood often sacrificing careers and relative comfort to support their children. She identified “sacrifice” as a dominant theme in their self descriptions and linked this with the ancient Chinese history of Confucius mothers uprooting themselves to ensure a better education/life for their children, and failed to address the inequity of this situation. We argue that the term *kirogi* mothers that has been widely applied to Korean accompanying mothers actually serves to exoticize this phenomenon by focusing attention on the loyalty and family devotion which is believed to be characteristic of wild geese and so has been used as a descriptor of a similar devotion to family. This then solicits admiration and approval while the socially destructive realities of separation, isolation and gender inequity are forgotten. This is another form of cultural propaganda.

As returnees children after their study abroad can become caught between two nations, two educational systems, and two ways of growing up. Not full members of either
Transnationalism and the Production of Education Migrants

place they experience marginality in both. If a loss of the home language occurs this will have a significant impact on re-integration as returnees, particularly in re-integration into the education system (Orellana, 2001). Several studies discuss impacts of returnees to Korea as well as challenges and issues of people who have not had opportunities of sending their children abroad (Kim, 2010; J.-K. Park, 2009; Song, 2011, 2013). English-medium International schools in Korea have been at the centre of this controversy. They provide English-based tuition and a more western style of teaching making them an attractive alternative to education migration for wealthy Koreans. This means that those who do not have the wealth for this or for education migration have no choice but to use public education, which is criticized for being highly meritocratic with an authoritarian teaching style and onerous regular examinations making stressful demands on the students (Song, 2013).

This developing two-tier education system which polarizes the wealthy from the poor has aroused dissension as it not only marginalizes but it has also spawned a growth industry in private tutoring options which belies the belief that any Korean can access upward mobility by his/her own efforts through education. This division is now known as the “English divide” in South Korea and is a source of anxiety for South Koreans who cannot access this English-benefit for their children (Song, 2013). Many of them even feel excluded and marginalized from the mainstream value of what devoted parents should do – sacrificing themselves to provide the best education opportunity for children.

Policy statements showcase the benefits of the program but seldom report the negative outcomes. Currently in Canada many education policies and practices reveal a conflictive stance in embracing and integrating education migrants into the Canadian school system and community. While the TDSB website advertises Newcomer Reception Centres, Literacy Enrichment Programs, and ESL Programs and Settlement Services, the links reveal that the services are more limited than they at first appear. The settlement services are linked to
Canadian Immigration Centre services but there are gaps in service such as the provision of translation services. Attempts are being made to have brochures and information in multiple languages but the website itself demonstrates availability is commonly only available in Canada’s bilingual options of French and English (TDSB, 2011).

Increasingly, the gap between needs of education migrants and the services is being addressed by private fee-based services, consistent with the neo-liberal agenda. When accompanying mothers have limited English abilities and/or are not familiar with the Canadian school system, this means someone else assumes the guardian role who can issue consent and liaise with the school regarding the welfare and progress of the student ((TDSB), 2011). In efforts to fill this need – coupled with meeting their own business class immigration conditions, immigrant entrepreneurs have emerged in various Korean communities across Canada (Kwak, 2010). International education agencies and related service providers such as home-stay operations have become entrepreneurial opportunities for Korean Canadians. While many are legitimate, they tend to be new, they lack regulation and there is an ambiguous boundary between the formal and informal economy in the provision of these services. The informal international education industry is largely unregulated and may be subject to the vagaries of the market with competition in pricing and demand as key shapers.

Increasing numbers of younger education migrants in the schoolroom and the schoolyard have resulted in cultural shifts and new dynamics. A number of studies look at the impact of transnational education on Korean families (D.H. Lee, 2010; Lee & Koo, 2006), yet there does not appear to be any studies around how this phenomenon has been perceived by Canadian-born students and their parents, and teachers and school staff. If we accept the tenet that social integration is bidirectional, this is an area that warrants attention. Having little understanding of these factors in the host country limits our understanding of the phenomenon of the South Korean education migration in Canada and may be a barrier to
Canada’s ongoing commitment to social integration among various cultural groups and leave education migrants in the social margins.

**Conclusion**

We have shown how the immigration and education policies developed in Canada and in South Korea produce and maintain education migrants for their own nation building agendas. Although drafted to respond to national domestic conditions, they act to complement one another in a shared but undeclared neoliberal global agenda. Canada has joined other western nations who compete in the market for international education as it is a growing and lucrative industry in a global knowledge economy. We have shown through our analysis: (1) how social policy in addition to individual family perspective becomes a key factor in producing education migration and how the social policies of Korea and Canada operate in tandem; (2) that the practice of splitting families is located historically in western immigration policies and it is this rather than Korean cultural traditions which produce the *kirogi* family structure and (3) we challenge the notion of globalization as one big world which narrows the distance among nations and brings the world closer. Rather we see it creating margins, class distinctions and differentiated access to services between the wealthy and the not-so-wealthy in both societies.
References


Ferguson, N. (2007). Emotions, Moments, and Transnational Connections: the lived experiences of two labour migrants in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker's Program. (M.A.), Concordia University.
Transnationalism and the Production of Education Migrants


